# Visions of Canada

# Visions du Canada

Edited and with a foreword by /
Rédaction et avant-propos par

**Catherine Bates**
**Graham Huggan**
**Milena Marinkova**
**Jeffrey Orr**

**Canadian Studies in Europe**
**Études Canadiennes en Europe**

**Volume 6**

Editor
**Catherine Bates**
**Graham Huggan**
**Milena Marinkova**
**Jeffrey Orr**
Technical editing
**Catherine Bates**
**Jeffrey Orr**
**Petr Vurm**


1$^{st}$ edition, 2007

# Contents
# Table des matiéres

# Acknowledgements

As the essays in this collection testify, Canadian Studies in Europe is as rich and diverse as it has ever been. The commitment and talent of young graduate Canadianists are integral to the continuing scholarly interest in Canada, and so it is important for these students to be given the opportunity to share ideas and feel part of a larger academic community. Consequently, the European Seminar for Graduate Students in Canadian Studies has been set up as an annual event which is hosted by a different European Canadian Studies Centre each year, providing young Canadianists with the chance to present their work to others in their field.

From 8-11 September 2005 the 14th European Seminar for Graduate Students in Canadian Studies was held at York St John College, organised by the School of English at the University of Leeds, the British Association of Canadian Studies (BACS) and the European Network for Canadian Studies (ENCS/REEC). Additional and much needed financial support was provided by the University of Leeds Centre for Canadian Studies, the AHRC Centre for Cultural Analysis Theory and History, the University of Leeds Institute for Colonial and Postcolonial Studies and the Canadian High Commission.

To give the conference a focus the theme 'Visualising Violence' was suggested, which some speakers engaged with, whilst others chose to present on Canadian Studies more generally. Twenty-five students gave papers; the relatively small number allowed for an intimate and supportive atmosphere, enabling the students to receive ample feedback and make contacts which will undoubtedly enhance their future research. Our priority when choosing the participants was to ensure the seminar would address a number of disciplines in an interrogative and thoughtful way, whilst also ensuring students from the whole of Europe would be represented. In addition, we were happy to continue the tradition of having a student from the Latin American Seminar for Canadian Studies (SEMINECAL) present a paper, helping European students build connections with Canadian associations beyond Europe.

There are many people whose help made this conference as productive and stimulating as it was. The chairs, Conny Steenman-Marcuse, Keith Battarbee, Michelle Gadpaille, Rachel Killick and Donna McCormack provided invaluable support to the delegates contributing to the success of the conference. In addition, thanks are

due to the two keynote speakers: Paul Kennedy, host of the IDEAS programme for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Radio, and Valerie Alia, Running Stream Professor of Ethics and Identity at Leeds Metropolitan University. In addition to giving fascinating talks and readings, both speakers participated in the conference discussions, attending and responding to papers. Further support was given to the conference by Gareth Jackson, Jodie Robson, Administrator of BACS; Itesh Sachdev, President of BACS; and Vivien Hughes and William Lawton of the Canadian High Commission. Furthermore, Stuart Murray, Sue Baker and Sharon Kyriacou from the School of English at the University of Leeds provided logistical support, whilst the friendly professionalism of the staff at York St John College ensured the smooth running of the event.

Finally, we must acknowledge those who have helped to put together these conference proceedings. Rachel Killick, Patrick Farges and Natalie Diebschlag provided much needed expertise when it came to proofreading and translating the French articles and abstracts, whilst Don Sparling, of the European Network for Canadian Studies, supplied the final guidelines needed to complete the book and Marasyk Press contributed the time, expertise and facilities for producing the publication. And, of course, without the conference delegates who gave and submitted papers this event could not have happened. So our biggest thanks go to them for their enthusiastic and scholarly commitment to Canadian Studies.

Catherine Bates, Graham Huggan, Milena Marinkova, Jeffrey Orr

Conference Organising Committee

Leeds, 2006

## Remerciements

Comme le montrent les articles de cette collection, les Études Canadiennes en Europe sont plus riches et variées que jamais. L'attachement et le talent des jeunes canadianistes diplômés sont constitutifs d'un intérêt intellectuel constant pour le Canada, et il est donc important de donner aux étudiants l'occasion de partager leurs idées et de se sentir membres d'une communauté académique étendue. Par conséquent, le Séminaire Européen des Étudiant(e)s Diplômé(e)s en Études Canadiennes a été créé en tant qu'évènement annuel, organisé par un centre d'Études Canadiennes Européen différent chaque année, ce qui donne aux jeunes canadianistes l'occasion de présenter leur travail à leurs co-disciplinaires.

Du 8 au 11 septembre 2005, le 14$^{ème}$ Séminaire Européen des Étudiant(e)s Diplômé(e)s en Études Canadiennes à eu lieu au York St John College, organisé par le département d'anglais de l'Université de Leeds, l'Association Britannique d'Études Canadiennes (BACS) et le Réseau Européen d'Études Canadiennes (ENCS/REEC). Un soutien financier supplémentaire et très bienvenu a été apporté par le Centre des Études Canadiennes de l'Université de Leeds, le Centre AHRC de Théorie et Histoire de l'Analyse Culturelle, l'Institut d'Études Coloniales et Postcoloniales de l'Université de Leeds et le Haut-commissariat du Canada.

Un thème a été suggéré pour la conférence, 'Visualising Violence' ('s'imaginer la violence'), auquel se sont attelés quelques conférenciers, les autres préférant parler des Études Canadiennes plus généralement. Vingt-cinq étudiants ont présenté des articles ; leur nombre assez réduit a créé une ambiance intime et bienveillante, permettant aux étudiants de recevoir d'abondantes réactions et de faire des rencontres qui amélioreront sans doute leurs recherches à venir. Notre priorité, lors du choix des participants, était d'assurer que le séminaire traiterait un grand nombre de disciplines d'une manière interrogatrice et réfléchie, en assurant également la participation d'étudiants de tous les pays d'Europe. Nous avons de plus eu la joie de perpétuer la tradition d'entendre un étudiant du Séminaire Latino-américain d'Études Canadiennes (SEMINECAL), ce qui aide les étudiants européens à créer des liens avec les associations canadiennes hors d'Europe.

De nombreuses personnes ont aidé à rendre cette conférence aussi fructueuse et stimulante. Les présidents, Conny Steenman-Marcuse,

# Introduction

In the March 28 2006 edition of *The Guardian*, two news items stand out on Canada. One, a short article by Duncan Campbell, concerns the growing number of US army deserters who have crossed recently into Canada and have sought political asylum there, claiming that they had been tricked by the US military into serving in a manifestly unfair war in Iraq (Campbell 2006, 17). "It's really great here", says one successful escapee: "Generally people have been very hospitable and understanding, although there have been a few who have been for the war" (Campbell 2006, 17). The other item, a protest letter signed by, among others, the Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe, decries the annual mass cull of seal pups off the shores of northwest Canada, "shot and skinned alive by hunters ... [in] one of the largest and most brutal slaughters of marine mammals on the planet" (Banks et al 2006, 31). In response, Widdecombe et al call for a UK trade ban on Canadian products as a way of sending "Canada a signal that enough is enough – we can halt the vicious slaughter on the ice" (Banks et al 2006, 31). *The Guardian* offers no particular comment here, but a double-page spread in the same edition unambiguously features a black-clad hunter out on the ice in front of his vessel, cudgel poised above an inert seal, with the punning caption "Fate sealed" and the mock-dispassionate reading: "Sealers watch from the deck of their boat as a seal is clubbed off the coast of Newfoundland, on the second day of the annual seal hunt" (Cook 2006, 18-19).

The two items belong to a set of countervailing images of Canada. The first reconfirms the perception of Canada as a "safe place", a refuge from the barbarous regime across the border (a perception played upon, sometimes ironically, by many Canadian writers, including Margaret Atwood in her well-known dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*). The second offers a less common but nonetheless significant counter-image of Canada as a place of extreme violence, less a victim – although the image of the victim still continues to loom large in the Canadian national imaginary – than a victimiser, and less a site of innocent endeavour than one of elemental force. Similarly, popular perceptions of Canada – some of them developed and supported by Canadians themselves – have traditionally oscillated between opposed ideas of Canadian polity as a "zone of safety" and a self-divided "danger zone" (see, for example, Ignatieff 1990). Such sweeping diagnoses are unhistorical, no doubt, but settler historiographies – in Canada and the US, Australia and New

Zealand, South Africa as well – all too often have a dichotomous feel to them, seen in the counter-tendencies to glorify (post)colonial achievement or to perform an equally exaggerated post-mortem on imperial invasion, frontier violence, and their continuing implications for white-dominated nations persistently racked by a sense of their own insufficiencies: hand-wringing gestures which, while by no means unjustified, are difficult not to see as a displaced form of white colonial guilt.

Canada is not an *unusually* dangerous place, but that does not make its history any less violent; nor does its recent record of relatively peaceful cultural pluralism make it unequivocally safe. This collection of essays enters into some of the debates that surround the contrary, highly mediated perceptions of Canada as a violent/dangerous and as a peaceful/safe place. While by no means all of the essays deal with violence, either implicitly or explicitly, several of them focus on the conceptualisation, textualisation, and historicisation of violence that served as the lead theme of the 14th ENCS Post Graduate Seminar for Canadian Studies. Taken together, the essays – or at least those which choose to address the main theme – offer a series of cross-disciplinary perspectives on violence by a number of talented young European postgraduates whose work is Canadian-based.

The collection begins with Jan Wechmann's excellent analysis of the 1972 ice hockey series between Canada and the Soviet Union – a curious but by no means exceptional case of sport as regulated violence in the service of cross-cultural diplomacy and world peace. Combining East-West détente with Canadian cultural nationalism, the series opened up the fault lines between sport's role as an instrument of international diplomacy and as a vehicle for national prestige. Wechmann cautiously concludes that while the series, narrowly won by Canada, "enhanced mutual respect between Canadians and Soviets" and provided the catalyst for further sporting and cultural exchanges, it "would be exaggerated to say that [it] furthered Canadian-Soviet friendship to a great extent".

For all its tensions, the 1972 series was broadcast – in Canada at least – as a triumph in international public relations; the novels of the award-winning writer Carol Shields, by contrast, have traditionally been perceived as offering quieter insights into emotional vicissitudes of domestic, private life. As Alex Ramon argues,

Shields' fictional worlds are by no means as safe or as circumscribed as they appear, suggesting that violence is a "constitutive part of the texture of everyday life", upsetting easy assumptions about Canadian pacifism and conviviality, and pointing to the relation of her "habitual concerns about female struggle ... [to] a resolutely global sphere" (Ramon).

Anna Szczepaniak's entertaining essay on popular national and international perceptions of the Canadian Mounties is equally suspicious of Canada's self-mythologising status as the "Peaceable Kingdom" (Frye, qtd in Howard 1998). As keepers of the peace, the Mounties are "symbols of political and moral authority" – an ambivalent status that carries over into similarly double-edged perceptions of "Canada [as] the only country in the world where the police are heroes". Benjamin's slippage between "lawbreaking" and "lawmaking" violence comes to mind here, according to which logic the Mounties might be seen as heroically protecting individual national citizens while ironically upholding the institutional violence that continues to be performed in the nation's name (see Benjamin 1969).

The problem of the authority figure as hero is also alluded to in Elena Clemente's essay on the castaway motif in Canadian speculative fiction. Canadian literary castaways, suggests Clemente, tend to be fallible anti-heroes rather than controlling figures, implying a challenge to the structures of authority implicit in the idea of the utopian society, and revealing the non-violent violence inherent in the idea of Utopia itself as a "perfectly organized world".

In the essays above, the idea of peace, dogmatically pursued, runs the risk of instituting its own form of protective violence. This idea is also explored in a number of essays in the collection that look critically at Canadian ethnic, linguistic and racial identity politics, opening up – as Patrick Farges puts it in his essay– a series of "cracks in the Canadian [cultural] mosaic". As Farges' essay on the fluctuating fortunes of German-speaking exiles in Canada from the 1930s to the present indicates, violence can be seen to underpin discursive structures of nationality and belonging in twentieth-century Canada. This violence persists despite progressivist readings of Canada's shift from "a closed country worried about its ethnic 'stock' ... [to an open-minded] multicultural mosaic".

Farges' careful historical work emphasises a state-sponsored conflict between competing ethnicities, whereby some migrants are noticeably more marginal than others. An interesting variation on the theme of multiple identities in contact, although not necessarily in conflict, is provided by Cristina Petras' essay on patterns of code-switching among Nova Scotia Acadian French speakers. Her detailed empirical analysis explores instances of intersystemic interference of contact English in Acadian French and the resulting radical intrasystemic "reorganization of [specialized] discourse markers".

The slippages of identitarianism surface in the next two essays of the collection: Yvonne Völkl elaborates on the "internally conflicted" Jewish/French Canadian writer Monique Bosco, considering the relationships between internal and external conflict, and between narrative, violence, and identity. Fanny Macé makes a suitably provocative contribution to the controversial debate on Métis identity as a function of continuing national anxiety over "valid" ethnic categories – a somewhat circular, state-led debate within which Métis desires for autonomy and self-determination can easily be trapped.

The two essays completing this particular section of the collection, by Delphine Jeanroy and Chloé Collin, seek alternatives to this debate by turning their attention to the specificity of Indigenous cultural knowledges and artforms. Jeanroy's essay, like Macé's, points to the problem of ethnic/racial categorisation, a foundational problem merely perpetuated, or even exacerbated, by the Canadian Film Board's rather parochial view of what constitutes a *bona fide* Canadian film. Indigenous cinema, argues Jeanroy, operates according to a wholly different set of epistemological and aesthetic conventions. These conventions are neither easily understood nor seamlessly replicated, despite white Canadian authors' and filmmakers' efforts to "indigenise" their material – the subject of Collin's essay, which alludes to the different forms of discursive violence performed when non-Indigenous Canadians attempt, however good their will or respectful their intentions, to reproduce an "Indigenous vocabulary" or to represent an "Indigenous point of view".

Sabine Schlüter's and Krzysztof Majer's complementary essays on the representation of corporeal violence in Canadian literature, which lead off the next section of the collection, explore the possibilities of

the body both as a receptacle for extreme violence and, simultaneously, as a kind of portal through which the disfigured/grotesque body may create 'new, restructured forms of identity' (Majer). As Schlüter suggests in her analysis of George Walker's ultra-violent plays, the grotesque becomes a means of confronting the audience with their own voyeuristic tendencies while stirring their conscience about the routinisation of extreme violence and brutality in a highly mediatised world. Schlüter's essay marks a shift, maintained throughout the rest of the collection, toward the role of the reader/spectator in making meaning and in assuming responsibility for his/her own reading. This role is explored in more detail in Natalie Diebschlag's essay on intertextuality in Ondaatje, wherein she reads Ondaatje's *The English Patient* as an allegory of Roland Barthes' well known essay "The Death of the Author". Similarly, Justyna Kucharska analyzes "transtextual" elements in Canadian diasporic cinema, which she reads as a "palimpsest written on at least two cultures", and through which each culture modifies the other, creating a new transcultural mix.

The last three essays in the collection return to some of the conference's main themes: the different forms of violence inherent in a purely identity-based approach that risks perpetuating these forms of violence while effectively prevents alternative non-violent understandings of identity and community, and short-circuits the search for a "safe place", where different kinds of people might belong. Niina Holm approaches issues of identity through the creation of doubled or multiple selves in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, arguing, with Butler, that identities, and particularly gender identities, are performative and situated, incorporating numerous oppositions that "do not relate hierarchically but connect in an endless motion" (Holm). Likewise Donna McCormack and Emma Smith use their detailed critical analyses of the work of recent transcultural Canadian writers to offer wider perspectives on an ethics of reading based on the acceptance of the limits of one's own cultural knowledge, and on a felt conviction that the ability to read openly and critically squares with the 'potential for social transformation to bring about different, less violent, ways of belonging (McCormack), both in Canada and beyond. The idea of reading as 'ethical exchange' (Smith) opens up possibilities of non-identitarian community, indicating that the long-standing practice of constantly redefining 'Canadian identity' has been complicit with the

discursive violence it inadvertently re-enacts. Perhaps it is time, McCormack suggests, to "abandon identity as that which defines us or by which we define others": a sentiment echoed, implicitly or explicitly, in nearly all the essays, and a step toward a fresh, not necessarily comforting understanding of words and ideas like "peace", "security", and "community" in a country where such terms remain important and hotly contested conceptual territory.

Catherine Bates, Graham Huggan, Milena Marinkova, Jeffrey Orr

Conference Organising Committee

Leeds, 2006

# Introduction

Dans l'édition du 28 mars 2006 de *The Guardian*, deux articles sur le Canada sont remarquables. Le premier, un court article de Duncan Campbell, concerne le nombre croissant de déserteurs de l'armée américaine récemment arrivés au Canada et qui ont demandé l'asile politique, protestant que l'armée américaine leur aurait amené à servir dans une guerre manifestement injuste par la ruse (Campbell 2006 ; p.17). «C'est vraiment super ici,» dit un évadé qui a réussi. «En général, les gens ont été très hospitaliers et compréhensifs, mais il y en a quelques uns qui soutiennent la guerre» (Campbell 2006, p.17). L'autre article, une lettre de protestation signée par, entre autres, le député des Conservateurs au Royaume-Uni Ann Widdecombe, qui dénonce le massacre annuel des petits phoques au large du nord-ouest du Canada, «abattus et dépecés vifs par les chasseurs…dans un des massacres de mammifères marins les plus grands et les plus brutaux sur la planète» (Banks et al 2006, p.31). En réponse, Widdecombe et al demande l'interdiction des produits canadiens au Royaume-Uni comme «signal au Canada que cela suffit – on peut arrêter le cruel massacre sur la glace» (Banks et al 2006, p.31). On ne trouve aucun commentaire particulier du *Guardian* ici, mais un article sur double page présente la photo d'un chasseur en noir sur la glace devant son bateau, sa trique suspendue par-dessus un phoque inerte, avec la légende 'Fate sealed' ('seal' étant le mot anglais pour 'phoque', il s'agit d'un mauvais jeu de mots pour dire que leur sort est réglé) et un commentaire faussement objectif : «Des chasseurs de phoques regardent du pont de leur bateau, pendant qu'un phoque se fait frapper à coups de massue au large de la Terre-Neuve, à la deuxième journée de la chasse aux phoques annuelle» (Cook 2006, pp. 18-9)

Les deux articles font partie d'un ensemble d'images contradictoires du Canada Le premier conforte la perception du Canada comme «endroit sûr», à l'abri du régime barbare de l'autre côté de la frontière (une perception exploitée par beaucoup d'écrivains canadiens, y compris Margaret Atwood dans son célèbre roman contre-utopique, The Handmaid's Tale). Le deuxième offre une image moins connue mais néanmoins très signifiante du Canada comme lieu de violence extrême, moins une victime – même si l'image de la victime pèse lourd dans l'imagination nationale canadienne – qu'un persécuteur, et moins le lieu d'un effort innocent que celui d'une force élémentaire. De même, les perceptions

répandues du Canada – dont une partie développées et soutenues par les Canadiens eux-mêmes – oscillent traditionnellement entre des idées opposées du régime canadien comme une « zone de sécurité » et une « zone de danger » qui s'auto-divise (voir, par exemple, Ignatieff 1990). De tels diagnostics, trop généraux, ne sont sans doute pas historiques, mais les historiographies sur les colons – au Canada et aux États-Unis, en Australie et en Nouvelle Zélande et aussi en Afrique du Sud – ont trop souvent un air dichotomique, que l'on voit dans la contre-tendance à glorifier la réussite (post)coloniale ou à effectuer une autopsie tout aussi exagérée de l'invasion impériale, de la violence aux frontières et de leurs implications persistantes pour les nations dominées par les blancs, constamment torturées par le sentiment de leurs propres défauts : gestes qui, sans être injustifiés, sont difficiles à voir autrement que comme une forme de culpabilité coloniale blanche déplacée.

Le Canada n'est pas un endroit *exceptionnellement* dangereux, mais cela ne rend pas son histoire moins violente, de la même façon que son record de pluralisme culturel relativement paisible ne le rend pas explicitement sûr. Cette collection d'essais rentre dans quelques-uns des débats entourant les perceptions opposées et très médiatiques du Canada comme d'un endroit violent/dangereux et paisible/sûr. Même si la violence n'est pas le sujet de tous les articles, implicitement ou explicitement, plusieurs se concentrent sur la conceptualisation, la textualisation et l'historicisation de la violence, qui était le thème principal du 14ème Séminaire Européen des Étudiant(e)s Gradué(e)s en Études Canadiennes. Considérés dans leur ensemble, les articles- ou au moins ceux qui ont choisi de traiter du thème principal – offrent une série de perspectives multidisciplinaires sur la violence par un nombre de jeunes gradué(e)s européen(nes) dont le travail porte sur le Canada.

La collection commence avec la superbe analyse par Jan Wechmann de la saison de hockey sur glace de 1972 entre le Canada et l'Union soviétique – cas curieux mais pas exceptionnel de sport comme violence réglementée au service de la diplomatie entre cultures et de la paix mondiale. Fusionnant la détente Est-Ouest avec le nationalisme culturel canadien, la saison a creusé les failles entre le rôle du sport comme instrument de diplomatie internationale et comme véhicule de prestige national. Wechmann conclut avec prudence que même si la saison, remportée de peu par le Canada «a augmenté le respect mutuel entre canadiens et soviétiques» et a servi

de catalyseur pour des échanges culturels et sportifs futurs, il «serait exagéré de dire qu'elle a beaucoup fait avancer l'amitié entre le Canada et l'Union soviétique».

Malgré les tensions qu'elle portait, la saison de 1972 a été diffusée – du moins au Canada – comme un triomphe des relations publiques internationales ; les romans de l'écrivaine primée Carol Shields, par contre, ont traditionnellement été perçus comme donnant un aperçu plus posé des vicissitudes émotionnelle de la vie domestique privée. Comme l'argumente Alex Ramon, les mondes fictionnels de Shields ne sont pas du tout aussi sûrs ou limités qu'ils ne le paraissent, ce qui suggère que la violence est une «partie constituante de la texture de la vie ordinaire», renversant les suppositions faciles sur la convivialité et le pacifisme canadiens et montrant la relation de ses «préoccupations habituelles sur la lutte féminine…avec une sphère résolument globale» (Ramon).

L'article divertissant d'Anna Szczepaniak sur les perceptions populaires nationales et internationales de la police montée du Canada est tout aussi suspicieux du statut "auto-mythisant" du Canada comme « Royaume Paisible » (Frye, cité dans Howard 1998). En tant que gardiens de la paix ; la police montée est « symbole de l'autorité politique et morale » – un statut ambivalent reflété dans les perceptions à double tranchant du Canada comme « le seul pays du monde où les policiers sont des héros ». Le glissement de Benjamin entre violence qui « enfreint la loi » et celle qui « fait la loi » vient à l'esprit ; logique selon laquelle la police montée devrait être vue comme protégeant des citoyens nationaux tout en maintenant avec une certaine ironie la violence institutionnelle qui continue à être infligée au nom de la nation (voir Benjamin 1969).

La question du symbole d'autorité comme héros est également évoquée dans l'article d'Elena Clemente sur le thème de l'exclu dans la fiction spéculative canadienne. Les exclus de la littérature canadienne, suggère Clemente, ont tendance à être des antihéros faillibles plutôt que des personnages dominants, ce qui implique un défi lancé aux structures d'autorité, implicite dans l'idée d'une société utopique, et révélant la violence non-violente sous-jacente héritée de l'idée d'Utopie comme un « monde parfaitement organisé ».

Dans les articles cités ci-dessus, l'idée de la paix, poursuivie dogmatiquement, risque d'instaurer sa propre forme de violence protectrice. Cette idée est également examinée dans un certain nombre d'autres articles de la collection, qui explorent les politiques ethniques, linguistiques et d'identités raciales au Canada, ouvrant – comme le dit Patrick Farges dans son article – une série de « fissures dans la mosaïque culturelle canadienne ». Comme l'indique l'article de Farges sur les fortunes fluctuantes des exiles germanophones au Canada des années à 30 à nos jours, on peut voir la violence comme étant à la base des structures discursives des concepts de nationalité et d'appartenance du Canada du 20ème siècle. Cette violence persiste malgré des lectures progressivistes du glissement du Canada « d'un pays fermé qui se soucie de son patrimoine ethnique…à une mosaïque multiculturelle à l'esprit ouvert ».

Le travail soigneux de Farges souligne un conflit financé par l'état entre des ethnies en compétition, où certains immigrés sont nettement plus marginaux que d'autres. Une variation intéressante sur le thème des multiples identités en contact, mais non pas forcément en conflit, se trouve dans l'article de Cristina Petras sur les modèles de l'alternance codique chez les Acadiens francophones de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Son analyse empirique détaillée explore les cas d'interférence intersystémique d'anglais en contact avec le français acadien et la « réorganisation de marqueurs de discours (spécialisés) » radicale qui en résulte.

Les glissements de l'identitarianisme surgissent dans les deux articles suivants de la collection : Yvonne Völkl traite de l'écrivaine française juive « avec conflit intérieur » Monique Bosco, considérant les relations entre conflits internes et externes et entre narration, violence et identité.

Fanny Macé fait une contribution convenablement provocatrice au débat controversé sur l'identité métisse comme fonction de l'angoisse nationale sur les catégories ethniques «valides» – un débat quelque peu circulaire et mené par l'état dans lequel les désirs métis pour l'autonomie et l'autodétermination se trouvent très facilement.

Les deux articles qui clôturent cette section de la collection, de Delphine Jeanroy et Chloé Collin, cherchent des alternatives à ce débat en se tournant vers la spécificité des connaissances culturelles et formes artistiques indigènes. Comme celui de Macé, l'article de Jeanroy montre le problème de la catégorisation ethnique et raciale,

un problème simplement perpétué, ou même aggravé, par la vision d'épicier de l'Office National du Film du Canada de ce qui fait un film canadien de bonne foi. Le cinéma indigène, argumente Jeanroy, opère selon un jeu de conventions esthétiques et épistémologiques complètement différent. Ces conventions ne sont ni facilement comprises ni parfaitement reproduites, malgré les efforts des cinéastes et écrivains blancs canadiens de « rendre plus indigène » leurs œuvres – le sujet de l'article de Collin, qui fait allusion aux différentes formes de violence discursive reproduites quand les canadiens non-natifs tentent, malgré une bonne foi ou des intentions respectueuses, de reproduire un « vocabulaire indigène » ou de représenter un « point de vue indigène ».

Les articles complémentaires de Sabine Schlüter et Krzysztof Majer sur la représentation de la violence corporelle dans la littérature canadienne, qui commence la section suivante de la collection, explorent les possibilités du corps à la fois comme récipient de violence extrême et comme une sorte de portail à travers lequel le corps défiguré/grotesque pourrait créer des «formes nouvelles et restructurées d'identité» (Majer). Comme le suggère Schlüter dans son analyse des pièces de théâtre ultra-violentes de George Walker, le grotesque devient un moyen de confronter le public avec ses propres tendances voyeuristes en secouant sa conscience à propos de la violence et la brutalité extrêmes rendu routinières dans un monde très médiatisé. L'article de Schlüter marque une dérive, maintenue dans le reste de la collection, vers le rôle du lecteur/spectateur dans la construction du sens et sa prise de responsabilité dans sa propre lecture. Ce rôle est examiné en plus de détail dans l'article de Natalie Diebschlag sur l'intertextualité dans les écrits d'Ondaatje, où elle voit Le Patient Anglais comme une allégorie du célèbre essai de Roland Barthes, « La mort de l'auteur ». De la même façon, Justyna Kucharska examine les éléments « transtextuels » dans le cinéma de la diaspora canadienne, qu'elle voit comme un « palimpseste écrit sur au moins deux cultures », et à travers lequel chaque culture modifie l'autre, créant une nouvelle fusion transculturelle.

Les trois derniers articles marquent un retour aux thèmes principaux de la conférence : Les différentes formes de violence inhérente à une approche basée seulement sur l'identité, qui risquent de perpétuer ces formes de violence tout en empêchant une compréhension non-violente de l'identité et de la communauté, et court-circuite la

recherche d'un « endroit sûr » où pourrait coexister différentes peuples.

Niina Holm aborde la problématique de l'identité par la création de double ou multiples personnalités dans Cat's Eye de Margaret Atwood, argumentant, avec Butler, que les identités, en particulier celles de genre, sont performatives et situées, incorporant plusieurs oppositions qui « ne s'associent de façon hiérarchique mais qui se relient en un mouvement sans fin » (Holm). Donna McCormack et Emma Smith elles aussi se servent de leurs analyses critiques détaillées du travail des écrivains transculturels canadiens récent pour offrir des perspectives plus larges sur l'éthique de la lecture, basée sur l'acceptation des limites de ses propres connaissances culturelles, et sur une conviction ressentie que la capacité de lire ouvertement et de façon critique complète le «potentiel de la transformation sociale de faire surgir des façons différentes et moins violentes d'exister» (McCormack) au Canada et plus loin. La vision de la lecture comme «échange éthique» (Smith) ouvre la possibilité d'une communauté non-identitaire, indiquant que la vieille pratique de la redéfinition constante de «l'identité canadienne» a été complice de la violence discursive qu'elle reproduit involontairement. Il est peut-être temps, suggère McCormack, d'« abandonner l'identité comme façon de se définir ou de définir les autres » : sentiment raisonnant, de façon implicite ou explicite, dans presque tous les articles, et un pas vers une nouvelle compréhension, pas forcément rassurante, des mots et des idées tels que « paix », « sécurité » et « communauté » dans un pays où de tels termes restent un territoire conceptuel important et fortement contesté.

Catherine Bates, Graham Huggan, Milena Marinkova, Jeffrey Orr

Conference Organising Committee

Leeds, 2006

# *States of Violence*

**Jan Wechmann**
**Freie Universität Berlin, Germany**

# The Great Canadian Myth Exposed: The 1972 Summit Series in Diplomatic and Domestic Perspective

**Abstract**

*The 1972 ice hockey series between Canada and the Soviet Union was more than a mere series of eight international friendly matches. It remains one of the most defining moments in Canadian history. Apart from its almost mythical magnitude, the series was indeed seminal in many respects. In its domestic dimension, it represented the first highlight of the federal government's strategy to advance national unity and foster a distinctly Canadian sense of identity through accomplishments in international sporting competitions. On the other hand, the series also had important international implications. The materialization of those games was an expression of thawing Cold War tensions in Canadian-Soviet relations in the early 1970s. The series was a landmark event both in Canada's drive for a diversified foreign policy and in cultural diplomacy. Consequently, the series was marked by a high level of political involvement on both sides.*

*The inherent tensions between its domestic and international dimensions set the series apart from seemingly similar events in sport diplomacy such as President Nixon's famed "ping-pong" diplomacy, where the playing field was not intended to be level in the first place. In the 1972 Summit Series, however, two hockey superpowers met and neither was willing to lose. Conversely, there was a striking attitudinal difference between the two opponents. While the Soviet Union had nothing to lose in this series, Canada put the myth of its supposed hockey supremacy on the line and could*

barely afford to lose a single game due to the high expectations at home. And while the series was not necessarily conducive to promoting détente from its very outset, it became ever more difficult to do justice to its well-meant diplomatic intentions as the Soviet team drove the Canadian team to the brink of defeat.

Against the backdrop of Prime Minister Trudeau's new nationalism of the early 1970s, this article attempts to render a multifaceted analysis of this rare Canadian moment and examine the usefulness of sport as a vehicle for nation-building and diplomacy.

### Résumé

La saison 1972 de hockey sur glace entre le Canada et l'Union Soviétique représente bien davantage que huit rencontres internationales et amicales. Cette saison est en effet un moment décisif dans l'histoire canadienne. En dehors de son importance quasi mythique à l'époque, cette saison a aussi eu une grande portée par la suite. En matière de politique intérieure, elle représente un point culminant dans la stratégie du gouvernement canadien de faire avancer l'unité nationale et d'encourager un sentiment d'identité canadien. Ce sentiment devait notamment être fondé sur des performances sportives internationales. Par ailleurs, la saison a également eu des effets importants à l'échelon international. Le fait même que ces matchs aient pu avoir lieu était l'expression d'une détente entre le Canada et l'Union Soviétique dans le contexte de la Guerre Froide. La saison de 1972 a marqué un tournant dans la politique extérieure et la diplomatie culturelle canadiennes. Par conséquent, elle a été investie au plus haut niveau par les deux pays.

Les tensions entre la dimension de politique intérieure et la dimension internationale distinguent cette saison d'autres événements, semblables en apparence, dans la diplomatie du sport : on pense par exemple au célèbre épisode de la "diplomatie ping-pong" menée par le Président Nixon. Lors de la saison au sommet de 1972, deux "grandes puissances" du hockey sur glace se sont rencontrées, et ni l'une ni l'autre ne voulait perdre. On a néanmoins pu constater une différence d'attitude frappante entre les deux adversaires. Alors que l'Union Soviétique n'avait rien à perdre, le Canada risquait en revanche de mettre en péril sa réputation de meilleure nation du hockey. Au regard des enjeux intérieurs, il ne pouvait donc pas se permettre de perdre un seul match. Si une saison

*de hockey n'est de toute façon pas nécessairement le lieu idéal pour favoriser la détente, il est devenu de plus en plus difficile de rendre justice aux bonnes intentions de départ, tant l'équipe soviétique acculait l'équipe canadienne à la défaite au fil des matchs.*

*Avec pour arrière-plan le nouveau nationalisme du Premier Ministre Trudeau au début des années 1970, le présent article tente d'analyser les divers aspects de cet événement particulier et d'examiner le sport comme véhicule de patriotisme et de diplomatie.*

## Introduction

Two instances have only recently illustrated that modern sport often has implications that go far beyond its recreational or entertaining purpose. Despite frequent assurances to the contrary by both politicians and sport officials, sport and politics mix more often than not. When Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad described the Holocaust as a "myth" in mid-December 2005, it prompted a short but intense debate about the possibility of excluding the Iranian national team from the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany as an effective way of dealing with the outrageous behaviour of Iran's political leadership. While the international football federation FIFA quickly dismissed the idea on the grounds that a strict separation between sports and politics needs to be upheld, the debate in itself demonstrated that sport is seldom trivial. The consideration of Iran's exclusion from an event of considerable cultural magnitude demonstrates that sport is regarded as a potentially useful diplomatic tool. It is a relatively safe but highly visible tool, which is able to stir people's emotions to a considerable extent. Consequently, sport has the potential to put governments under substantial pressure. In addition to the relevance of sport to international relations, the domestic dimension of sport also figured rather prominently in the news media in late 2005. In discussions about the causes of weeks of unrest by urban youths across France in October and November 2005, the 1998 FIFA World Cup and the 2000 UEFA European Cup victories of the French national football team were frequently evoked as an alleviating factor that had prevented these riots from happening at a much earlier point in time. What some observers attributed to these championship titles was a temporarily unifying impact on a society that had long been coping with ethnic tensions. Since those winning teams were supposedly made up of a cross-section of the French ethnic mosaic, it was widely believed that they had, in a way, represented the concentrated strength of the same multiethnic society

which in late 2005 seemed to be falling apart. While there was no explicit utilization of sport in either of the aforementioned examples, those two instances nevertheless demonstrate that sport's role as a relevant factor in international and domestic political affairs is widely recognized, at times appreciated, and constantly at issue.

The realization of sport's potential as a tool in domestic and international affairs leads us to a rare example where a single sporting event was deliberately used for both domestic and diplomatic purposes: the 1972 Canada-Soviet hockey series, commonly known as the 1972 Summit Series.[1] What makes this example for the utilization of sport even more extraordinary is the fact that the Summit Series remains, until today, one of the most iconic and mythical events in Canadian history. It is rather striking that an event that became memorable to so many Canadians was neither part of an official or established international competition – at first glance it was merely a series of eight "international friendly" matches – nor was it commonly known outside of Canada. And while Canadian journalists and fans commemorate the anniversary of the Summit Series every five years or so, the Summit Series did not even receive the same kind of attention in the Soviet Union. As Igor Kuperman, a former Soviet hockey journalist who emigrated to Canada in 1991, recalled in an interview with the *Toronto Star*:

> [T]he Summit Series did not receive front-page coverage in the Soviet Union. And after it ended, the Summit Series was reduced to a blip on the screen everywhere outside of Canada. "People have asked me why there is no one great moment in Russian hockey," Kuperman said. "But when you have 20 world championships and eight gold medals, how do you choose?" (*Toronto Star*, September 10, 2002, E.09)

All that said, it is important to note that the Summit Series was more than just a legendary sporting event. It was a key event in the construction of Canadian national pride and, at the same time, it was also an exercise in Cold War sport diplomacy. Against the backdrop of these two dimensions – the domestic and the international – the Summit Series was above all a well-orchestrated event as it marked the first high point in the Canadian federal government's involvement in the politics of sport. This article will take a closer

look at those two dimensions of the 1972 Summit Series and the tensions that inevitably arose between them.

**The domestic dimension of the 1972 Summit Series**

To understand the euphoria and anticipation generated in Canada by the mere announcement of the Canada-Soviet hockey series in April 1972, one has to take into consideration Canada's famed hockey history and what was left of it in 1972. The series was a landmark event as it marked the first time Canada's *professional* hockey players took on a Soviet national team. The question of whether Canada was allowed to send professional players to international hockey competitions had never come up as long as Canadian amateur teams whitewashed every opponent, which they basically did from the very first international hockey competitions in the 1920s until the mid-1950s. But the eligibility to use professional players became a main concern in Canada when Soviet amateur national teams began to dominate international hockey competitions from the mid-1950s onwards, often at the expense of Canadian amateur teams. The impact this Soviet ascension had on Canadian national pride was compounded by the fact that the Soviet Union had only taken up the game of hockey after 1945.[2] This bruise to Canada's pride in its hockey prowess had for years been mitigated by the belief that once Canada was allowed by the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) to field its elite professional players, the Soviets could be easily put in their place. Thus, the eight exhibition games scheduled for September 1972 gave Canada the opportunity to straighten the distorted image of Canadian hockey and reassert the myth of its hockey supremacy. The first four of those games were to take place in early September in different Canadian cities,[3] while the last four were to take place in Moscow at the end of the same month.

For Canadian hockey officials, fans and politicians, the struggle between professionalism and amateurism lay at the very heart of Canada's woes in international hockey. Consequently, Canadian representation in international hockey became a political issue in the 1960s since success in hockey was increasingly regarded as a vital element of Canada's international prestige (Macintosh, 1987, 35).[4] While Canada's prestige abroad might have suffered from the lack of international hockey accomplishments and the occasional instance of rude on-ice conduct, what really prompted the Canadian federal government to become involved in high performance sport was one of the most pressing domestic issues of the period: the national unity

and identity crisis.[5] Due to its growing affinity with television, sport had become a prominent component of television programming in the 1960s and it certainly did not escape Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's notice that sport's increased prominence made it particularly attractive as an instrument for achieving a highly symbolic goal like national unity. Moreover, sport

> did not cost government a great deal; it had mass audiences and citizen appeal and support; there was no serious opposition to it; and athletic achievement appeared to be independent of language, culture, or regional origin. (Macintosh, 1987, 53)

In a campaign speech in June 1968, Trudeau explained that he was particularly worried by Canada's showings in international hockey, by the growing American dominance of the National Hockey League, and by the lack of Olympic honours for Canada. And he promised to do more for sport if re-elected (*Globe and Mail*, June 4, 1968, 9). When Trudeau eventually fulfilled his campaign promise, Ottawa embarked on a course of direct government involvement in high performance sports, hoping that international sporting accomplishments could transcend language and regional differences in Canada and promote a sense of national unity and pride (Macintosh and Bedecki, 1986, 22). Since most Canadian politicians realized the fact that hockey is one of the lowest common denominators Canadians have, Canada's role in international hockey competitions was destined to become a focal point of Trudeau's search for symbols of national unity.

The creation of Hockey Canada, a federally sponsored non-profit organization designed to improve Canada's representation at international hockey tournaments, in 1969 marked the first step in pushing ahead Canada's insistence on using its very best players in international hockey competitions or none at all. In this context, it is revealing what a management consulting firm had to say about the federal government's intentions to support Hockey Canada. In its study on Hockey Canada's development in the first three years since its foundation, the consulting firm noted that the federal government "is using Hockey Canada as a buffer to protect it from all the latent political problems and dangers associated with hockey in Canada" (Clayton, 1982, 84-85).[6] Accordingly, it is reasonable to conclude that not only was the federal government aware of hockey's

potentially beneficial role in achieving political aims such as national unity and prestige, but it also realized that it was politically dangerous to ignore the issue of Canada's hockey fortunes any longer. While the federal government was keenly aware of hockey's potential to advance national unity and strengthen Canadian national identity, Canadian politicians did not fail to notice the series' potential for publicity gains either. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau got his first taste of the kind of public relations opportunities hockey was able to generate in July 1972. When the NHL declared star player Bobby Hull ineligible to play for Team Canada in the upcoming series because he had recently signed a contract with a rival professional league, the public uproar was immense and pressure was brought on the federal government to act on behalf of Hull's inclusion. Trudeau, who until then had not exactly been known for his hockey passion, tried to endear himself to the Canadian public in what would turn out to be an election year and decided to become personally involved in an attempt to pressurize the NHL to include Hull. In the end, his efforts were in vain as the NHL refused to give in and even threatened to jeopardize the whole series. However, Trudeau had conveyed the impression that he deeply cared about an issue that affected Canada's best interests (MacSkimming, 1996, 15-17).

In its domestic context, the 1972 Summit Series was a seminal event insofar as it gave Canadians a rare opportunity to develop a strong sense of national solidarity, of collective consciousness, of being "one people". In countries divided by ethnic, regional and other means of identification, such opportunities are usually rare (Rowe, 1999, 22). In the Canadian case, among the most divisive domestic issues of the late 1960s and early 1970s were the difficult relations between the anglophone and francophone communities, Quebec's drive for greater autonomy, federal-provincial relations, and a continuing concern about the potential cultural and economic degradation by the United States of America. In short, Canadian domestic politics were preoccupied with national unity, and hockey, Canada's national winter sport, was deliberately used by the federal government for the attainment of this symbolic aim. In addition, the prominence of the event was used by politicians of all convictions for publicity gains. Reviving Canada's past hockey glory presented itself as an obvious and easy road to accolades not only for the federal government, but also for officials with slightly different

political affiliations, such as Alan Eagleson, who was Hockey Canada's chief organizer in the series and an avid supporter of the Progressive Conservative party. However, in certain respects the involvement of the federal government in the 1972 Summit Series was also a risky endeavour. First of all, the outcome of a sporting event can rarely be arranged ahead of time. This also applied to the Summit Series. While there was a considerable amount of hubris in the Canadian media and among Canadian fans and players before the series, Canadian professional hockey players had never taken on the ostensible amateurs of the Soviet Union and no one could truly judge how good the Soviet Sbornaja really was. So, from a more objective point of view, there was a substantial degree of uncertainty as to whether the series would in fact become "a glorious 'coming out' party, a celebration of *us*" for Canada (Dryden and MacGregor, 1989, 202; emphasis in the original). Moreover, the Summit Series was a focal point of Canada's cultural exchange with the Soviet Union, and from a diplomatic point of view the series involved considerable risks as well. The domestic importance of the event had the potential to undermine in just a few weeks years of diplomatic efforts that had been devoted to improving Canada's tenuous relationship with the Soviet Union.

## The international dimension of the 1972 Summit Series

International sport can at times serve as a safety valve for international tensions. A case in point would be the famed "ping-pong" diplomacy between the USA and China. In this instance, the kind of sport was carefully chosen for its diplomatic value insofar as an American defeat at the hands of the dominant Chinese table tennis team would not result in loss of prestige since no one expected the American team to win (Houlihan, 1994, 10). The 1972 Summit Series, however, differed significantly from the latter example. While Canadians might have felt as dominant as the Chinese table tennis team, the Soviet team had no intention of letting the Canadians get away with an easy victory. This view was confirmed by the Canadian ambassador in Moscow, Robert A.D. Ford. In his memoirs Ford noted that "[t]he need to win on the Soviet side was overwhelming. It became a question of national pride and Soviet victories were hailed as proof of the superiority of the system" (Ford, 1989, 130). The Summit Series was a meeting of two hockey superpowers and both nations had something to prove. Under these conditions, it is fair to say that the diplomatic value of the chosen

sport was rather dubious, especially since "the extent of
identification with the sport as a metonym for national culture" was
so great in Canada (Peppard and Riordan, 1993, 8). The
overwhelming desire of both sides to win – for prestigious reasons –
a competition that was meant to be a friendly encounter certainly
posed a great danger to the idea of cultural exchange. Still, the
positive diplomatic impact of the Summit Series should not be
undervalued. Admittedly, several unpleasant, at times outrageous,
on-ice incidents during the series gave the impression that diplomacy
had at least been suspended within the confines of the hockey rink.
Also, it should be noted that it was mostly Canadian players who did
not live up to their role as ambassadors for their country. Add to that
the Soviet backroom manoeuvrings that occurred once the series
moved to Moscow, with the intention to unsettle the beleaguered but
resurgent Canadian team, and it is easy to paint a pretty grim picture
of the diplomatic situation during the Summit Series.[7] In this context,
it is quite telling that the Canadian federal government was not
entirely unprepared for what transpired on the ice once it became
clear that the Soviet team was no pushover. The Department of
External Affairs (DEA) established an International Sports Relations
desk in 1972 to deal especially with the preparations for the Summit
Series, and the Canadian embassy in Moscow fully committed its
resources to the preparation of the event (Macintosh and Hawes,
1994, 33). The DEA also assigned an experienced diplomat, Patrick
Reid, as a special liaison officer to Team Canada for the duration of
the series in order to make sure everything went relatively well from
a diplomatic point of view. A remark in his memoirs is quite
revealing as it demonstrates awareness that damage limitation was
certainly going to be among his responsibilities:

> And this one [the Summit Series] was so out of the
> ordinary, so full of Canadian nationalism, so fraught
> with Murphy's Law, it was as good a test as any of my
> durability. …I would deal with the team through Alan
> Eagleson unless there was a crisis demanding
> immediate action. That the tournament would unfold
> without incident was conceded to be unlikely. (Reid,
> 1995, 210)

Thus, it seems that the Canadian federal government was well aware
that the Summit Series indeed represented a "curious juxtaposition"
as it attempted to combine détente at the government level with a

prestige bolstering victory over the Soviet team (Macintosh and Hawes, 1994, 32). The series perfectly reflected the inherent ambivalence of sport diplomacy since it enabled both participants "to symbolize the antithetical poles of competition and cooperation in one and the same event;" and by virtue of its connotative power, sport diplomacy suggested more than one message simultaneously (Peppard and Riordan, 1993, 9-10). As indicated above, the Canadian federal government was well aware that on-ice incidents were more or less out of its control and posed some diplomatic risks. Accordingly, it was not inclined to let Canadian hockey officials run the entire show, and besides giving special assignments to diplomats like Patrick Reid, it put considerable effort into the ceremonial aspect of the series.

In spite of all these diplomatic risks, perhaps the most important message was that the series took place at all. This alone was a clear and highly visible indication of improving relations between Canada and the Soviet Union and a thaw in Cold War tensions. To a certain extent, the idea of a stronger Canadian identity had also spilled over into Canadian foreign policy. The Trudeau government was determined to make foreign policy an essential part of Canada's drive for the expression of a distinctive national identity, especially vis-à-vis the United States of America. Closer relations with the Soviet Union and open advocacy of détente allowed Trudeau to do just that. Canadian foreign policy of the early 1970s can best be characterized by scepticism towards aggressive anti-communism, a general lack of interest in foreign policy adventures and an acknowledgement of Soviet Union legitimacy and durability.[8] While Trudeau's foreign policy towards the Soviet Union was first and foremost marked by a change in tone and had mostly atmospheric effects, it is hard to imagine the materialization of the 1972 Summit Series without those atmospheric changes having taken place. One result of the cultivation of closer relations with the USSR was the signing of a General Exchanges Agreement on October 20, 1971.[9] Sporting exchanges constituted a vital part of the agreement. Thus, in a way, the 1972 Summit Series reflected Canada's efforts to diversify and expand its foreign contacts. If one looks at the series against the backdrop of détente, it is important to keep in mind that both countries had their very own motives for pursuing a policy of détente. While Canada sought to create counterweights to an increasingly unbalanced relationship with the United States, the

Soviet Union wanted to reap political benefits from strategic parity and increase trade with the West to stave off domestic pressures for economic reform (Sarty, 1995, 116). One aspect of the Soviet conception of détente is of particular significance here: to the Soviet Union détente meant, among other things, a growing recognition by the West of its co-equal superpower status. Thus, movement towards détente in international politics was regarded as a sign for the increased strength of the socialist camp (Sarty, 1995, 121–3). The Canadian move towards détente was seen in this light by the Soviet Union as well. In a figurative sense, the series eventually went in unison with the Soviet conception of détente. Not only had the Soviet team exposed the great myth of Canada's hockey supremacy, but it had also proved once and for all that the Soviet hockey team was in fact a superpower in the world of hockey.[10]

From a Canadian point of view, the series far from erased all doubts about Canada's hockey prowess, even less so in the face of the high expectations that had been omnipresent before the series. Furthermore, Canada's already tarnished hockey image was not exactly presented in a more favourable light by what transpired on the ice. What mattered in the end was the fashion in which Team Canada won the series: the team came from behind, after being booed off the ice at home, won the series in a seemingly hostile environment and eventually defended what was left of Canada's hockey prestige. In the process Canada was overtaken by a strong nationalist fervour that could barely have been evoked by an easy victory. Consequently, the drama of the series added significantly to the patriotic atmosphere that took hold of Canada in September 1972. After all, it was Canada's national game that was on the line. It had to be defended against two perceived external threats. First, there was the perceived Americanization of the game through American business interests in the National Hockey League that endangered the quality of the on-ice product and had prevented Team Canada from freely choosing the best players for the series. Second, there was the perennial challenge of the Soviet team that jeopardized Canada's hegemony in a game whose origin had always been traced to Canada. Therefore, for Canadians the series had

> a more fundamental dimension. For though much may
> be special about Canada, surrounded as it is historically
> and geographically by countries that are bigger, richer,
> more powerful, whose specialness seems more

> obvious, we cling to every symbol. A game is a game. But a symbol is not. *We had to win this series*. (Dryden and MacGregor, 1989, 202; emphasis in the original)

This Canadian attitude towards the series was also acknowledged in the USSR. As one Soviet sports writer observed in 1972:

> [T]he Canadians made an all-out effort to save their prestige and succeeded, though frequently violating the rules, to win the series. It has become clear to the whole world that the Soviet players are just as good as the famous and really skilled pros. (McGrath, 1989, 96)[11]

**Concluding comments**

In the end, the 1972 Summit Series had given both countries the opportunity to prove a point. The Canadian team had proved its resilience and won the series in a dramatic fashion. While the Soviets had lost the series, they had nevertheless presented themselves as a force to be reckoned with. Thus, the wayward behaviour of Canadian players and hockey officials, and the diplomatic embarrassment this caused did not harm Canadian-Soviet Union relations in a significant way. Nor did the manipulative actions of Soviet officials. In the rather weary words of the Canadian ambassador in Moscow: "the series had probably not set bilateral relations back more than six months" (Morse, 1987, 1). But the series certainly raised questions whether sports in fact helped to bring nations closer together. As one Russian hockey fan remarked in the *New York Times* after the end of the series:

> I am for better relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and I can tell you I am glad that this is a Canadian team and not an American team our players are battling out there on the ice. (*New York Times*, September 29, 1972, 49–50)

Obviously, the cordiality of the Canadian-Soviet relationship that had been established during the diplomatic 'annus mirabilis' of 1971, in combination with Canada's relative unimportance to Moscow in global political terms, made it easier to ignore or forgive some of the antics that occurred during the series.[12] While the Soviet-American rapprochement that took flight during 1972 markedly reduced Soviet interest in Canada, the 1972 Summit Series at least helped to keep it

steady, especially among the general public. William McGrath, who spent an academic year in the USSR immediately after the series, observed:

> The generally unexciting history of Soviet-Canadian relations has in this one sphere [i.e. hockey] sparked great mass interest in both societies and has led many to hope that a permanent series will be established. Competition in hockey seems to have generated considerable admiration of Canadians among the populace, though this is mixed with very strong censure of certain individual players. (McGrath, 1989, 96)

There can be little doubt that the series also made a noteworthy contribution to the objective of cultural exchange. First of all, the series ultimately had a revolutionary impact on the development of the game of hockey. The Soviet training methods and playing style that emphasized conditioning, mobility and technical skill were gradually appreciated and in part adopted in North America, while Soviet players and coaches were certainly impressed by the Canadians' physical playing style in combination with heart and passion, and tried to incorporate some of those features into their own game. Moreover, the series led to a greater appreciation of the European style of hockey among Canadians and paved the way for the influx of European players into North American hockey leagues in the 1970s and 1980s. The series' impact in this regard has been even more remarkable if one considers that prior to the series Canadians had often been "an insular, isolationist, self-protective, ignorant lot" when it came to "their" game (MacSkimming, 1996, 247). Second, the event's psychological impact on Canadian and Soviet citizens should not be underestimated. It marked the first time that a mass North American audience was able get an impression of the Soviet Union that went beyond the usual images of "intercontinental ballistic missiles parading past stony-faced Kremlin leaders" (MacSkimming, 1996, 140). The series was an experience that was shared by Soviets and Canadians alike. For many Soviet hockey fans, those games were a door to another world, too, as they were able to watch the Canadian part of the series on TV, and witness the non-conformist, sometimes unruly, Canadian players as they did the seemingly unthinkable and at times acted in open defiance against referees, the Soviet militia and officials. Thus, if

only in a symbolic way, hockey provided a common ground on which two peoples met and tentatively began to get to know each other, and allowed each people to take a glimpse behind the Iron Curtain. The boisterous contingent of roughly 3,000 Canadian fans that accompanied the Canadian team to Moscow even prompted Soviet officials to produce new words for the Soviet national anthem. Ambassador Ford reminisced:

> On the first night they [the Canadian fans] stood and sang lustily when 'O Canada' was played. When the Soviet national anthem was played, the audience was mute. The words, a poem of praise to Stalin, dated from the days of the Vozhd and had been scrapped. The Soviets were so humiliated they got to work and in a few months produced new words. (Ford, 1989, 130)

As a result of Trudeau's diplomatic efforts during the halcyon days of Canadian-Soviet détente in the early 1970s, Canada won recognition in the Soviet Union as one of the first countries to put the Cold War behind it (Sarty, 1995, 126). Canada had managed to gain for itself a separate niche in the official Soviet view of the world,[13] and the 1972 Summit Series undoubtedly made a contribution to that accomplishment. In the eyes of the Soviet public, the series put Canada firmly on the map and further distinguished Canada as a country from its imposing southern neighbour. In the words of Ambassador Ford, "[f]rom then on, hockey and Canada were synonymous" (Ford, 1989, 130). But the image of Canada that was on display during the series, at least on the ice, differed markedly from Canada's long cultivated, at times rather feminine, image of a peace-loving and peace-keeping nation. Rather, the series led to the self-discovery that Canadians can at times be "among the roughnecks of the world" (Fisher, 1972, 20). It seems that the rather brutish image of Canada – that is habitually dormant, and only gets released through the safety valve of hockey – commanded the respect of many Soviet people. As one of Team Canada's doctors told a Canadian hockey official after the end of the series:

> This [the USSR] is a powerful country with tough people and a harsh system. They'll respect what the Canadian players and fans have shown here in Moscow. We are not Nice Nellies. We are direct, crude and emotional, easily arrogant, even more easily bitchy

> and complaining, cherishing a sense of grievance.
> Before you and others crawl away and hide because of
> the embarrassment Eagleson and his antics have caused
> you, think it over: Is there any other way we could
> have done it and won? (Fischer, 1972, 20)

Well, at least there did not seem to have been any governmental
efforts to make Team Canada win the series in a more respectable
manner. With regard to the series' domestic impact, the eventual
victory led to an almost unprecedented outburst of patriotism in
Canada. People, both in Quebec and the rest of Canada, crowded the
streets to celebrate and wave flags after the decisive game was won.
Ultimately, neutral observers might have felt that there was actually
little to celebrate since Team Canada had failed to live up to the huge
expectations. Perhaps what temporarily united the country was less a
sense of pride than a deeply felt sense of relief. While the moral
victory clearly belonged to the Soviet Union, a new myth had grown
out of the one that had just been exposed by the Soviet Union. The
new myth was about a team that had won in a hostile environment,
won for Canada on enemy ice with their backs against the wall; a
team that purportedly represented a cross-section of the Canadian
ethnic mosaic – a notion which implied in a figurative sense that
only a united Canada can be strong and weather adversity. Thus, the
highly symbolic aim for national unity had been attained, if only for
a brief moment at the end of September 1972. But the need to win at
all costs, to defend the symbolic value of hockey, left little room for
diplomacy and dignity. The rather paradoxical idea to use a series of
friendly matches to promote both national unity and détente had
emerged as a result of Canada's confidence in its hockey superiority.
Once the myth of Canada's invincibility in hockey had been
shattered, Team Canada realized that there simply was no diplomatic
way to win the series. The intensity of the 1972 Summit Series
certainly led to some delicate diplomatic situations, but these
situations never escalated into anything more severe than diplomatic
embarrassments. Finally, the series also proved that sport can be a
useful diplomatic tool. While it would be exaggerated to state that
the series furthered the Canadian-Soviet friendship to a great extent,
it certainly enhanced the mutual respect between Canadians and
Soviets and established hockey exchanges between North American
professional and Soviet amateur teams as a common feature of
international sport.

**Endnotes**

1. The North American term "hockey" instead of "ice hockey" will be used throughout the article.

2. The USSR did not compete at Olympic ice hockey competitions until the 1956 Winter Olympic Games at Cortina d'Ampezzo, where the Soviet team immediately won the gold medal.

3. The first four games took place in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver, respectively.

4. The decline of Canada's hockey fortunes became painfully visible at the 1964 Winter Olympic Games when the Canadian team for the first time ever finished out of the medals.

5. An excellent overview of how sport became an instrument that could be used to counteract the national unity crisis is given in Macintosh, 1987, Chapter 4.

6. The study "Organizational Development of Hockey Canada" was conducted by Edmonton-based M & M Systems Research Ltd. between January 1969 and May 1972.

7. For some colourful background information on what happened on and off the ice once the series had moved to Moscow, see for example MacSkimming, 1996, Chapters 15, 17 and 19 and Eagleson, 1991, Chapter 6.

8. This discussion draws on Bothwell, 1998, 78–93.

9. For further details see *International Canada* (October 1971): 195–6 and (July/August 1972): 125–6.

10. In the end, Team Canada barely won the Summit Series on a goal by Paul Henderson with 34 seconds left to play in the final game. The results of the eight games were as follows: Game 1, Sept. 2 at Montreal: Soviet Union 7 - Team Canada 3; Game 2, Sept. 4 at Toronto: Team Canada 4 – Soviet Union 1; Game 3, Sept. 6 at Winnipeg: Soviet Union 4 – Team Canada 4; Game 4, Sept. 8 at Vancouver: Soviet Union 5 – Team Canada 3; Game 5, Sept. 22 at Moscow: Soviet Union 5 – Team Canada 4; Game 6, Sept. 24 at Moscow: Team Canada 3 – Soviet Union 2, Game 7, Sept. 26 at Moscow: Team Canada 4 – Soviet Union 3; Game 8, Sept. 28 at Moscow: Team Canada 6 – Soviet Union 5. Canada won the series

with an overall score of four wins, three losses and one tie. 11. Ryzhkov, Dmitry. *Our Hockey*. Translated from Russian by Nikolai Shartse and Gennady Pavlov. Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport Publishers, 1972. Quoted in McGrath, 1989, 96.

12. For a concise summary of Canada's relation with the Soviet Union during the Trudeau years see Granatstein and Bothwell, 1990, 189–203.

13. For the argument that Trudeau's 1971 visit to the Soviet Union finally signalled Canada's emergence as an independent country in Soviet eyes, see Farr, 1989, 102–18.

## Works cited

Bothwell, Robert. *The Big Chill: Canada and the Cold War*. Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1998.

Clayton, Deidra. *Eagle: The Life and Times of R. Alan Eagleson*. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1982.

Dryden, Ken and Roy MacGregor. *Home Game: Hockey and Life in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.

Eagleson, R. Alan, with Scott Young. *Power Play: The Memoirs of Hockey Czar Alan Eagleson*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991.

Farr, David. "Prime Minister Trudeau's Opening to the Soviet Union, 1971". In J.L. Black and Norman Hillmer (Eds.). *Nearly Neighbours. Canada and Soviet Union: From Cold War to Détente and Beyond*. Kingston: Ronald P. Frye, 1989, 102-118.

Fisher, Douglas. "A Hockey Series that Challenged Canadians' View of Themselves". *International Perspectives* (November/December 1972): 13-20.

Ford, Robert A.D. *Our Man in Moscow: A Diplomat's Reflections on the Soviet Union*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.

Granatstein, J.L. and Robert Bothwell. *Pirouette: Pierre Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.

Houlihan, Barrie. *Sport and International Politics*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994.

Macintosh, Donald and Tom Bedecki. "Canadian Government Involvement in Sport: Some Consequences and Issues". In

Gerald Redmond (Ed.). *Sport and Politics*. Champaign: Human Kinetics Publishers, Inc., 1986, 21-26.

Macintosh, Donald, with Tom Bedecki and C.E.S. Frank. *Sport and Politics in Canada: Federal Government Involvement since 1961*. Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987.

Macintosh, Donald and Hawes, Michael. *Sport and Canadian Diplomacy*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994.

MacSkimming, Roy. *Cold War: The Amazing Canada–Soviet Hockey Series of 1972*. Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1996.

McGrath, William. "Canada in the Soviet Mirror, 1964–1974". In J.L. Black and Norman Hillmer (Eds.). *Nearly Neighbours. Canada and Soviet Union: From Cold War to Détente and Beyond*. Kingston: Ronald P. Frye, 1989, 85-101.

Morse, Eric S. "Sport and Canadian Foreign Policy". *Behind the Headlines* 45 (December 1987): 262-279.

Peppard, Victor and Riordan, James. *Playing Politics. Soviet Sport Diplomacy to 1992*. Greenwich: Jai Press, 1993.

Reid, Patrick. *Wild Colonial Boy. A Memoir*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995.

Rowe, David. *Sport, Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999.

Ryzhkov, Dmitry. *Our Hockey*. Trans. by Nikolai Shartse and Gennady Pavlov. Moscow: Fizkultura i Sport Publishers, 1972.

Sarty, Leigh. "A Handshake Across the Pole: Canadian-Soviet Relations During the Era of Détente". In David Davies (Ed.). *Canada and the Soviet Experiment. Essays on Canadian Encounters with Russia and the Soviet Union, 1900–1991*. Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1995, 117-135.

**Alex Ramon**
**University of Reading, UK**

# Domestic violence? A Reassessment of the Fiction of Carol Shields

**Abstract**

*This essay explores representations of violence in the fiction of Carol Shields. It begins by acknowledging that Shields's work has not customarily been associated with violence, whether "domestic" or "public," and proposes that the tendency of critics to celebrate (or denigrate) Shields as "a benign, tender, mild observer of ordinary, minor lives" (Lee, 2004, 1) has obscured the extent to which her fiction does consistently "visualize violence" in both domestic and global contexts. Exploring incidents such as the central murder-suicide in* Swann *and the many sudden deaths which infiltrate novels such as* The Republic of Love *and* The Stone Diaries *and stories like "Accidents" and "Dolls, Dolls, Dolls, Dolls," the essay relates violence in Shields's fiction to its exploration of issues of accident and unknowability. Repeatedly, her work presents a contingent world in which individuals are continually subject to risk and hazard, and in which human motivation for violent actions is always ambiguous and uncertain. The essay also identifies surreal and blackly comic elements in Shields's presentation of the dangers "within" dailiness.*

*The final section of the essay explores how Shields's work engages with violence in more global terms. It proposes that* The Stone Diaries *both confirms and subverts the notion of Canada as a "safe place" by contrasting that perception with the more ambivalent recollections of the narrator. It also examines how the self-immolation witnessed by the narrator's daughter in* Unless *relates to Shields's habitual concerns about female struggle and silencing and places them within a resolutely global sphere.*

**Résumé**

*Il s'agit ici d'une enquête sur les représentations de la violence dans la fiction de Carol Shields. Nous verrons en premier lieu que la critique ne s'est guère occupée de la question de la violence, soit privée soit publique, dans ses écrits. Notre auteure est plutôt vue comme 'a benign, tender, mild observer of ordinary, minor lives', ce qui risque d'occulter les traces dans ses ouvrages d'une violence à la fois locale et globale. Nous examinons à titre d'exemple le meurtre, événement central dans* Swann*, et les décès inattendus qui surviennent au cours de* The Republic of Love *et de* The Stone Diaries*, autant que dans les nouvelles 'Accidents' et 'Dolls, dolls, dolls, dolls' . Y sont liés des concepts tels que l'accident et l'inconnu. Les personnages de Shields habitent un monde marqué au coin par la contingence, le risque et les périls, où l'aggressivité humaine manque souvent de cohérence voire de motivation. Nous relevons aussi le dosage du surréel et de l'humour noir dans sa présentation des hasards du quotidien.*

*Notre enquête se penche ensuite sur la présence de la violence sous l'aspect global. Nous verrons que l'idée qu'on se fait habituellement du Canada comme 'lieu sûr' dans* The Stone Diaries *est à la fois confirmée et subvertie à travers du récit rétrospectif du narrateur. En guise de conclusion nous examinons l'immolation dont la fille du narrateur a été le témoin involontaire, dans* Unless*, pour y voir un exemple du thème habituel chez Shields de la lutte féminine, à l'échelle globale, contre l'imposition du silence.*

This essay organises its "reassessment" of Carol Shields's fiction around an analysis of the representation of violence in her work. It identifies the most significant incidences and images of violence in Shields's novels and stories, and explores how these incidences can be related to some of the major thematic concerns of her fiction. The title "Domestic violence" is intended as a partially interrogative allusion to the general association of Shields's work with domesticity. Seeking to present her fiction as broader in its scope than the critical emphasis on the domestic has implied, a final section of the essay considers Shields's portrayals of violence in both Canadian, and more widely global, contexts.

It is important, firstly, to acknowledge that Shields's work has not customarily been associated with violence in either domestic *or*

public contexts. Rather, there remains a tendency amongst critics to either celebrate or denigrate her fiction as that of "a genial suburban miniaturist" (Morrison, 2002, 2) or "a benign, tender, mild observer of ordinary, minor lives" (Lee, 2004, 1).[1] Certainly, this perception has shifted somewhat. Margaret Atwood, for one, insists upon a recognition of what she terms the "thread of blood" in Shields's work, and other critics have offered similar reappraisals (Atwood, 2004: viii). Despite this, however, a view does persist of Shields as a "celebratory," "life-affirming," "nice" writer whose "kindly, sympathetic view of human nature" (Werlock, 2001, 12) results in the avoidance of conflict or cruelty in her work, and a problematic "absence of darkness" (Hill, 2000, 2). This perspective was evident in many of the tributes paid to Shields following her death in 2003, and was summarised succinctly by Barbara Ellen in an interview with Shields conducted the year before:

> [T]here are still those who worry about the breadth and scope of Shields's vision. That she is too domestic, too measured and calm, too nice about everything. Not dark enough … [T]he image fastens in the mind of Shields as a Miss Reid [sic] for the home-knit generation, a fragrant lady writer in the traditional mode … For [some] she is too much the literary "Pollyanna", her faith in human nature encapsulated by the decency, fidelity and essential "ordinariness" of her characters. (Ellen, 2002, 1-3)

Given her sensitivity to the ways in which she felt her fiction was being undervalued or misinterpreted, it is possible to suggest that Shields would have found much to challenge in this assessment, not least the notion of "essential" ordinariness. Interestingly, however, Shields herself disavowed an interest in exploring violence in her fiction. In a 1995 interview she told Marjorie Anderson:

> I would never write a war story … I am interested in people's perversions and dishonesties … and how they work those out, but violence has never been part of my experience and I am far too fond of my characters to want to do them violence. (Anderson, 1995, 143-4)

Overlooking the rather curious suggestion that writers who choose to explore violence are not sufficiently "fond" of their characters, closer inspection of Shields's work reveals this statement to be seriously

flawed, and demonstrates precisely how problematic an author's pronouncements about their own work can be. Contrary to both her own and others' views, her fiction does in fact feature a series of violent incidents and encounters which can not be dismissed as insignificant, and which, I would suggest, constitute a vital part of the "world-picture" constructed in her fiction. Examples are multiple. In her story "Dolls, Dolls, Dolls, Dolls" (1985), the murder of a child is graphically described (Shields, 2004, 160).[2] In "Mrs. Turner Cutting the Grass" (1985) the protagonist abandons her baby on a doorstep, where the child risks the fate of being "bitten … by a rabid neighbourhood cat" which jumps into the baby carriage (Shields, 2004, 34). In *The Republic of Love* (1992), Tom Avery recalls the violent acts of his unstable ex-wife Clair who "once struck him across the chest with a belt as he slept because a voice had directed her to do so" (Shields, 1992, 141). In *Unless* (2002), the central childhood trauma in the life of Danielle Westerman is revealed to be connected to a violent event: the day when her mother "tried to strangle her" for "stay[ing] out late one night" (Shields, 2002, 316).

In addition to these incidences of aggression inflicted against others, violent suicides also permeate Shields's texts. Once again in *The Republic of Love*, Fay McLeod reports how her sister Bibbi's boyfriend committed suicide after Bibbi left him, "hanging himself with a leather belt Bibbi herself had made for him" (Shields, 1992, 258). In *The Stone Diaries* (1993), Harold Hoad's father shoots himself in the basement of the family home, an event which anticipates Harold's own (possibly accidental) early death when he falls from the window of a hotel in France on honeymoon (Shields, 1993, 108-110, 119). Also in *The Stone Diaries*, Bessie Perfect jumps or falls from a Canadian Pacific stock car, dying "within minutes," "[h]er left arm and leg completely … severed" (122). The self-immolation of a young Muslim woman in *Unless* will be discussed in closer detail later. Elsewhere in Shields's fiction, there are sudden deaths caused by choking (Shields, 2004, 320), by seizure (Shields, 2004, 29), by bicycle accident (Shields: 1993, 66), by a fall down a flight of stairs, by heroin overdose, and by lightning (Shields, 2002, 195, 216, 308). There are lingering deaths by cancer and Parkinson's disease, and still-born babies in her stories "Others" (1985) and "Soup du Jour" (2000). In *Larry's Party* (1997), Dot Weller inadvertently poisons her mother-in-law with stewed runner

beans, "inadequately sealed, insufficiently heated" (Shields, 1997: 51). In *The Stone Diaries*, Daisy Goodwill may survive her ninety years without having been "struck on the face or body by another being" (Shields, 1993, 345) but she enters the world in what Lisa Johnson has termed "a torrent of blood and grief" (Johnson, 201), a birth scene which ends with the death of Daisy's own mother. To these incidences, we might add others in which violence is threatened, imagined or dreamt about in Shields's fiction: the bomb-scare in the museum in her story "Hinterland" (1989), the doll covered in ketchup signifying blood which is thrown at Fay's pro-abortionist sister-in-law in *The Republic of Love* (36). One of the male protagonists in "Our Men and Women" endures nightmares of "disorder, violence" (Shields, 2004, 466). In "Invitations," the unnamed female protagonist entertains fantasises of a thief entering her apartment and "carrying off her stereo equipment or … a deep slice of her dorsal flesh" (Shields, 2004, 169).

Why, then, given Shields's frequent presentation of violent acts, have such distorted perceptions of her work arisen? Gender prejudices, the tendency to read her fiction "through" the details of her biography,[3] and the fact that her work mainly - though certainly not exclusively[4] - takes familial relationships as its subject and domestic life as its context have surely all played their part in establishing a false, or at least highly partial, view of her writing. The result has been some rather superficial readings which have over-emphasised the benignity of Shields's portrayals of the quotidian and attempted to construct her as, in Stephen Henighan's phrase, "an apostle of family values" whose texts represent nothing more than "hymn[s] to the pleasures of sheltered upper-middle-class existence" (Henighan, 2002, 183). This last accusation is particularly misguided, since violence in Shields's work is presented, throughout, not as separate from but as contained within dailiness; and the notion of "shelter" is frequently figured by her as a "delusion" (Shields, 2004, 472).[5] (Nor can many of Shields's characters be adequately categorised as "upper-middle-class.") Moreover, her portrayals of family dynamics in the domestic sphere are often very far from benign. In *Happenstance* (1980), for example, a significant confrontation takes place between the protagonist Jack Bowman and his teenage son Rob in which both character and reader are given a disturbing glimpse into the feelings of aggression which fester within familial relationships:

> Jack felt the room rock. For a fraction of a second …
> he was sure he was going to kill Rob. His right hand
> jerked upward and with horror he saw that he was still
> holding on to the paring knife. So this was how it
> happened, kitchen murders, blood on the floor, bodies
> falling. (Shields, 1980, 59)

The moment passes; Jack controls himself. Nonetheless, scenes such as this one are presented by Shields as evidence of the precariousness of the daily surface, and the potential for violence which lurks beneath it, as familial routine threatens to give way to irrationality, aggression and disorder. Furthermore, Jack's momentary desire to "kill" his son provokes a reassessment of this ostensibly amiable character. Indeed, rather than offering a "kindly, sympathetic view of human nature," Shields's fiction in fact insists upon the capacity for aggression within *any* human being given a particular set of circumstances. Consistently, violent feelings are experienced by even her "nicest" Canadian protagonists. Daisy in *The Stone Diaries* "wrings [the] sheets [of her bed] like she's wringing someone's neck" (Shields, 1993, 250); Larry in *Larry's Party* spends his adolescence "wanting to punch someone … Anyone" (Shields, 1997, 114). Angered by an insensitive remark made by her ex-boyfriend, Fay in *The Republic of Love* "wonders what would happen if she raked [her] keys across his face, how much damage she could do" (Shields, 1992, 350). Thus, the most seemingly innocuous of everyday objects - keys, belts, runner beans - may be transformed into weapons in Shields's fiction. This sensitivity to the dangers within dailiness leads to increasingly surreal, absurdist and blackly comic elements in her presentation of violence, as harps (Shields, 2004, 461-464), vending machines (Shields, 1993, 330) and a "package of lamb chops" (Shields 2004, 527) are shown to pose potential threat and danger to characters.

However, it is Shields's 1987 novel *Mary Swann* - also known as *Swann* or *Swann: A Mystery* - that offers her most sustained exploration of an act of violence and its aftermath. The central event here is a murder-suicide, the killing of the Ontario poet Mary Swann by her farmer husband Angus, and Angus's subsequent self-inflicted death:

> Towering above the bleak outbuildings was the silo
> where Angus Swann had dumped the dismembered

> body of his wife - head, trunk, and severed legs -
> before shooting himself in the mouth as he sat at the
> kitchen table. (Shields, 1987, 43)

Once again, as in *Happenstance*, Shields locates the domestic space, and specifically the kitchen, as the site of aggression, but here that violence is not merely threatened but carried out. (Wendy Roy has suggested that the novel draws directly on real-life events, noting that "the life history of Mary Swann evokes [that of] Vancouver-born poet Pat Lowther, who was bludgeoned to death by her husband in 1975 and whose fourth, posthumous book of poetry is called *A Stone Diary*" (Roy, 2003, 140)). Another reference to the murder once again emphasises the domestic setting: "Rose […] sometimes dreams about this scene of horror - mazy dreams of splashing blood and thin-walled vessels hacked open and strewn on kitchen linoleum" (Shields, 1987, 164-5).[6]

Having established the preponderance of violent acts in Shields's work, and the idiosyncrasy of their presentation, it remains to explore further the function of these repeated images and incidents. I would suggest that the representation of violence in her fiction should be interpreted in the context of her exploration of two themes: accident and unknowability. In her study of Alice Munro's fiction, Ailsa Cox suggests that "[i]n Munro's work, sudden deaths provide "disarrangements", disrupting routine patterns and challenging previous assumptions. They are aspects of contingency, fluke events with unpredictable consequences for onlookers and survivors" (Cox, 2004, 60).[7] Violence in Shields's fiction serves a very similar function to that which Cox outlines here in relation to Munro's writing. The majority of the incidents of violence in her work can be viewed as accidental, not only the *Larry's Party* poisoning but many of the other deaths and injuries described above. One of her stories, entitled, aptly, "Accidents" (1985), consists of a series of contingencies which are observed and experienced by a Canadian couple vacationing in France, culminating in the death of a young Frenchman in a motorcycle crash. As attracted as Shields's fiction is to moments of connection and coincidence, it is also preoccupied by the fragility of existence, the fact that due to "[o]ne moment of carelessness […] a human life was erased" (Shields, 1993, 188). In this way, violent accidents function as part of what *The Republic of Love* figures as "*cosmic* carelessness" (138; emphasis added), a reminder that "[t]here's no way people can protect themselves

against surprise" (Shields, 2004, 468). "Everything is an accident" decides one of Shields's characters (Shields, 2004, 270), and the eruption of violence in her fiction serves, repeatedly, as a forceful demonstration of this view.

Violence in Shields's work can be linked to the theme of unknowability in a different but not entirely unrelated way. For, in the arbitrary and contingent world presented in her fiction, human motivation for violent acts is always decidedly ambiguous. This ambiguity is particularly evident in *Swann*, as the novel refuses to settle upon one easily identifiable reason for Angus's murder of Mary. Atwood's reading of the novel insists that the murder is connected to Angus's jealousy or fear of Mary's writing; for Atwood, the murder is an act of male vengeance perpetrated by a man who "can't stand the competition" (Atwood, 2003, 78) and who kills his wife "when her talent begins to show" (Atwood, 2004, vii). This is certainly a valid interpretation. The Swann murder is not the only incident of male violence against women in this text,[8] and Atwood's view is in fact articulated by one of the characters, the feminist scholar Sarah Maloney. Ultimately, however, Shields refuses to explain Angus's motives in the stark manner that Atwood implies, and complicates a view of Mary as a habitual domestic abuse victim:

> It is a mystery why Angus Swann hacked his wife Mary to death in December of 1965 […] Angus Swann was a violent man. No one ever denied that. It was known that he butchered his poultry crudely and bragged about it. […] Another time Mary Swann was seen with a bruise over one eye and an arm in a sling. Some people say he was jealous of her poetry, the little bit of local celebrity that came her way. […] But there is no proof of any of this, and other people say that, on the contrary, he was proud of her in his way, that it was he who gave her the fountain pen for a birthday present. (Shields, 1987, 164)

Presenting the speculation about the killing which circulates in local gossip, Shields leaves readers uncertain whether the murder was the culmination of a perpetual cycle of abuse or an aberration. Unlike a conventional murder-mystery (the genre which the novel parodies), absolute clues and final solutions to character motivation are

rejected. What one is left with instead is a series of what the novel figures as "various theories" (164) for these violent outbursts. The most complex and interesting mystery, Shields suggests, is the mystery of human personality and the extent to which we can ever claim knowledge of the reasons for another person's behaviour (or our own). Similar uncertainties relating to the causes of violent incidents permeate Shields's books. We do not know the "reason" for the suicide of Harold Hoad's father, or whether Harold himself (and Bessie Perfect) "jump or fall" to their respective deaths. Such ambiguities do not signify imprecision or vagueness, but are part of the existential uncertainty about human behaviour and motivation which underpins Shields's entire fictional project. Employing equivocation as a deliberate narrative strategy, her texts increasingly develop into evasive spaces in which psychoanalytical theory is shown to offer only a partial explanation for any incidence of violence against self or other, and in which the possibility of ever "knowing the whole story" is seriously problematised. Far from offering readers a benevolent or comfortable vision of existence, then, Shields's work in fact asserts the limitations of human knowability, presenting an unstable world in which characters are continually subject to risk and hazard, the domestic space frequently proves perilous, and in which an individual's motivation for violent action is always uncertain.

The preceding remarks would seem to suggest that, in spite of their occasional surrealism, Shields's representations of violence remain restricted to the domestic and the everyday. However, there is a global context for her exploration of these issues which has also been overlooked. In particular, Shields's fiction engages with the perception of Canada as "a safe place." When, in *The Stone Diaries*, Daisy returns to Canada following a childhood and adolescence spent mainly in the US, Shields interrogates, while seeming to affirm, her protagonist's romanticised view of the country of her birth:

> A cool clean place is how she thinks of [Canada], with a king and queen and Mounties wearing red jackets and people drinking tea and speaking to one another in polite tones, never mind that these images do not accord in any way with her real memories … It seemed to her that June day, as the train slid at last over the Michigan State line and entered Canada, that

> she had arrived at a healing kingdom. (Shields, 1993,
> 133)

The perception offered here is a familiar one: Canada as peaceable neighbour to the belligerent US, full of amiable citizens and presided over by brave Mounties and a beneficent monarch. Such stereotypes are not endorsed by this novel, however; in fact, they are subtly subverted. Daisy's "real memories" of Canada include "the hurly-burly of the Winnipeg schoolyard" and "the dust and horse turds of Simcoe Street" (133). She finds Ottawa in July to be as "hot as Hades" (157) rather than the "cool clean place" she had envisioned. The country is, moreover, the site of the early deaths of both her mother and her adopted aunt. Describing herself as a writer with "a foot on each side of the border," (Hollenberg, 1998, 352) a reference to her dual US/Canadian citizenship, Shields consistently uses that double position to identify and interrogate stereotypes in her fiction. Filled with border-crossings between the two nations, her work frequently questions American perceptions of its "polite northerly neighbour" as "a country where nothing seems ever to happen" (Shields, 1993, 93). Just as she challenged an interviewer's suggestion that her characters might be viewed as genial Canadian "types" (Hollenberg, 1998, 354) so her fiction casts a wry and ironic eye upon national stereotypes, labels and generalisations. It is possible, too, to discern a link between the perception of Shields's fiction — as benign, unassuming, ordinary, "nice" — and the general perception of Canada as nation. In both cases, close attention to Shields's work alerts readers to the superficiality of such perspectives.

In Shields's last novel, *Unless*, a national/global context for violence is invoked in a different and more polemical way. The narrator of this text, Reta Winters, attempts to understand why her 19-year-old daughter Norah has abandoned her life and university career to sit on a Toronto street corner with a begging bowl and a sign saying "Goodness" around her neck. Reta decides that Norah's behaviour is connected to her increasing awareness of her "powerlessness" as a woman, "dismissed and excluded from the most primary of entitlements" (Shields, 2002, 218, 99). However, late in the text it is revealed that Norah's actions may be connected to the trauma of witnessing the suicide of a Muslim woman on the same Toronto street:

> Norah was standing on the corner where Honest Ed's
> is situated when a young Muslim woman (or so it
> would appear from her dress) […] stepped forward on
> the pavement, poured gasoline over her veil and gown,
> and set herself alight […] [Norah] had walked over to
> Honest Ed's to buy a plastic dish rack, which she was
> holding in her hand when the self-immolation began
> […] Without thinking […] Norah had rushed forward
> to stifle the flames. Stop, she screamed, or something
> to that effect, and then her fingers sank into the
> woman's melting flesh […] her arms, her lungs and
> abdomen. These pieces gave way. (Shields, 2002, 315)

Shields's work has of course always been preoccupied by issues of "female exclusion" (Shields, 2002, 227), gender inequality and the ways in which culture and history have impacted, and often erased, women's lives. In particular, violent metaphoric images of female silencing have often featured in her fiction.[9] But *Unless*'s disturbing finale places these concerns in a wider context than ever before, with the Muslim woman's suicide hinting at a history of oppression which, while not directly explored in the novel, nonetheless parallels its investigation of feminism in contemporary Western culture. Other incidents of female struggle in the non-West are referred to throughout *Unless*: there is an allusion to the public flogging of a Nigerian woman for adultery, and a reference to the Mozambique woman who gave birth in a tree during a flood (Shields, 2002, 116-118). Via such references, the novel, more than any of Shields's earlier texts, broadens its concern with female oppression beyond a specifically Western context to encompass the diverse experiences of women of other cultures and backgrounds.

However, Shields's invoking of a global context in *Unless* has been viewed less positively. For Rana Dasgupta, the ending of the novel enacts nothing more than America's "horrified, paranoid relationship to the outside" and a wider trend in contemporary American fiction in which "the world outside America is … referred to [only to] supply an image of catastrophe" and "horror" (Dasgupta, 2005, 4). For Dasgupta, Norah's witnessing of and response to the self-immolation depicts

> a moment of pure, almost pornographic contact
> between a "normal," intelligent young woman engaged

> in a "normal" household errand and the irrational
> terror of the Muslim outside. We do not need to know
> the name of [the Muslim] woman, or where she is
> from, or her biography, or what led her to this startling
> act; for it is a complete image in itself of all the
> repugnant things "we" already know about Islam and
> women. Such an experience is too horrifying to be
> spoken, and Norah's months of silence and
> mindlessness are therefore thoroughly explained by it.
> The only hope that the end of the novel can provide us
> is that she might "forget" this moment of contact with
> the outside and thus recover her mind. (Dasgupta,
> 2005, 4)

Dasgupta's concerns are valid ones. Norah's "moment of contact"
with the Muslim woman can indeed be viewed as a destructive
encounter with an anonymous ethnic "Other" who remains entirely
objectified by the text. In these terms, Shields has failed to
sensitively broaden the scope of the novel's concerns and resorted
instead to stereotype and paranoia. However, this view does involve
extracting *Unless* from several significant contexts. Most
importantly, by discussing this episode in isolation, Dasgupta
overlooks the framework in which it is placed, and the debates about
"female exclusion" (especially in relation to literary culture) which
are explored throughout the novel, not just in this single scene. From
this perspective, it is possible to read the Muslim woman's
"exclusion" from the text as a reflection of a wider cultural
exclusion, an attempt to highlight the nature of silence imposed upon
ethnic voices, rather than as a simple participation in that silencing.
Furthermore, Dasgupta situates his analysis of *Unless* in the context
of a discussion of novels by American male writers, viewing each
text as representative of the US's paranoid construction "of the
Muslim outside." But the location of Shields's novel is Canada, not
the U.S, as Dasgupta's analysis implies. By bracketing Shields's text
with American novels such as Phillip Roth's *American Pastoral*
(1997), [10] Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001) and Don
DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) Dasgupta disregards the very diverse
histories of immigration and assimilation in these nations. By so
doing, he risks participating in precisely the same strategies of which
he accuses these texts: constructing a monolithic "West" (and a

monolithic "American literature") without regard for national (or gender) differences.

Nor, as Dasgupta suggests, are Norah's "months of silence and mindlessness […] thoroughly explained" by this violent encounter. Norah's behaviour, it is suggested, had been changing *before* her witnessing of the self-immolation, and her mysterious decision to "drop-out" in fact precedes this event. We are told that she had been "thinking about goodness and evil, about harm to the earth" for months prior to this encounter (201-202). As usual in Shields's work, the sheer idiosyncrasy of human behaviour thwarts the seductions of "understanding." Like the Swann murder, *multiple* theories for Norah's actions are postulated by characters in this novel, and these positions may all be "partly right and partly wrong" (310). "We'll never know why" Reta proclaims near the end (310). By stating that Norah's witnessing of the self-immolation provides a "thorough explanation" for her behaviour, then, Dasgupta fails to acknowledge the tentativeness of the novel's conclusions or to recognise Shields's scepticism about the tenability of "thorough explanations." At the end of the novel Reta is not left with a sense of closure; rather, she is "still sorting out the details" (310) of her daughter's actions and their relationship to the various kinds of "female exclusion" which persist both at home and abroad.

Therefore, attention to the representation of violence in Shields's work challenges a reductive view of her fiction as being characterised by excessive niceness or benignity, and ignoring global concerns and contexts. In her work, darkness, fear and brutality coexist with the comedic and the celebratory, and none of these elements should be overlooked in any serious, comprehensive analysis. Terrible things befall, and are perpetrated by, her characters, and these incidents are described without sentimentality, as facts of human existence, symptoms of a world in which "[t]here are casualties everywhere" (Shields, 1980, 112). Presenting violence or the threat of violence as a constituent part of the texture of everyday life, her fiction leaves us with a sense of "the fragility of human arrangements" (Shields, 1992, 331), subscribing, at least partially, to the view expressed in *Larry's Party* that "darkness surrounds and threatens every glimmer of common happiness" (167). Sentences such as these reveal Shields to have been as sensitive as any contemporary writer, male or female, to the terror and violence

that human beings are subject to in a "random and accidental" world (Shields, 2004, 537).

**Endnotes**

1. It should be noted that Morrison and Lee, both sensitive and perceptive critics of Shields's work, seek to challenge, rather than reaffirm, these views.

2. "The killer entered [the girl's] bedroom while she was sleeping. He stabbed her through the heart; he cut off her head and her arms and her legs. Some of these pieces were never found" (Shields, 2004, 160). The images of bodily mutilation here anticipate those of *Swann*.

3. Stephen Henighan, in particular, makes much reference to what he terms "Shields's puritanical upper-middle-class Wasp sensibility," an "attitude" which, he suggests, is displayed throughout her "prim and proper" fiction (182-3). Henighan's view of Shields's work is particularly hostile, and, I think, singularly misguided.

4. I would suggest that the academic context - the engagement with feminist theory and, especially theories of life-writing - is as important in Shields's work as the domestic context.

5.In *The Republic of Love*, for example, Fay, travelling to work on a bus, overhears conversations about daily disasters, "connubial disarray and impending crisis," stories involving "broken windows, broken dishes, pictures smashed" (50). In *Swann*, Sarah Maloney questions the expression "safe as houses" (65).

6. Like other Shields texts, *Swann* also extends its exploration of violence into a study of the aggression and hostility inherent in totalising approaches to biography and literary criticism, drawing explicit parallels between Swann's murder and the ways in which the novel's scholars approach her life and work: "It was just a matter of time before the theoreticians got to Mary Swann and tore her limb from limb in a grotesque parody of her bodily death" (Shields, 1987, 81).

7. Shields frequently discussed Munro's influence on her fiction, describing her as "more than a model" for her own work. See, for example, Hollenberg, 346.

8. There is the strong suggestion that Rose's neighbour Jean Elton, who seeks refuge with Rose following an argument with her husband, may be a domestic abuse victim (Shields, 1987, 135-136), and Frederic Cruzzi hits his wife Hildë in an isolated moment of frustration and anger (Shields, 1987, 220).

9 . In "Hazel," the protagonist is described as "a woman who swallowed her tongue, got it jammed down her throat and couldn't make a sound" (Shields, 2004, 262). *The Stone Diaries* figures Daisy's voicelessness in similarly brutal terms: "[s]omething, someone, cut off her head, yanked out her tongue" (252).

10. Shields does set up an explicit intertextual dialogue with Roth's novel, since Norah's actions (and their possible cause) recall those of Mercy in *American Pastoral*.

## Works cited

Anderson, Marjorie. "Interview with Carol Shields". *Prairie Fire* 16.1 (Spring 1995): 139-50.

Atwood, Margaret. "Dedication: The Great God Pen". In *Negotiating with the Dead.* London: Virago Press, 2003, 51-80.

----------. "Introduction". In Carol Shields. *Collected Stories*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004, v-ix.

Cox, Ailsa. *Alice Munro*. Devon: Northcote House, 2004.

Dasgupta, Rana. "Readings in Contemporary American Fiction". <http://www.ranadasgupta.com/texts.asp?text_id=35&page=4 > 31 August. 2005.

Ellen, Barbara. "Human Shields". *The Observer* Magazine 28 April 2002. <www.observer.co.uk/magazine/story/0,11913,706289,00.html> 16/09/2002.

Henighan, Stephen. *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing*. Erin: Porcupine's Quill, 2002.

Hill, Tobias. "Review of *Dressing Up for the Carnival*". *The Observer* Sunday 13 February 2000. <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/general fiction/0,6121,136046,00.html> 20 May. 2003.

Hollenberg, Donna Krolik. "An Interview with Carol Shields". *Contemporary Literature* 39.3 (1998): 339-55.

Johnson, Lisa. "'She Enlarges on the Available Materials': A Postmodernism of Resistance in *The Stone Diaries*". In Edward Eden and Dee Goertz (eds.). *Carol Shields, Narrative Hunger, and the Possibilities of Fiction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003, 201-229.

Lee, Hermione. "Reading Beyond the Fridge Magnets". *The Guardian* "Review" 3 July 2004 <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,1252142,00.html> 12 July. 2004.

Morrison, Blake. "Third Helpings". *The Guardian* "Review" 14 December 2002, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,859506,00.html> 25 March. 2003.

Roy, Wendy. "Autobiography As Critical Practice in *The Stone Diaries*". In Edward Eden and Dee Goertz (eds.). *Carol Shields, Narrative Hunger, and the Possibilities of Fiction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003, 113-146.

Shields, Carol. *Happenstance*. (1980). London: Fourth Estate, 1991.

----------. *Mary Swann*. (1987). London: Fourth Estate, 2000.

----------. *The Republic of Love*. London: Fourth Estate, 1992.

----------. *The Stone Diaries*. London: Fourth Estate, 1993.

----------. *Larry's Party*. London: Fourth Estate, 1997.

----------. *Unless*. London: Fourth Estate, 2002.

----------. *Collected Stories*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004.

Werlock, Abby. *The Stone Diaries: A Reader's Guide*. London: Continuum, 2001.

**Anna Szczepaniak**
**University of Silesia, Poland**

# The Place of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the Perception of Canada as a 'Safe Place'

### Abstract

*Prevailing opinion of Canada all over the world is that it is one of the safest places in the world. The country is especially famous for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, whose Red Serge and ability to 'always get their men' have become legendary.*

*In this paper the place of the RCMP in the perception of Canada will be explored in 3 main areas of interest:*

- *the Mounties in history – especially their role in 'civilizing' the frontier in the nineteenth century and in the times of the "Red Scare" after the WW I and the WW II – partly focusing upon discussing the incidents of violence on the part of the Mounties.*

- *the RCMP in the news - with special emphasis put upon the peacekeeping missions they took part in (e.g. Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Bosnia/Herzegovina) in order to maintain peace all over the world, and the public reaction to the incidents of May 3, 2005 in Rochfort Bridge, Alberta, when four constables were killed when investigating the theft of auto parts; one of the best examples of the respect and attachment to the police forces in Canada.*

- *the RCMP in popular culture – which concentrates on the Musical Ride performed by the Mounties to entertain the public and the way the Mounties were portrayed in numerous movies (including Hollywood productions) and TV series – which all led to creating the popular image of the Mounties.*

*The main aim of the paper is to examine to what extent the image of the RCMP in popular culture has influenced the belief that Canada is a safe place created in large measure by the Mounties. It is possible that the world has this idea mainly due to the representation*

*of the RCMP in popular culture, not because of the place they have in history or their remarkable achievements.*

## Résumé

*On entend souvent que le Canada est l'un des pays les plus sécuritaires au monde. Le pays est également célèbre pour sa Police Montée, dont les uniformes rouges et la capacité de « toujours attraper les bandits » sont désormais légendaires.*

*L'objectif du présent article est d'explorer la place de la Police Montée dans la perception du Canada, selon 3 axes principaux:*

*1 la Police Montée dans l'histoire: particulièrement son rôle dans la conquête de la « frontière » au XIXe siècle et au temps de la « chasse aux Rouges » après les deux guerres mondiales. Il s'agira de donner quelques exemples de violences commises par la Police Montée.*

*2 la Police Montée et les médias, avec une attention particulière portée aux missions de paix dans lesquelles elle était impliquée (par ex. en Yougoslavie, au Kosovo, en Bosnie-Herzégovine), ainsi qu'à la réaction suscitée par les incidents du 3 mai 2005 à Rochfort Bridge (Alberta): quatre policiers furent en effet tués lors d'une enquête sur un vol de pièces détachées automobiles. Cet épisode montre tout l'attachement et le respect pour les forces de police au Canada.*

*3 la Police Montée et la culture populaire: cette partie est consacrée aux parades musicales destinées au grand public, ainsi qu'à la représentation de la Police Montée au cinéma (à Hollywood par exemple) et à la télévision. Ces représentations ont toutes contribué à forger l'image populaire des « Mounties ».*

*L'objectif principal de l'article est d'examiner dans quelle mesure les représentations populaires de la Police Montée ont contribué à forger l'image du Canada comme lieu sécuritaire. Il est en effet possible que cette image soit plus largement due à des représentations populaires qu'à l'attention portée à l'histoire ou aux mérites des « Mounties ».*

Generally associated with hockey, marple syrup, moose and caribou, Canada is considered to be one of the safest places in the world. When in 1965, Northrop Frye created an emblem of Canadian cultural aspiration – "The Peaceable Kingdom" – the emblem of "the reconciliation of man with man and of man with nature" (Howard, p.9), he did not know that in forty years time such would be the global perception of Canada. The country is especially famous for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, whose red serge and ability to "always get their man" have become legendary. Their scarlet tunics have become the country's symbol, a symbol of law and order. Today the core values of the RCMP are integrity, honesty, professionalism, compassion, respect, and accountability.

The Mounted Policeman is the awe-inspiring image still treasured in Canada, the physical symbol of political and moral authority. In Canadian history, the Mountie – a unique kind of hero is considered "a typical Canadian hero in that he is nameless, faceless, a member of a group rather than an individual" (Francis, p. 34). Unlike in the United States, in the Canadian North-West the heroic individual was a rare phenomenon. Among the Mounties there were men like Sam Steele or James Walsh, but, all in all, what gave them their authority was the symbolic impact of the idea of the Force. And from that stems the strength of the legend of the Mounted Police and its widespread influential power.

Nowadays, when on normal duties, the RCMP, the largest police force of Canada, uses standard police methods, equipment and uniforms. What is more, horses are no longer used operationally by any Mounted Police unit. Yet, both Canadians and people from other countries visiting Canada are sure that whenever they encounter an officer of the RCMP he will be sitting on a horse, wearing his red serge. Such is the power of the myth of the Mountie (Macleod, p.44).

This paper argues that although the RCMP played a significant part in creating the "Peaceable Kingdom" in Canada, both in the history of the country and at present, it is in fact the myth of the Mounted Police – the product of popular culture – that is responsible for such a worldwide perception of the country. The reader should bear in mind, however, that this perception may vary from country to country due to the nature of the relationship the respective country has with Canada.

**The Mounties in history**

All the accomplishments of the Mounted Police in the course of history soon become mythologised and romanticised. By means of hundreds of personal accounts, biased stories and fictional portrayals the popular myth of the Mounties developed and became so powerful that it remained almost unchanged until today. It was even strengthened recently as a result of various current events (peacekeeping missions the Mounties took part in or the Rochfort Bridge Massacre in March, 2005).

The North West Mounted Police, which preceded the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, was created by the Act of Parliament in 1873. It had the structure of the Irish Constabulary, but the tactics and equipment were copied from the U.S. Cavalry. Much of the legend of the Mounted Police is, to some extent, historically inaccurate, the creation of the NWMP to begin with, which is one of the most romanticised events in Canadian popular history. The fact is that Canada acquired this unique police force almost by accident, as the Mounted Police was intended to meet the needs of the North West Territories for a decade or two and then disappear. What is more, the force that soon became such an important and crucial part of Canada's history and symbolism is closely linked to the United States. In the last quarter of the 19th century, the plains south of the 49th parallel (The Medicine Line (Stegner, 81), as it was known) were still considered to be part of the legendary "wild west". The Canadian plains north of the Medicine Line belonged to the First Nations (e.g. the Cree). The Whiskey Traders from the south crossed the Medicine Line to make huge profits selling alcohol to the First Nations at grossly inflated prices. It was also the presence of American fur traders and their not-so-peaceful encounters with the First Nations that forced the Canadian government to consider the creation of a national police force to protect Canadian sovereignty. Sir John A. MacDonald, Canada's first Prime Minister, who created the NWMP, knew that to ensure that the North West remained Canadian in the face of various pressures and threats from the south three things would be needed: settlers, a railroad, and a police force to enforce Canadian law (Morrison, 4-5).

The North West Mounted Police was successful from the first years of its existence; it not only helped police the Northwest Territories, but also managed to establish friendships with the First Nations, and this accomplishment constitutes part of their legend. On the other

hand, their legend stems from their ability to keep law and order in the West, while at the same time the American West was lawless and violent. Peaceful conquering of the North-West also meant bringing these lands under the rule of the British Empire. The Imperial connections were symbolised by the scarlet tunics worn by the Mounties, as they were to resemble the uniforms of Her Majesty's soldiers. The First Nations, who were undoubtedly acquainted with the colour of blood, were greatly impressed by the colour of the uniforms, and a legend had even grown that the red coat was dyed from the blood of "the great White Queen's enemies" (Atkin, 1973, 115-39).

The histories of the RCMP present the North-West before the Mounties as a lawless and frozen land where both "Indians" and whites were 'uncivilized'.

> But here was the conscious, deft and masterful creation of the human environment, the transforming of a wilderness, often harsh, often sparse, into a cultivated landscape, a human abode, waterways to carry commerce, roads to be followed along hillside and over rivers without jar or stay. To create a Human Habitat, to make the land habitable, and responsive to human needs, that might be articulate and sensitive, was to work a gigantic masterpiece, to draft a very Shield of Achilles. (Morton, 1968, 330)

And it was to this place that the Mounties were sent to perform the task equating to the struggles worthy of the mythic hero, Achilles. The North West Mounted Police was the most important element in bringing about this "transformation". And by succeeding, they earned their place in history and legend of the Canadian west. They did not only 'conquer the wilderness', they also protected uncivilized whites and "Indians" from each other in the course of a bloodless revolution.[1]

The popular and historical literature of the time, as well as the history textbooks for many decades to come, presented 'typical' scenes of peaceful life of the Mounties in the North West Territories. Those scenes included descriptions of friendly encounters with the First Nations people, the life of the First Nations under the guidance and protection of the members of the NWMP, and confrontations of an unarmed officer with a band of armed and angry criminals. The

*Fort Benton Record* was one of the first newspapers to describe the legendary abilities of the Mounties only three years after the force was created, reporting:

> [...] another attempt to smuggle whiskey has been frustrated by the arrest of three men, who were tried, found guilty and sentenced to pay a fine of five hundred dollars each or to be imprisoned for the minor period of six months. They preferred the former. Horses were sacrificed for the arrest, but the M.P.s are worse than bloodhounds when they scent the track of a smuggler, and *they fetch their men any time*.[2]

The early history of the RCMP is also one of the causes of the cultural differences between Canada and the United States. The complete lack of any analogous organization in the Western United States during the frontier period, in conjunction with the story of the Mounted Police, had a powerful influence on the way Canadians felt themselves to be distinct from, and morally superior to, the United States.

The mythologisation of the history of the RCMP stems from the fact that almost all literature written on the Mounted Police alters or ignores the historical facts because the authors were impressed by the Mounted Police's achievements and influenced by their legend. Authors, by the very act of writing those accounts, perpetuated the myth of the Mounties. Among such works, there are some official histories of the Force written by former Mounties, for example the one written by S.T. Wood, the Comissioner of the RCMP. There are, however, books such as *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police* (1939) by L. Charles Douthwaite or *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police: A Century of History* (1973) by Nora and William Kelly, which tend to omit those incidents from the history which might be seen as embarrassing to the force and create a negative image.

The mythologised history of the RCMP, however, also has its darker elements; the parts which consist of police violence. Despite the fact that acts of police violence always receive public attention (because the members of the force, who swear to protect the society, abuse some of its members), the ones committed by the Mounties did not enter the consciousness of the wider public. The problems with defining the controversial and "hidden" nature of police violence[3] meant some of these acts never come to the attention of the public.

Yet, this is not the case with the incidents of 1919 and 1935, when the Mounties committed the worst acts of violence in the history of the Canadian Mounted Police.

The years after World War 1 were times of a rise of militancy of the working class in Canada. The first wave of labour unrest in 1919 was seen as the outbreak of Bolshevism. The most serious strike of the time took place in Winnipeg and was soon to be known as Winnipeg General Strike. Francis notes:

> For the strikers it was about their right for collective bargaining. For many police and government officials and members of the employing classes, it was the beginning of Canada's Bolshevik revolution. (Francis, 1997, 44)

As the city police themselves joined the strikers, the army and the Royal North Western Mounted Police were sent to break up the strike. After a major riot, in which officers fired into the crowd of strikers, killing several people and causing the injuries of thirty others, order was restored. Because the Mounted Police needed a sense of mission when the frontier period was over, the Bolshevik threat replaced the threats of the past. In order to exist and survive, the Mounties needed an enemy to fight with. The need to survive does not explain, however, the illegal practices and acts of violence on the part of the Mounties.

A scenario similar to that of 1919 occurred in 1935 during the On-to-Ottawa Trek, when thousands of men from relief camps arrived in Regina. The worst instance of RCMP violence occurred when a full scale riot developed between the trekkers and the Mounted Police. Mounties knocked people to the ground with their clubs, used tear gas and finally fired on the crowd. The incident resulted in one person dead and 17 wounded. Among the workers and immigrants, who were the main victims of the repression, the image of the upright Mountie suffered after the incidents.

The RCMP's search for the "enemy within" continued in the times of the Cold War, the search, which lead the Mounties into law-breaking practices, especially in the 1970s, when a series of enquiries revealed that they were tampering with the mail, spying on Aboriginal and Black Canadians, and burglarizing offices of

legitimate political parties (e.g. Parti Quebecois). Despite all these activities, the image of the RCMP remained intact.

**The RCMP in the media**

Historically speaking, the RCMP has always been concerned with its public image. As early as 1874, during the Great March, the Canadian public were informed almost instantly about the privations the officers underwent or their adventures on the way by Henri Julien, a correspondent for *The Canadian Illustrated News*, who was invited by the Commissioner to accompany the Mounties on the march. His sketches were published between July, 1874 and March, 1877, and they informed the public about the Mounted Police.[4] From its very beginning, then, the Mounted Police was a focal point for media attention and from this moment on it was continually thrust into the minds of Canadian readers, as well as readers further afield. Nowadays, the force is constantly present in the Canadian media, in the international, national and local news.

The fact not so obvious to many people is that the RCMP also has a military unit, which participates in many peacekeeping missions. The Mounted Police's experience in military combat began in 1899–1902, when over 250 Mounties were part of the British war effort in South Africa. During World War I, the RCMP cavalry squadrons were sent to Europe and Siberia, and during World War II the RCMP provided naval and air force units.

In the 1990s, on behalf of the Canadian Government, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (alongside the Canadian Armed Forces) took part in peacekeeping missions. During more than 10 years of peacekeeping, the RCMP had successfully completed more than 20 peacekeeping and police support operations world–wide (under the umbrella of the United Nations or under other mandates). Over 1400 police officers, who were sent to countries such as Namibia, Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Bosnia/Herzegovina, and East Timor, not only acted as civilian police, but also restored local police forces, investigated human rights violations, assisted in war crime investigations, and provided investigative resources for international tribunals.[5] In that respect, they were perceived as the ones who brought law and order to countries which needed it, using the skills and abilities they are famous for outside Canada.

Nowadays Canada does not play as large a role in world peacekeeping as it once did. Therefore, the RCMP's officers'

participation in peacekeeping missions and other international peace support operations is not as significant a part in the work of the force, though it is still regarded as one of the RCMP's priorities.[6]

At a national level, one of the most shocking news stories concerning the Mounted Police during the last year was the event known now as the Rochfort Bridge Massacre. On the morning of March 3, 2005, the RCMP suffered a loss as it had never suffered before in the course of its history. Near the village of Rochfort Bridge, Alberta, four constables investigating the theft of auto parts were ambushed and killed by James Roszko, 46, who, already wounded by the police fire, turned his rifle on himself. The crime shocked the public, especially when it later transpired that one of the four Mounties had been on the job for only 2 weeks.[7]

One week later, a sea of red serge swept over Edmonton, where the National Memorial service was held. Hundreds of Edmontonians opened their homes to over 10 thousand police officers, most of them Mounties, who travelled from all parts of Canada and from other countries to attend the service. There were so many people offering help to the arriving officers, that the RCMP issued an official request that people stop phoning to offer their homes. On the afternoon of March 10, 2005, the thousands marched in full dress uniform through the crowd-lined streets of Edmonton to assemble before Canada's Governor General, Prime Minister, and the families of the shot officers for a celebration of their lives and of the community they had sworn to serve and protect.[8]

The sacrifice of the four constables at Rochfort Bridge is said to be a monument and a tribute to the Canadian society, which the RCMP helped to build over the century and a quarter of their existence and during that week the Canadians showed how proud they are to have such a unique police force. The exceptional character of the Force was expressed by a Newfoundland scholar and journalist, Rex Murphy, who wrote a day after the shooting:

> Yesterday's tragedy is a bitter tribute to the RCMP, but it is a tribute nonetheless to both their competence and their professionalism, that this is the worst thing that has befallen the force in over 120 years. A century and 20 years. (Murphy, 2005)

At the local level, the Mounties are usually presented as friends and neighbours – a very important part of the local community. The pictures, which accompany the articles, usually depict a Mountie in his traditional red serge, with very small children or old people. This is to show that the RCMPs are as close to the Canadian citizens as they can be.

### The Mounties in popular culture

What the world knows about the Mounties is not only what people read about in textbooks or newspapers. To some extent, it is popular culture (especially movies, television or live performances) that shapes the common perception of both Canada and the Mounties.

As has been mentioned before, the sight of a Mountie in his scarlet tunic – the red serge – on his horse is not as common now as it used to be. The red serge is reserved for ceremonial occasions, one of which is the Musical Ride. This world renowned spectacle is performed by police officers on well-trained horses, in the early years of the RCMP used for transportation, now – a very important part of this living symbol of Canada. The Musical Ride consists of a series of displays derived from drill manoeuvres of the British Cavalry, performed by a team of 32 horses and riders and set to music. The riders are volunteers who have been on active police duty for at least 2 years and they remain within the Musical Ride for 3 years. The Musical Ride has been entertaining audiences across Canada and around the world since 1887. Nowadays, with up to 50 performances every year, it has become one of the rare occasions when people can see the Mounties as they always imagine them – in a red tunic, riding a horse.

Yet, nothing was more powerful a means of creating the myth of the RCMP than the cinema and television. In particular, Hollywood was well known for falsely depicting Canada (in general) and the Mountie (in particular). The romantic conception of the Mountie-as-hero is an American invention. The Americans created the movie image of Mounted policemen which represented their own cultural assumptions, disregarding any historical facts or even their own knowledge of the North-West.

Even if we concentrate only on silent movies, westerns in particular (as the Mountie was present mainly in this type of movie), we may find at least 45 of them, produced from 1915 to 1929, in which a Mountie was the main character or one of the main characters. One

of the earliest silent westerns about the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, was *Andy of the Royal Mounted* (1915), which was soon followed by a number of 'Mountie' westerns based on more or less the same pattern. Every single one of these movies presented all the trouble a typical Mountie could face. For instance, a 1920 action drama - *The Cyclone* – featured Tom Mix as an officer of the RCMP trying to capture the head of a smuggling gang wanted for murder, who kidnapped the Mountie's wife-to-be. The movie presented a lot of fighting and horse riding all the way towards the happy end.[9] These movies also shaped the stereotypical Mountie's physical appearance, mainly due to the fact that Mounties were played by actors such as George Larkin, Tom Mix, Tom Tyler or Howard Keel. They created the Americanized-Canadian archetype: the movie Mountie has all the standard Boy Scout qualities; he is brave, noble, honourable, courteous, kind, and trustworthy.

The popular misconception that the motto of the force is "Get Your Man" has its root in the Hollywood popularization of the phrase taken from the 1877 *Fort Benton Record* article.[10] In the movies, which usually explored the theme of love versus duty, the Mountie who did not "get his man" was dishonoured. The phrase "They always get their men" was used so often that in the eyes of the public it became to be considered the motto of the RCMP, rather than the actual motto – "Defending the Law" – adopted from the French, whose exact origin is, however, not known.

The image of the Mountie was used by the British as well, often in an extremely humourous way. The BBC television series *Monty Python's Flying Circus* featured a group of Mounties singing the chorus of 'The Lumberjack Song' in their famous lumberjack sketch. Though they do not play an important part in the sketch, they give it a typically Canadian atmosphere, as Canada, in the minds of the world, is inseparable from the Mountie. Another interesting example of exploitation of the myth of the Mountie is the 1994-1998 TV series *Due South*, which presented a Mountie (Paul Gross as Const. Benton Fraser) paired with a streetwise American detective solving criminal mysteries on the streets of Chicago. The entertainment of the series derived from the perceived differences in attitude towards life or work between the American and Canadian police officers. Both American and Canadian police officers served as the epitome of stereotypical national traits. The TV series, being very popular all

over the world, in some countries is one of the main sources of the knowledge on Canada and the Mounties.

## Conclusion

It is said that Canada is the only country in the world where the police are heroes, as well as an important part of the country's tourist trade. Almost every tourist shop in Canada has postcards of the Mounties and other Mountie paraphernalia. They seem to be present everywhere: in history, in the media, in movie and TV productions. The history, especially the textbook history, created an image of the Mountie – a skillful negotiator, successful in dealing with problems with the First Nations, workers or Bolsheviks. The media present a Mounted Police officer as brave, loyal and dedicated to the cause of defending peace inside or outside Canada. A Mountie in the media is also a member of the community, a friend and a neighbour. The Hollywood image of the Moutie is a square-jawed, stoic and polite man. Although the RCMP started to recruit women in 1974, and, in recent years, members of the minorities, this stereotype has not changed. The popular stereotype of the Mountie – a tall, handsome, well-behaved, white man – remains very powerful. Can we imagine a female Mountie? Or a black Mountie?

From 1873 to 2005, from the creation of the North West Mounted Police to the Rochfort Bridge Massacre – during all this time the attitude towards the Mounties; love, trust and respect shown on various occasions, make clear that in the successful Canadian experiment in "peace, order and good government"[11] the Mounties played a significant part. Canada does not tend to have heroes, but thanks to Hollywood, and to a long and solid reputation across the country, the Mountie has become a hero for Canada on an international scale. The way the image of the Mountie appeals to people from both Canada and all over the world may be summarised by the words of Corporal Fudge,[12] the brief hero of the RCMP: "I hardly ever wear a red serge. Once I was in Ottawa and saw a Mountie on a horse and in red serge, I grabbed a couple of snapshots myself." (Flaherty and Manning, p. 188). If the citizens of Canada, or even the Mounties, cannot resist the power of the image, how can the outside world?

**Endnotes**

1. More on the role of the Mounties in conquering the wilderness in A.L Haydon, *Riders of the Plains: A Record of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, 1873-1910.* Routledge, Vermont: C.E. Tuttle Co, 1910.

2. This part of the article from *The Fort Benton Record* may be found:in *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police*. Online. April 26, 2005. BBC h2g2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/A3851101> August 15. 2005.

3. More on police violence, its presentation in the news, with the emphasis on the comparison between New York and Toronto can be found in: Jeffrey Ian Ross, *Making News of Police Violence. A Comparative Study of Toronto and New York.* Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000.

4. 'Henri, Julien'. 2000. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*. <http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=40938> August 15. 2005.

5. *RCMP Fact Sheets 2000 – 2001*. 2004. Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Online. <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pdfs/facts_2001_e.htm> August 15. 2005.

6. The Commanding Officers and Directors Planning Conference, held in Regina in September 1999, selected peacekeeping as one of the RCMP's four priorities.

7. *RCMP officers killed in Rochfort Bridge*. March 10, 2005. CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/rcmp/victims.html> August 16. 2005.

8. *Memorial honours Mounties 'who have given everything.'* March 11, 2005. CBS News Online. <http://www.cbc.ca/story/canada/national/2005/03/10/rcmp-memorial050310.html> August 16. 2005.

9. More on silent westerns in: Larry Langman, *A Guide to Silent Westerns*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992.

10. *The Fort Benton Record* article may be found in *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police*. April 26, 2005. BBC h2g2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/A3851101> August 15. 2005.

11. The phrase "Peace, order and good government" is a key concept of the Constitution of Canada.

12. Corporal Daniel Fudge became famous when he arrested Charles McVey, who had been selling billions of dollars' worth of Western technology to the Soviet bloc. He was invited to the White House, where he appeared in his red serge. Is is worth noting, however, that Fudge failed to deliver the criminal to a judge within the prescribed time limits, and the spy was released. Another Mountie later arrested McVey.

**Works cited**

Atkin, Ronald. *Maintain the Right: The Early History of the North-West Mounted*. London: Macmillan, 1973.

Cruise, David, and Alison Griffiths. *The Great Adventure: How the Mounties Conquered the West*. Toronto: Viking, 1996.

Dawson, Michael. *The Mountie from Dime Novel to Disney*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1998.

Flaherty, David H., and Franke E. Manning, eds. *The Beaver Bites Back? American Popular Culture in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993.

Francis, Daniel. *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997.

Hamilton-Barry, Joann. *Boldly Canadian: The Story of the RCMP*. Toronto: Kids Can Press, 1999.

Haydon, A.L. *Riders of the Plains: A Record of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, 1873-1910*. Routledge, Vermont: C.E. Tuttle Co, 1910.

*Henri, Julien*. 2000. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*. <http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=40938> August 15. 2005.

Horrall, Stanley. *The Pictorial History of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1873 – 1973*. Toronto: McGraw – Hill Ryerson, 1973.

Howard, Viktor, ed. *Creating the Peaceable Kingdom and Other Essays on Canada*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998.

Kelly, William and Nora. *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police. A Centennial History*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1973.

Macleod, R.C. "Canada's Mounties: Myth and Reality." *History Today* 50.2 (February 2000): 39-44.

*Memorial Honours: Mounties 'who have given everything.'* March 11, 2005. CBS News Online. http://www.cbc.ca/story/canada/national/2005/03/10/rcmp-memorial050310.html August 16. 2005.

Morton, W.L. "Victorian Canada". In: W.L. Morton (ed.). *The Shield of Achilles: Aspects of Canada in the Victorian Age*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968.

Morrison, William R. *Showing the Flag. The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894 – 1925*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985.

Murphy, Rex. *A hard and bitter day*. March 4, 2005. CBC Kanada. <http://www.cbc.ca/national/rex/rex_050304.html> August 15. 2005.

*RCMP Fact Sheets 2000 – 2001*. 2004. Royal Canadian Mounted Police. <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pdfs/facts_2001_e.htm> August 15. 2006.

*RCMP officers killed in Rochfort Bridge*. March 10, 2005. CBC News. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/rcmp/victims.html> August 16. 2005.

Stegner, Wallace. *Wolf Willow: A History, a Memory, and a Story of the Last Plains Frontier*. New York: Penguin, 1990.

*The Fort Benton Record* (fragments) in: *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police*. April 26, 2005. BBC h2g2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/A3851101> August 15. 2005.

*The Royal Canadian Mounted Police*. April 26, 2005. BBC h2g2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/A3851101> August 15. 2005.

Walden, Keith. *Visions of Order. The Canadian Mounties in Symbol and Myth*. Toronto: Butterworth, 1982.

**Elena Clemente Bustamante**
**Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Spain**

# Place and Resistance in Canadian Speculative Fiction: Castaways in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake and Nalo Hopkinson's Midnight Robber

## Abstract

*The article discusses the castaway motif in two Canadian speculative fiction novels*, Oryx and *Crake by Margaret Atwood and* Midnight Robber *by Nalo Hopkinson. It pays attention to how conventional images of the castaway, such as Robinson Crusoe and Prospero, are portrayed as part of the colonial literary subconscious, and how Atwood's and Hopkinson's novels dismantle such myths by presenting new castaway figures as fallible antiheroes, unable to control their landscapes. The article further discusses how* Robinson Crusoe *and* The Tempest *portray natives as submissive and waiting for instruction, which is also subverted in Atwood and Hopkinson in different ways. Finally, the similarities between castaways stories and utopian literature will be analysed, with an emphasis on the role of the spirit of exploration in speculative fiction and the challenge posed by both* Oryx and Crake *and* Midnight Robber.

## Résumé

*L'article traite le motif du naufragé dans deux romans canadiens appartenant au genre de la 'speculative fiction'*, Oryx and Crake *de Margaret Atwood et* Midnight *Robber de Nalo Hopkinson. Il s'appuie sur les représentations conventionnelles de naufragés, tels que Robinson Crusoë et Prospéro et met le doigt sur la manière par laquelle celles-ci appartiennent au subconscient de la littérature coloniale et comment les romans d'Atwood et de Hopkinson démantèlent de tels mythes en introduisant un nouveau type de naufragé avec des anti-héros faillibles qui se voient dans l'incapacité de maîtriser leurs paysages. De plus, l'article examine la façon par laquelle* Robinson Crusoë *et* La Tempête *dessinent des portraits d'indigènes comme étant des êtres soumis, prêts à recevoir une éducation, ce qu'Atwood et Hopkinson subvertissent chacun à sa*

*manière. Pour conclure, les similarités entre histoires de naufragés et utopies littéraires seront analysées en mettant l'accent sur le rôle qu'a joué l'esprit explorateur dans la fiction spéculatrice ainsi que le défi posé* par Oryx and Crake *et* Midnight Robber.

To a great extent, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* embodies the Protestant belief in personal responsibility and hard work as the means for success that have underlined much of the ideological narratives of imperialism. Crusoe begins as the Prodigal Son figure, smitten by the desire for adventure and unwilling to listen to his father's advice. His disastrous sea voyages, however, finally lead him to an island where he will become the epitome of the economic beliefs of his time. He builds a small empire, converts the heathens (represented by Friday), takes care of his crops, cattle and shelter in rational ways, and simultaneously with that regains a strong belief in Providence. But Crusoe is not the only successful castaway of literature in English. Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* reminiscent of early English colonial enterprises, puts a castaway, Prospero, at the centre of a fantastic kingdom where the forces of nature and the indigenous inhabitants of the island can be effectively controlled. The play's influence can be traced not only to Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and James (Ashcroft, 2001, 188), but also to the creation of an "other", Caliban, who becomes, in Leslie Fiedler's words, "the last stranger, in fact, whom this globe can know, until we meet on his own territory, or in ours, the first extraterrestrial" (Ashcroft, 2001, 187). The main characters of *Oryx and Crake* (2003) by Margaret Atwood and *Midnight Robber* (2000) by Nalo Hopkinson similarly have life stories of disastrous voyages and irresponsible lives. However, neither novel puts them in positions of power over their landscapes. Quite on the contrary, both Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake* and Antonio in *Midnight Robber* are overwhelmed by their landscapes, and even Hopkinson's more sympathetic Tan-Tan will need to learn from the underestimated "natives".

The Canadian hardback edition of *Oryx and Crake* by McClelland & Stewart (2003) has on its cover the shadow of a man gazing at a dry, deserted horizon. This image reflects both the degradation of the environment the story is set in and the loneliness of its protagonist, Snowman, the last specimen of the *Homo Sapiens* species, purposefully annihilated by a devastating disease. The novel's title

points to yet another vanishing: of the three main characters around which the plot develops, only two – Oryx, Jimmy's lover, and Crake, his friend – appear on it. The title *Oryx and Crake* seems to erase the relevance of Snowman, known before the disease breakout as Jimmy, as he remains conspicuously absent from it. The narrative in this case will also be in the third person: the last remnant of a human being may provide the narrative's main viewpoint, but if we look for him on the book cover, we can see that he has been banished (and vanished) from the "story" to the position of a somewhat irrelevant bystander. His inadequacy as a member of this brave new world is emphasized by his inability to bear witness to his story. He is no Robinson Crusoe because none of the signs he might construct will be subject to interpretation any longer:

> But even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who'll come along later and find his bones and is ledger, and learn his fate. Snowman can make no such assumptions: he'll have no future reader, because the Crakers can't read. Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past. (Atwood, 2003, 41)

In fact, one of the features of the post-apocalyptic world Snowman inhabits is its lack of chronological time as we understand it. Both past and future have become irrelevant as the Crakers' notion of time is fundamentally a-historical. This is suggested early on by Snowman's relationship with his defunct watch: "A blank face is what it shows him: zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is" (Atwood, 2003, 3). This "absence of official time" is also a metaphoric reversal of the notion that "Man" controls "nature", which will be witnessed in Jimmy's pre-apocalyptic time. Besides, it is an interesting counter-image to what Paul Carter describes as the "inaugurat[ion] of linear history" that colonisation produces on both aboriginal peoples and the colonised landscape:

> The result of ground-clearing was to institute one system of memorialization at the expense of another. It was as if the colonists set out to erase the common ground where communication with the 'Natives' might have occurred. To found the colony, to inaugurate linear history as its puppet-theatre of marching soldiers and treadmills, was to embrace an environmental

> amnesia: it was actively to forget what wisdom the ground, and its people, might posses. (Carter, 1996, 6)

Cornered by a nature that is extremely hostile to him, Jimmy is often plagued by memories of books read in the past dealing with extreme survival (45, 151), colonialism (4) and anthropology (96), which seem to be oriented at helping him in his situation. In his context, however, the power position of these books is challenged not only in terms of their lack of useful advice, but also on the grounds of their definition of "indigenous" (Atwood, 2003, 96). Snowman is "indigenous" since he has never left his country; however, although the Crakers are better adapted, they "need" Snowman's instruction. The parallelism with white Canadians and First Nations seems more than casual. Furthermore, the whole concept of time and discipline derived from the colonial environment seems highly inappropriate to Snowman's timeless situation:

> It is the strict adherence to daily routine that tends towards the maintenance of good morale and the preservation of sanity," he says out loud. He has the feeling he's quoting from a book, some obsolete, ponderous directive written in aid of European colonials running plantations of one kind or another. (Atwood, 2003, 4)

This organization of time that Snowman's imaginary book calls for is very reminiscent of Foucault's ideas on the establishment of modern disciplinary systems:

> The *time-table* is an old inheritance. […] Its three methods – establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate cycles of repetition – were soon to be found in schools, workshops and hospitals. […] Time measured and paid must also be a time without impurities or defects; a time of good quality, throughout which the body is constantly applied to its exercise. Precision and application are, with regularity, the fundamental virtues of disciplinary time." (Foucault, 1995, 149–51)

But as Snowman's speaking out loud suggests, it is this loss of "daily routines" and the compartmentalization of time that marks, as already argued, his loss of control over the environment, and

possibly his own sanity. He acts as a distorted mirror image of Robinson Crusoe, the protagonist of a novel that is, in Jean-Jacques Hamm's view, "about the removal of empty spaces and the reordering of the world according to a utilitarian perspective" (Hamm, 1996, 116). If Hamm and Foucault are correct, the defeat of this value system in the face of the new world is the beginning of the end of any heritage of the world Snowman had known as Jimmy, which for him is equivalent to death: "Can a single ant be said to be alive […] or does it only have relevance in terms of its anthill?" (Atwood, 2003, 372)

In contrast to Snowman's mis-adaptation to the landscape, the Crakers are extremely well adapted to the world they are meant to inhabit: not only are they resistant to the highly increased sunlight (6), but they are also able to sustain a vegetarian diet (158-9), their smell repels mosquitoes (102) and their urine drives away possible predators (154-5). Furthermore, they are oblivious to both the past and the future, including their own mortality. The Crakers are, in Crake's words, the closest thing to an immortal being (Atwood, 2003, 303). Snowman, on the other hand, is too close to mortality. His only option, then, is to assume a new personality that fits his landscape better. He becomes Snowman, -- not only in a futile act of rebellion against the man responsible for the disaster, Crake, but also as a way to ironically associate himself with a fantastic species of the past. This puts his own "reality" into question and severs all links with a past he prefers to ignore:

> It was one of Crake's rules that no name could be chosen for which a physical equivalent – even stuffed, even skeletal – could not be demonstrated. No unicorns, no griffins, no manticores or basilisks. But those rules no longer apply, and it's given Snowman a bitter pleasure to adopt this dubious label. The Abominable Snowman — existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumours and through its backward-pointing footprints. (Atwood, 2003, 7–8)

In spite of this name change, Snowman is overwhelmed by the haunting past, which he seems unable to turn off. It is actually through these glimpses of the past that the pre-apocalyptic world is

narrated until, eventually, Snowman finds himself forced to physically go back to the RejoovenEssence Compound where the Crakers were created in order to avoid death by starvation. Nevertheless, he is really reluctant to go back as he associates the return to that physical space with an emotional return to his past. This is obvious in an exchange with one of the voices with which he often has "conversations":

> *But you don't want to go back there, do you?* a soft voice whispers.
> "Not particularly"
> *Because?*
> "Because nothing"
> *Go on, say it.*
> "I forget."
> *No, you don't. You've forgotten nothing.* (Atwood, 2003, 152; emphasis in the original)

The past Snowman is desperately trying to forget and yet continues to remember is very different from Snowman's own post-apocalyptic world, but not that different from our present. Rather, it seems that it is a likely continuation of the troubles we are already experiencing, as Atwood claims:

> As with *The Handmaid's Tale*, [*Oryx and Crake*] invents nothing we haven't already invented or started to invent. Every novel begins with a what if, and then sets forth its axioms. The what if of *Oryx and Crake* is simply, What if we continue down the road we're already on? How slippery is the slope? What are our saving graces? Who's got the will to stop us? (Atwood, 2004, 330)

We are informed early in the novel that much of the world as we know it has disappeared by Jimmy's time (our near future) due to ecological catastrophes. At various points in the narrative we are informed of instances of aggressive global warming: coastal aquifers have turned salty, the northern permafrost has disappeared, and deserts have expanded (Atwood, 2003, 24). The state of Texas has "dried up and blew away" (Atwood, 2003, 244). The weather has turned unpredictable (118), the autumn warmer and sunnier (71) and February is not only warm and humid but also plagued by twisters (173).

Even before the fatal disease hits, Jimmy has led most of his life in suburban environments; and in general nature is contemplated, echoing Crusoe's enterprising attitude on his island and Prospero's magic control of the elements, as something that can be easily manipulated. Thus, when Jimmy's mother expresses her discomfort with the genetic manipulation her husband practices in his job, he claims that "[t]here's nothing sacred about cells and tissue" (Atwood, 2003, 57). And when Jimmy expresses similar anxieties about Crake's experiments, his friend replies: "I don't believe in Nature […] Or not with a capital N" (Atwood, 2003, 206). The hubris of Jimmy's society, however, is constantly undermined by its own apocalyptic ending, which the structure of he novel, with its narrative temporal dislocations (a disruption of that "linear time" that Carter refers to above), can only emphasize. Scientific progress and hedonistic comfort become pointless exercises in the face of nature and its challenges. It is not a coincidence that another eighteenth-century source for Atwood's novel is the Laputa episode of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, that scathing satire of presumptuous scientific detachment from everyday life. The rational, pseudo-scientific manoeuvres of Prospero and Crusoe become the ridiculous experiments of the Laputans, concerned more with personal gains than with the practical uses of their efforts. These pointless exercises are what finally leads to the appearance (and financial support) of Crake: the ultimate representative of the well-established tradition of mad scientists in science fiction (from Faustus to Frankenstein), mad enough to consider humanity unworthy of its existence on the planet and deserving to be substituted by the enhanced, environment-friendly Crakers. The Earth's post-apocalyptic future in Atwood's novel, however, will not even leave us the comfort of hope in the Crakers' post-human perfection. Through Snowman's eyes we see the beginning of a new civilization (the source of all evil, according to Crake), and become increasingly aware that the story of human chaos is about to begin again and that utopia is far beyond human (or post-human) control.

Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* also deals with the extinction of humanity and the exploitation of nature, but the take on colonised peoples is even stronger than in Atwood's work. Toussaint's status quo is maintained by selective memory: while the epic history of its colonisers is preserved, that of the indigenous inhabitants has been erased to the point that they are denied any existence. They can only

be found on Toussaint's twin planet, the seemingly fearsome New Half Way Tree:

> **New Half-Way Tree, it look a little bit like this Toussaint planet where I living: same clouds in high, high mountains; same sunny bays; same green rich valleys. But where Toussaint civilized, New Half-Way Tree does be rough. You know a thing and the shadow of that thing could be in almost the same place together? You know the way a shadow is a dark version of the real thing, the dub side? Well, New Half-Way Tree is a dub version of Toussaint.** (Hopkinson, 2000, 2; emphasis in the original)

In New Half-Way Tree we are made aware of the real cost of the pseudo-utopian facade of Toussaint, as we are given the chance to see the original shape of the planet before Earth colonisers have transformed its environment with the help of nanotechnology. Colonisation is described by the narrator as a sexual encounter:

> **New Half-Way Tree is how Toussaint planet did look before the Marrishow Corporation sink them Earth Engine Number 127 into it like God entering he woman; plunging into the womb of soil to impregnate the planet with the seed of Granny Nanny**. (Hopkinson, 2000, 2; emphasis in the original)

This sexual encounter, as we shall see later, is re-enacted in Tan-Tan's own story. Tan-Tan's father, Antonio, is sentenced to either "life sentence or exile" (Hopkinson, 2000, 70) for the murder of his wife's lover. Unable to give up his seven-year-old child, he manipulates his daughter into running away with him to the prison planet, and two years later he abuses her sexually as a substitute for his wife. Antonio tries to pass his child's rape as an act of love both to his new wife, Janisette, and to his daughter: "*Is just because I missing your mother, and you look so much like she. You see how I love you girl?*"(Hopkinson, 2000, 141; emphasis in the original). This discourse replicates the kind of colonial discourse that Dorothy F. Lane identifies as a classic motif in the representation of islands in British imperialist texts:

> The motif is also associated with a particular family configuration: the island itself is depicted as a feminine space penetrated by male reason and science, and the coloniser is often accompanied by male children who reproduce, and will eventually inherit, his power. (Lane, 1995, 2)

Nevertheless, according to Lane, postcolonial texts in New Zealand and the Caribbean frequently re-write this motif by combining the male children and the feminine space, thus representing an often violent and incestuous father-daughter relationship that subverts and questions the colonising rationale:

> [T]he genetic reproduction of the coloniser results primarily in daughters, and these daughters are themselves ambivalent about their father and his language. Aberrations of sexuality, such as incest, miscegenation, and rape or attempted rape appear […], the revision of the family configuration appears in the New Zealand texts as an infiltration of the insular world of Miranda by a Caliban figure; in the Caribbean texts, which depict an island not so easily divided into isolated gardens, the family is contaminated by sexual unions within an incestuous community. (Lane, 1995, 155)

The relation of the island motif and the planet motif is strong. An isolated environment, usually in exotic locations that are ripe for discovery and exploration, the planet seems to take on the same role as the island did in earlier narratives. As Darko Suvin puts it:

> [A]n island in the far-off ocean is the paradigm of the aesthetically most satisfying goal of the [science fiction] voyage. This is particularly true if we subsume under this the planetary island in the aether ocean – usually the moon – that we encounter from Lucian through Cyran to Swift's mini-moon of Laputa, and on into the nineteenth century. (Gunn, 2005, 24)

*Midnight Robber* intertextually refers to one such island narrative, *The Tempest*; in this case, however, Tan-Tan's father, Antonio, impersonates both Shakespeare's "benevolent" Prospero and his namesake, Antonio, Prospero's treacherous brother. Tan-Tan, on the

other hand, makes a peculiar Miranda. Like Prospero and Miranda, Antonio and Tan-Tan are stranded and forced to start from scratch. But, in contrast to *The Tempest,* where Prospero has been banished and usurped by his brother, in *Midnight Robber* Antonio is both the victim and the cause of his and his daughter's misfortunes. This split identity is emphasized in the text after Tan-Tan's rape, when she begins to see her father as two: "good Daddy" and "bad Daddy" (Hopkinson, 2000, 149), a strategy she also uses when she refers to herself as either "good Tan-Tan" or "bad Tan-Tan" (Hopkinson, 2000, 149).

Furthermore, the politics of colonialism that Shakespeare's play presents have a strong utopian connection. As Philip E. Wegner has noted, the first utopian text, that is, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), is a reflection of the revision of social structures generated by the discovery of the Americas:

> The trauma of contact with new worlds only a quarter century before the publication of Utopia meant that the figure of this Other began to loom even more significantly than it had before in the European imagination. Contact with the cultures of the Americas suggested, on the one hand, something of the contingency and relativity of European customs […] On the other hand, this event also engendered a new need to *define* those things that made the cultures of Europe different. (Wegner, 2002, 56–7)

In Act II Scene I, Gonzalo is lost in daydreams about a new "Commonwealth" on the island where he has been shipwrecked. However, in doing so he is not only setting up an imaginary society, but also carrying out an act of acquisition, as Sebastian's ironic reply to his speech implies:

> GONZALO    I' the commonwealth I would by contraries
> Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
> Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
> Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
> And use of service, none; […]
> No sovereignty;–

SEBASTIAN     Yet he would be king on't.
<div align="right">(<em>The Tempest</em>, II. 1. 143)</div>

Gonzalo's intentions may have already been fulfilled by Prospero himself; but Prospero's "benevolent" rule of the island is at the cost of Caliban's own dispossession. Caliban, like Australia's aborigines in Paul Carter's <em>The Road to Botany Bay</em>, is "not physically invisible, but culturally so" as aboriginal cultures "[do] not share history's celestial viewpoint" (Carter, 1987, xx). The deformed slave has become, particularly in the Caribbean, a well-recognized symbol of the struggle against colonialism by refusing to accept Prospero's concept of civilisation: he still considers his island "mine" (<em>The Tempest</em>, I. 2. 333), rebels constantly against his master, and preys sexually on Miranda thus posing the menace of miscegenation – "Thou [Prospero] didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (<em>The Tempest</em>, I. 2. 352). This spirit of rebellion is also present in <em>Midnight Robber</em>. The novel opens with David Findlay's poem "Stolen", where the lyrical persona repeatedly brags that "[s/he] stole the torturer's tongue!" (Hopkinson, 2000, frontispiece), and delights in his/her ability to use it to let us "know this tall tale to be mine too" (Hopkinson, 2000, frontispiece). Similarly, Caliban retorts to Prospero: "You taught me language; and my profit on´t / is, I know how to curse" (<em>The Tempest</em>, I. 2. 365).

Caliban is, in Jean-Jacques Hamm's words, "a victim of his generosity" (Hamm, 1996, 114). He teaches Prospero how to profit from the island, but unable to fit into Prospero's expectations of what a "civilised" man is, he is enslaved and forced to do the lowliest jobs on the island instead. In <em>Midnight Robber,</em> the original intelligent species of New Half-Way Tree, the douen, fulfil a role similar to that of Caliban in <em>The Tempest</em> and of Friday in <em>Robinson Crusoe</em>. Defoe's work is also, according to Ian Watt, "a utopia, though of a new peculiar kind […] the utopia of the Protestant ethic" (Watt, 1975, 324), whereby isolation in an empty space does not bring about desperation and madness as it does in <em>Oryx and Crake</em>. On the contrary, Crusoe is capable of constructing a perfectly organised world, which he is eventually capable of bequeathing to other colonisers (Defoe, 1975, 237); a world in which Friday automatically assumes his role of a servant and unquestionably accepts it as his duty to speak English.

If slaves have always been considered property and natives such as Caliban and Friday subhuman, the douen in Toussaint are considered "indigenous fauna" (Hopkinson, 2000, 32), and have been driven to extinction (Hopkinson, 2000, 33). Their name is significant as it comes from the West Indies figures of "children who'd died before they had their naming ceremonies" (Hopkinson, 2000, 93). The image of the "sullen peoples / half devil and half child" (Kipling, 1989, 321) of Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" comes easily to mind. And, just as Robinson Crusoe finds himself entitled to name Friday, thus erasing his original native name, the settlers consider they have the right to name and thus claim cultural possession over the douen (Hopkinson, 2000, 95). Hamm quotes Ian Watt when he concludes: "Crusoe's relations with Man Friday are similarly egocentric. He does not ask him his name, but gives him one" (Watt, 1988, 19). But while Friday remains submissive about his servitude and Caliban powerless, the role of the douen in Hopkinson's text is not to support but to challenge the moral and technological superiority of the colonisers. Their ears, being more accurate than the human ones, allow the douen to detect new exiles as they arrive in New Half-Way Tree (Hopkinson, 2000, 234), which gives them the advantage to deal with the newcomers firsthand, and, like Caliban, act as their introduction to the new environment. Chichibud, the douen Tan-Tan and Antonio encounter when they arrive on the planet, is an example of this. The creature provides them with food and shelter even without the customary "trail debt", and, most importantly, protects them from the dangers of their inexperience in the treacherous New Half-Way Tree wilderness, in spite of Antonio's arrogant recklessness. This becomes more evident after Antonio falls asleep while minding the fire, which attracts a giant animal, the mako jumbie, which could have killed Tan-Tan and Antonio had it not been for Chichibud's intervention. Nevertheless, the douen has to fend off Antonio's attacks on his expertise and thus challenge the "human" definition of a "beast": "Beast that could talk and know it own mind. Oonuh tallpeople [you humans] quick to name what is people and what is beast. Last time I asking you: safe passage through this bush?" (Hopkinson, 2000, 92)

Like Caliban, Chichibud is not treated as an ally by those that have benefited from his help. When he finally arrives with Tan-Tan and Antonio at the colonisers' village, he is welcomed by one of the settlers in the patronising terms we are accustomed to expect in

slave-master narratives: "Eh Chichibud, ain't see you for a while. I bet you been up to mischief, ain't, boy?" (Hopkinson, 2000, 120) Later on, Chichibud will be even denied the status of a person in an exchange between young Tan-Tan and one of the leaders of the colonisers' village, Claude. This exchange is reminiscent of the decision that the US Founding Fathers took to count slaves as three-fifths of a person in order to displace the principle of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness":

> Tan-Tan scolded, "He not your boss, Chichibud." She repeated her lesson exactly as Nanny had sung it to them in crêche: "Shipmates all have the same status. Nobody higher than a next somebody. You must call he 'Compère,' " she explained to the douen.
> The men burst out laughing, even Daddy. "Pickney-child," said Claude, "is a human that?" (Hopkinson, 2000, 121)

The douen, however, have an independent life they keep, for the most part, secret and away from the colonisers – in a way this is somewhat reminiscent of the structure and secrecy of the maroon communities. Similarly to escaped slaves, Tan-Tan enters the douen world as a renegade: she is forced to flee her village after she murders her father. The young woman is the first non-douen visitor to one of these communities, and she must swear to keep its location and the douen "secrets" unknown as the douen fear the technological power of the colonisers (Hopkinson, 2000, 273–4). And, unlike the rapist/victim relationship Antonio and the Marryshow Corporation construct with their environment through technology, or the nature that "appeals not for adoration but for exploitation" (Hamm, 1996, 316) in *Robinson Crusoe*, the douen's relationship with their environment is based on ecological collaboration.

The douen do not inhabit houses like the colonisers, but a large tree called the "daddy tree", which is a self-sustaining ecosystem based on a tree structure "big so like any village" (Hopkinson, 2000, 178). The daddy tree is inspired by a Carib legend which is rewritten both within Tan-Tan's narrative and in "How Tan-Tan learn to thief" (Hopkinson, 2000, 78) – one of the three "legends" that are inserted within it. In the original Carib story (Ishmael, 1995, 16) and in "How Tan-Tan learn to thief", the tree is a gift from the Creator where different kinds of food grow. In the main narrative of *Midnight*

*Robber,* the daddy tree is a biologically plausible being that covers all the basic necessities of the douen, as Chichibud explains to Tan-Tan: "You in a Papa Bois, the daddy tree that does feed we and give we shelter. Every douen nation have it own daddy tree" (Hopkinson, 2000, 179). These needs include shelter (the douen live in nests built on top of the tree), food (plants and animals grow on it), hygiene (bromeliads growing on the tree are used to gather water for bathing and waste purposes), etc. Tan-Tan is represented as an extraneous element in the delicate ecology of the daddy tree and her difficult adaptation reflects the complicated relationship of the colonisers with their landscape, which can be discerned in Tan-Tan and Antonio's disastrous arrival on the planet. She is unaccustomed to the lack of private space in the tree, is physically unable to climb it up and down, and refuses to bring herself to eat the "pale, fat grubs" (191,195) which form the staple douen diet, having been grown in the daddy tree inhabitants' own body wastes and then eaten alive. To make matters worse, her own excrement turns out to be pernicious for the grubs, therefore risking the douen food chain. Although Tan-Tan eventually finds ways to adapt to the new environment (not to adapt the environment to herself), she decides to leave the daddy tree once she realizes she is pregnant with her father's child in order to get an abortion at a human village. But it is her stay in the daddy tree that has made her strengthen herself mentally and physically, and eventually enabled her to fulfil her role and survive her future trials.

The douen remain, therefore, elusive and independent of humans, in spite of their apparent submission to the human rule. The douen's strategy of avoiding humans echoes Thomas King's parody debunking colonial ideology in *Green Grass, Running Water*. One part of the novel covers the epic travels of the mythical Thought Woman, who has fallen from the sky and floated towards Crusoe's island. King derides Crusoe's "logical" thinking and assumed superiority:

> Under the bad points, says Robinson Crusoe, as a civilized white man, it has been difficult not having someone of color around whom I could educate and protect.
>
> What's the good point? says Thought Woman.
>
> Now you're here, says Robinson Crusoe […]
>
> Have you got it straight? says Robinson Crusoe

> Sure, says Thought Woman, I'll be Robinson Crusoe. You can be Friday.
>
> But I don't want to be Friday, says Robinson Crusoe.
>
> No point in being Robinson Crusoe all your life, says Thought Woman. It couldn't be much fun.
>
> It would be a lot more fun if you would stop being stubborn, says Robinson Crusoe.
>
> All things considered, says Thought Woman, I'd rather be floating. And she dives into the ocean and floats away. (King, 1993, 325–6)

Thought Woman's act, like the douen's or even the Crakers', ridicules Crusoe and Prospero's position better than an open confrontation would. The antiheroes of both *Oryx and Crake* and *Midnight Robber* are not triumphant conquerors; nor are they defeated by armies of savages. They are put in their place after the failure of their own megalomaniac aspirations to control nature and erase those parts of history and landscape that do not fit in their utopian constructs. These novels show that even the most benevolent utopian worlds, such as Prospero's island or the Toussaint planet, have an authoritarian component that cannot be overlooked. Without collaboration and negotiation, utopias and empires eventually fail, and landscapes and the environment will always prove stronger than wild scientific dreams. As with Jimmy, Crake and Antonio, to ignore this rule is equal to the fastest road to self-destruction, while collaboration, as in Tan-Tan's case, may lead to redemption and happiness. Consequently, castaways can never become conquerors, and the assumption of this role, in these novels as well as in much Canadian speculative fiction, is only the beginning of true survival.

## Works cited

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (Eds.). *The Empire Writes* Back. London: Routledge, 2001.

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 2003.

----------. *Moving Targets: Writing with Intent*. Toronto: House of Anansi, 2004.

Carter, Paul. *The Road to Botany Bay*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

----------. *The Lie of the Land*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.

Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe: An Authoritative Text/ Backgrounds and Sources/Criticism*. Ed. Michael Shinagel. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

Fiedler, Leslie. *The Stranger in Shakespeare*. London: Croom Helm 1973.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Random House, 1995.

Gunn, James and Matthew Candelaria (Eds.). *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*. Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005.

Hamm, Jean-Jacques. "Caliban, Friday and Their Masters". In Spaas, Lieve and Brian Stimpson (Eds.). *Robinson Crusoe: Myths and Metamorphoses*. New York: Macmillan, 1996, 110–123.

Hopkinson, Nalo. *Midnight Robber*. New York: Warner Books, 2000.

Ishmael, Odeen. *Amerindian Legends of Guyana* Sheboygan. WI: Artex Publishing, Inc., 1995

King, Thomas. *Green Grass, Running Water*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.

Kipling, Rudyard. *Complete Verse*. New York: Anchor, 1989.

Lane, Dorothy F. T*he Island as Site of Resistance: An Examination of Caribbean and New Zealand Texts*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Ed .by R.S. White. Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1999.

Watt, Ian. "Robinson Crusoe as Myth". In  Shinagel, Michael. *Robinson Crusoe: An Authoritative Text/ Backgrounds and Sources/Criticism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

----------. "Individualism and the Novel". In Harold Bloom (Ed.). *Daniel Defoe's* Robinson Crusoe. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988.

Wegner, Philip E. *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

# *Intersections of Canadian Identity*

**Patrick Farges**
**Université de Bourgogne, France**
**Centre de recherches interdisciplinaires sur l'Allemagne**
**(EHESS), France**

## In between the Cracks of the Canadian Mosaic: Culture and Identity of German-Speaking Exiles in Canada, 1933-2003.

### Abstract

*The Nazi regime in Germany and its expansion over Europe forced the politically and racially persecuted into exile. Despite its closed door policy in the 1930s, Canada hosted a small number of exiles – no more than a few thousand. How did they adapt to the Canadian socio-cultural environment? From a Canadian point of view, the exiles witnessed a pivotal period in the historical formation of contemporary Canada's identity as a young nation. While some managed to participate in the dominant discourse, others hardly fitted into the Canadian framework of the nation, thus literally falling in between the cracks of the mosaic.*

### Résumé

*Le régime nazi en Allemagne et son expansion en Europe ont contraint à l'exil ceux qui étaient persécutés pour raisons politiques et raciales. Dans le contexte d'une politique d'immigration extrêmement restrictive dans les années 1930, le Canada a néanmoins accueilli quelques milliers de ces exilés. Comment se sont-ils adaptés à leur nouvel environnement socio-culturel ? Du point de vue canadien, ils furent les témoins d'une période charnière dans le processus de formation identitaire du Canada contemporain. Si certains exilés sont parvenus à intégrer leur histoire personnelle au grand récit de cette nation jeune, d'autres sont au contraire littéralement tombés dans les interstices de la nation-mosaïque.*

Migration history led to the reconsideration of the traditional representation of Western societies as homogeneous, stable and characterized by sedentary ways of life. It also showed how public discourse on immigration and the institutional framework were co-constructed. The present essay is centred on the acculturation of German-speaking refugees who fled Nazi Europe and found refuge in Canada. "Exile studies" form an ill-assorted corpus of scholarly works that for a long time focused solely on the biographies of famous émigrés. However, since the groundbreaking work of social history directed by Wolfgang Benz (1991), scholarly interest for acculturation and adaptation mechanisms grew, thus echoing simultaneous developments in migration studies. The sources used for this project are testimonies and other autobiographical narratives, published and unpublished memoirs, correspondences, and oral history interviews. The interviewees belong to a specific generation of exiles: those born during the Weimar Republic who left Europe as children or teenagers – the "generation exodus" (Laqueur, 2001). The sources for this project document the material, affective and social universe of these migrants, and bear traces of group dynamics, 'ethnic' networks and family strategies – elements all pertaining to the "meso-level" so crucial in migration studies (Faist, 1997).

The migrant contributes, from the margins, to redefining the host society's expectations. Migrants decisively shape the discourse on identity constructed by a given society. The migrants' memory, as retained in life stories (published or unpublished memoirs, oral history interviews), illustrates and partly moulds the representational and historiographical system of a given society. Moreover, such a memory sometimes contradicts the master narrative of the nation, while participating in it. In the present paper, I shall present two differentiated group trajectories among German-speaking refugees in Canada: one of political refugees (Social-Democrats from the Sudeten region) vs. one of German and Austrian Jews. These two groups embody two distinct ways of coping with the institutional framework of the "mosaic" characteristic of post-war Canada. While the Sudeten-German refugees managed to adapt to and participate in the dominant discourse, the Jewish refugees hardly fitted into this framework of the nation.

**Representing immigration in Canada until the 1960s: "Canadian stock"**

Canada elaborated no specific policy in response to the 1930s refugee issue. This can partly be explained by the dominant discourse on immigration then prevalent in Canada, as experienced by one group of German-speaking refugees: the Social-Democrats from the Sudeten region. The Sudeten, a borderland region with an ethnically German majority population, had become part of Czechoslovakia in 1918. The Munich Conference (Sept. 29-30, 1938) sealed the fate of the region that was taken over by Nazi Germany. On March 1, 1938, the rest of Czechoslovakia fell under Hitler's control. For Nazi opponents there was but one option – to flee. In a frenzied effort to get its members out of Europe, the Sudeten-German Social-Democratic party had approached the Canadian government and in early 1939, Canada accepted up to 1,200 families. However, only 307 families and 72 single men (a total of 1,053 people) were able to leave Europe before the war broke out.

Once in Canada, the group was divided in two: 155 families and 37 men were directed to the St. Walburg district in north-eastern Saskatchewan (Schilling), while the others settled in the Peace-River district in northern British Columbia (Wanka). Before they even reached their final destination, the new settlers were actively talked about in the rural communities, in a manner characteristic of the dominant discourse at the time. On March 23, 1939, the editorial of the *St. Walburg Enterprise* read as follows:

> […] it is […] desirable, once they have adopted this country as their home, that [these settlers] absorb Canadian ideals and ideas as speedily as possible and this can best be done by settling them in such a manner that they must necessarily rub shoulders daily with established Canadians.

The vocabulary used here is typical: it revolves around the idea of the 'desirability' of immigrants and draws a clear, hierarchical line between "established Canadians" and newcomers. Canadian immigration policy and its flipside, Canadian discourse on immigration, are characterized at the time by their ethnic selectivity, their emphasis on manual skills, and their general preference for agriculturalists. Immigration thus served precise economic interests

as well as a narrow vision of Canada. Between the wars, potential immigrants were categorized as "preferred" and "non-preferred" immigrants according to social, political, religious and above all ethnic, criteria, favouring the genuinely "British-Canadian stock". Potential immigrants from Western Europe were seen as 'assimilable', whereas southern and eastern Europeans were non-preferred. Immigrants from the rest of the world and Jews were at the bottom of the scale. Certain categories were altogether "prohibited", among which were revolutionaries, anarchists and political activists (Farges, 2004, 36). As Barbara Roberts shows, Canadian immigration policy went hand in hand with unlawful deportations. In the context of the economic crisis and the strong emergence of Canadian "nativism", immigration was drastically restricted in 1930 and 1931, practically shutting the door to all who were not agriculturalists with an important capital. However, the government still had the power to grant "special permits" (Kelley and Trebilcock, 1998, 216-249).

In this unfavourable context, those German-speaking refugees who did manage to immigrate to Canada were mostly exceptions to the rule. They entered Canada on special permits or as members of exceptional group schemes. Annette Puckhaber recently established that among the total number of "landed immigrants" between 1933 and 1945, only 4,891 were German-speaking, mainly refugees (40). Two groups entered Canada on exceptional schemes. I have already evoked the Sudeten-German Social-Democrats (1,053 persons). The second group consisted of German-born and Austrian-born men who initially resided in Great Britain. In view of Nazi-Germany's military successes at the beginning of the war, the fear of a "fifth column" of saboteurs spread over the United Kingdom, reaching a peak in 1940. In reaction, Churchill decided to register and categorize all "enemy aliens" on British soil, and to intern some of them in May 1940, although they were in great part refugees from National-Socialism. Among those, over 2,000 men were sent overseas to Canadian internment camps, where they spent several months, before being released in Canada (Koch, 1980). About half permanently settled in Canada after their release, while the other half returned to the United Kingdom or went to the United States (Draper, 1983).

Because of the general orientation and restrictive character of Canadian immigration policy, and because of a widespread institutional, as well as societal, anti-Semitism, the various refugees

and refugee groups were instrumentalised against one another from the start. In 1938, Wilma Abeles Iggers arrived from a rural Bohemian village with her extended family to settle on a farm in the Hamilton area (Ontario). In retrospect, she thinks that the civil servant in charge of their particular case did not find out that they were Jewish and hence did not follow the – unwritten – rule of not letting in Jews. It must indeed have been counter-intuitive for this government official that Jews could be farmers. In any case, his ignorance probably saved Wilma and her family (Iggers, Personal interviews).

The Sudeten-German Social-Democrats benefited from the personal support of Vincent Massey, the Canadian High Commissioner in London. He stressed several times the fact that these potential settlers were "Christians". In December, Vincent Massey, the High Commissioner in London, wrote that it would be wise for the Canadian government to consider these immigrants "quite separately from other refugees […] as they include […] many persons who would be much more desirable as Canadian settlers and much more likely to succeed in our country than certain other types of refugees". In a letter to the Canadian Prime Minister, he made his point clear: "If we could take a substantial number of them, it would put us in a much stronger position in relation to later appeals from and on behalf of non-Aryans [sic]" – the latter term obviously describing Jewish refugees (quoted in Abella and Troper, 2000, 48). What he suggested was a form of bargaining between categories of refugees according to their degree of desirability. As for the male civilians interned as "enemy aliens", they would never have gained access to Canada if they had not been "accidental immigrants" (Draper, 1983) under joint British and Canadian control.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Canada was still a closed society with audible nativist and xenophobic tendencies. Scholars and journalists echoed this fear of a foreign invasion that might affect "Canadian stock" and they argued in terms of "capacity of absorption" and "optimal size of the population". In 1937, the Canadian Statistical Office published a study of the "racial origins" of the Canadian people in which the author listed the criteria of assimilability of various "racial groups" (Hurd, 1937). Until World War I, Germans had been considered as highly desirable – as opposed to Austrians who had been citizens of a multi-ethnic state. But the anti-German sentiment prevalent in North America between 1914 and 1918 put an

end to this. German cultural visibility and identification with German roots abruptly ended, as post-World War I Canadian censuses on ethnic origins dramatically show. This anti-German sentiment was partly re-activated in the 1930s, but to a much lesser degree (Keyserlingk, 1984).

On the other hand, anti-Semitism was largely present in Canada in the 1930s as in other industrialized nations (Rome). Quebec anti-Semitism is a well-known and well-discussed historical fact. However, anti-Semitism was far from being solely a Quebec phenomenon. Minna Loewith recalls diffuse but widespread anti-Semitism:

> But there was anti-Semitism in Canada, I'm sorry to say. They didn't employ a Jew in a bank, you couldn't live in certain parts […]. You couldn't go to certain lodges, you couldn't go to certain summer resorts, you couldn't belong to golf clubs. […] Well, I tell you: when I first came to Canada and the people I lived with were Jewish, and I couldn't understand that they separated themselves from the non-Jewish people, and I felt 'Gosh, here I came to this country because we were Jewish, and now they tell me that the Jews are not equal', you know, it was a big shock! (Loewith, Personal interview)

The German-speaking refugees were often stigmatised as Germans, as Jews, or as both. Gerry Waldston, an ex-internee, retrospectively remembers this double stigma rather humorously. Born Gerhard Waldstein, he decided to change his name in the midst of World War II in order to find work in the advertising business. Numerous refugees indeed 'chose' – or rather were societally coerced – to change their last names or anglicize their first names, to marry persons of Canadian stock, or not to speak German anymore. Moreover, if it seemed impossible to disguise one's German accent, one could at least deny being Jewish: "Many of our people decided to present themselves as Gentiles or even to formally convert to Christian religion" (Iggers, 1995, 125).

Like in the United States, there is a constant tension in 20th century Canada between a narrow and a pluralist vision of the nation. In the 1950s, the first paradigm was still largely dominant. In 1955, while Canadian borders were open to displaced persons and other

categories of immigrants, the Canadian minister of immigration still stated that

> [w]e try to select as immigrants those who will have to change their ways least in order to adapt themselves to Canadian life and to contribute to the development of the Canadian nation. This is why entry into Canada is virtually free to citizens of the United Kingdom, the United States and France, so long as they have good health and good characters. That is why deliberate preference is shown for immigrants from countries with political and social institutions similar to our own. (*House of Commons Debates*, 1955, 1254)

This statement echoes assimilationist theories, but the Canadian minister's speech goes even further: by using the notion of cultural distance, he was defending a culturally conservative immigration policy predominant until the 1960s, a policy that served a narrow vision of Canadian national identity.

**From the Canadian mosaic to multiculturalism, or how to manage difference**

Canada is a nation of immigrants. However, it was for a long time based on racism and the domination of one group over another: native people vs. French and English colonizers, French minorities vs. English majority, newcomers vs. established citizens of Canadian stock. On the other hand, the multiethnic element decisively shaped economic, social, intellectual and cultural progress in Canada, an influence that has been celebrated for a little over three decades. Since the 1970s, a new historiography of immigration has emerged in Canada which intends to expose the flaws of the homogenizing and assimilationist model. This body of literature is mainly rooted in social history (e.g. history of labour) and ethnic sociology.

The Canadian discourse was largely constructed in – implicit or explicit – opposition to the US "melting pot" paradigm: Canada developed a system of representations metaphorically described as a "mosaic" of peoples, a term first used in 1926 by Kate A. Foster in *Our Canadian Mosaic*. But the term really became popular in the 1930s through John Murray Gibbon's opus, *Canadian Mosaic*, a catalogue of Canada's "racial groups" and of their – actual and potential – contribution to the "making of a Northern nation" (subtitle) that stood in explicit opposition to the southern neighbour.

"Melting pot" and "mosaic" are two metaphoric ways of thinking the nation in relation to its components. Needless to say, they are not adequate representations of ethnic realities. In *The Vertical Mosaic* (1965), the Canadian sociologist John Porter pointed out that the mosaic's segmentation happened more along socio-economic than ethnic lines. Nevertheless, the ethnic understanding of the "mosaic" paradigm established itself and was constantly re-instated in Canadian debates on immigration. The various components of the mosaic, the ethnic groups themselves, came to use it to underline diversity within the mosaic, i.e. the mosaic within the mosaic (Weinfeld et al.; Bassler, 1991).

In the post-war period, however, the traditional configuration changed dramatically with the introduction of "multiculturalism" as an official policy that led to a profound re-definition of Canadian identity. The formulation of this policy was a direct consequence of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism's final report that recommended, at the end of the 1960s, that measures be taken to ensure equal opportunities between the two founding peoples, considering the contribution of "other ethnic groups" (Final Report, Vol. 4, 1969). These conclusions led to Pierre-Elliott Trudeau's formulation of a policy of "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" in 1971. One major goal was to equate migrants, 'new' and 'old' Canadians, and to grant all Canadians a visible status within the nation. However, given the power constellation in Canada, the implementation of this policy soon had the pernicious effect of relegating the Francophone nation – especially Quebeckers – to the status of one ethnic group among others.

The notion of Canadian multiculturalism is multi-faceted. However, three main aspects must be distinguished: first of all, the notion of multiculturalism is a description of a *demographic* reality in post-war Canada. But it is also, on the level of the imagined nation, a *symbolic* representation of ideal contemporary Canada. It is this symbolic aspect that draws a strong line between Canada and the United States after 1945. Finally, multiculturalism also designates an actual policy endowed with a federal budget, as well as a body of provincial and federal institutions that administer this budget, support and celebrate cultural diversity, and commemorate ethnic heritages: this is the *institutional* aspect of multiculturalism.

The latter aspect has a notable historiographical corollary: one of the early institutional measures was to collect important archival material in order to document the presence and memory of ethnic groups in Canada. The Public Archives of Canada (now National Archives of Canada) established in 1972 a programme that led to the creation of Ethnic Archives of Canada (Neutel). This groundbreaking gathering of documents was followed by intense classifying and categorizing, and the archival grammar born in that initial period is still used today. While the memory of ethnic groups was being preserved, it was also taken out of its genuine configuration. To a certain extent, migrant memories became *de facto* impermeable to one another, as in the case of German-Canadian (Grenke) vs. Jewish-Canadian (Tapper) collections. Furthermore, historians and social scientists were granted the financial and editorial means to study particular ethnic groups and their impact on Canadian society: a number of such works were published with the assistance of the Historical Society of Canada. Similar developments took place on the provincial level, especially in urban centres.

In more recent years however, federal budgets supporting multicultural activities were drastically reduced. In fact, since the 1990s, multiculturalism as a means of administering difference within the Canadian nation has repeatedly been criticized. Canadian multiculturalism must be understood as a public discourse on diversity that aims at legitimizing public management of difference. There is a historical continuity between the English-colonial discourse, the mosaic metaphor and multiculturalism: "the assumption of an objectively existing and problematic ethnocultural diversity covers over the work of differentiation itself" (Day, 5). Real problems that arise from managing difference, like the recognition of native Canadians' rights, the historical minority position of Francophones or the marginalization of various groups, have thus often been eluded and replaced by a focus on folklore in the form of festivals and 'fests', ethnic neighbourhood, and culinary diversity. If on the one hand, the multicultural representation of Canada has allowed ethno-cultural differences to become legitimate and visible, it also gave rise, on the other hand, to somewhat inflexible categories of analysis. From a historiographical perspective, multiculturalism reinforced distinct ethno-cultural

memories that compete with each another, like the Jewish-Canadian and the German-Canadian ones.

## *Two Solitudes*: German-Canadians vs. Jewish-Canadians

Multicultural programmes decisively led to the constitution of distinct 'hyphenated' histories and historiographies that eventually became crystallized in competing narratives of the nation. Some have commented on the rise of parochialisms. Until the 1990s, the history of ethnic groups often took the shape of a narrative praising the group's contribution to the making of Canada. The recognition of a historical surplus value thus legitimized the group's respective position on the multicultural map and grounded the group's collective pride. Collective appropriation of individual success stories is a typical feature of this type of meliorative historiography: history is often reduced to a catalogue of important – male – members of the community.

Writing the history of the hyphenated nation often mirrors the political orientations of authors who are themselves active members of an ethnic group. Their goal is then to establish their community as a "founding element" of the Canadian nation or, in the German-Canadian case, to prove that Germans are historically the "third force" in Canada, alongside the French and the British (Bassler, 1990). Only recently have such historiographies been criticized, for instance by Franca Iacovetta, who, however, does not tackle the problem of memorial conflicts within or between communities. This type of historical narration indeed generates frictions at the points of contact between competing memories, remarkably analysed in Harold Troper and Morton Weinfeld's study of the Canadian-born conflict between a Jewish and a Ukrainian memory of World War II crimes. Another example is embodied by the differentiated identification mechanisms among two communities of German-speaking refugees: the Sudeten-German Social-Democrats and the German-speaking Jews.

As evoked previously, the trajectories of these two main groups of refugees from Nazism – Sudeten-German social-democrats and German-speaking Jewish refugees – were opposed from the very beginning by State officials themselves. Other aspects reinforce the antagonism, like the conditions of settlement. The Sudeten Social-Democrats initially settled on railway-owned lots in the Canadian West, a true frontier of civilization. These refugees, originally party

officials and workmen, adapted to Canada's rough conditions and created a new existence for themselves. Their narratives use the rhetoric of the pioneers and missionaries. Like 'true' Canadians, they brought civilisation to inhospitable lands. In that respect, the Sudeten-Germans' narratives mirror the grammar of the founding fathers who domesticated nature and they coincide with the dominant discourse in German-Canadian historiography.

Perhaps because they are not exactly 'Germans' – in the sense of German nationals – but ethnic Germans, the Sudeten-Germans in Canada were among the early defenders of the German-Canadian cause, through their associative involvement and their social activities. They soon became a key vector in diffusing a German-Canadian identity. In 1941, while Germans were still considered enemy aliens, Emil Kutscha, who had left his farm in the St. Walburg region to find industrial work in Hamilton, set up the first Sudeten-German association in Canada. In the midst of the war, German was used as the official language of the association. In 1947 the "Sudetenclub Forward" was founded in Toronto under the long lasting leadership of Henry Weisbach, who also remained the main editor of the German language bi-monthly *Forward / Vorwärts* well into the 1980s. The characteristics of the refugee Sudeten-Germans' socio-cultural presence appeared as early as the 1940s. Their presence was twofold: on the one hand they integrated into the German-Canadian social fabric; on the other, they displayed a profound commitment to their home region, especially after the post-war displacement of ethnically German populations. In 1947, Willi Wanka and Frank Rehwald – two main protagonists in the initial emigration scheme – took part in a decisive meeting of the Canadian Christian Council for the Resettlement of Refugees (CCCRR). The meeting revolved around the issue of "displaced persons" (DPs). That same year Prime Minister W.L.M. King had announced the beginning of the "Close Relative Scheme", allowing residents of Canada to bring over from Europe displaced family members. But, at the time, "Germans" were almost systematically excluded from the "International Refugee Organization's" mandate (Sauer). In order to change that situation, Sudeten-Germans in Canada united with Danube-Swabians and Baltic Germans to form an audible lobby within the CCCRR. Their efforts were soon crowned with success, and Willi Wanka was sent to DP camps in occupied Germany to speed up the process of immigration.

The Sudeten-German Social-Democrats remained true to social-democratic values and sociabilities, as their involvement in Canadian political parties and trade-unions demonstrates, but at the same time, their clubs and associations gradually became the driving forces behind the local – and later federal – organisation of Germanic clubs in Canada. In May 1951, Henry Weisbach and Emil Kutscha participated in the creation of the "Canadian German Alliance" in Kitchener, a "Federation of Germanic clubs and societies in Canada for the promotion of culture and social welfare, and good Canadian citizenship". Moreover, between 1967 and 1974 Henry Weisbach was president of the "Trans-Canada Alliance of German Canadians", the most accomplished – although conflictual – attempt to unite German-Canadians under one roof (Wieden, 1985).

The exiled Sudeten-German adapted well to the ethnic and multicultural paradigm in Canada. They also directly contributed to the advent of such a paradigm. Their narratives show a will of putting down roots in the new country, thus mirroring their initial activity as soil-breaking pioneers. Their success stories make sense in retrospect, as the final feeling of integration is made more legitimate by initial hardships. In a way, these "desirable" and ideal settlers lived up to the expectations immigration officials had of them from the beginning. On the contrary, the German-speaking Jewish refugees' narratives often echo a strong hiatus: although they seem perfectly integrated, they do not necessarily feel "at home" in the Canadian multicultural framework. Their story falls, so to speak, in between the cracks of the Canadian mosaic.

The German and Austrian Jews who found refuge in Canada were mostly urban and 'assimilated' Jews who had been brought up with the feeling that their German citizenship came before their identification as Jews. Those 'established' Jews sometimes looked down upon recently arrived "Jews from the East". In his memoirs, Eric Exton remembers: "In my generation however, the land of Egypt was called *Germany*" (1986, V). His parents, affluent shopkeepers in Saxony, "were very much typical German burghers in outlook, in their sense of values and other characteristics" (Exton, 1986, 2). Some of these assimilated Jews were observant, others not, yet others had formally converted. Some even confronted their being Jewish only after the Nuremberg Laws had definitely established who was to be considered a Jew. The example of those German-Jewish refugees raises two difficult historical questions: that of the

existence of a "Judeo-German symbiosis", to use Enzo Traverso's term, on the one hand, and that of the survival of their specific memory as German Jews after Auschwitz on the other. The idea of a Judeo-German symbiosis should not be idealized, as Traverso underlines. Traverso calls the Judeo-German symbiosis a "historical irony" involving "a vast misapprehension", i.e. "the illusory dream of [a] possible acceptance" (1995, XIX): in lieu of a German-Jewish dialogue, the idea of a symbiosis is the result of an internal "Jewish monologue". However, a subtle but indelible distinction was maintained throughout, which was easily reactivated after 1933. It is difficult to assess retrospectively the reality of a Judeo-German symbiosis – or that of a Judeo-Austrian one. The symbiosis was a powerful dream *and* at the same time, it was a lived reality for some, a tragic myth, as the reference to the land of Egypt in a previous quotation shows.

On the other hand, the idea of a symbiosis certainly corresponded to a deeply felt commitment to the "Heimat", to its values, its high culture and most prominently to its language. What the exiles express in their testimonies is not so much the nostalgia of a symbiosis that can be put in doubt with regard to later developments, as that of the societal fabric in which they felt embedded, and in which they became political subjects and social agents. Thus the symbiosis cannot be called a mere illusion, as it was intensely lived by two – sometimes three – generations of German and Austrian Jews. It cannot retrospectively be called an illusion because it left traces in the life stories and testimonies of exiles. The Judeo-German reality is an emotional capital that some of the exiles carried abroad and transmitted to their children as a heavy and historically tragic burden. Bereft of their home culture, of their milieu, the Jewish exiles were left only with their being Jewish as the most readily available identifying characteristic. However, Jewish-ness was in most cases not a matter of observance – it became one of ethnicity. And the German-speaking Jews certainly did not fit in the framework of the local Jewish community.

When the German-speaking, Jewish refugees arrived in Canada, the Jewish community in Canada was still largely dominated by Central European, Yiddish-speaking Jews. In his genuine, satirical style Mordecai Richler describes the newcomers – sophisticated and educated German-speaking Jews, "Yekkes" from Berlin, Vienna or Prague:

> As it turned out the refugees, mostly German and Austrian Jews, were far more sophisticated and better educated than we were. They had not, like our grandparents, come from *shtetls* in Galicia or Russia. Neither did they despise Europe. On the contrary, they found our culture thin, the city provincial, and the Jews narrow. This bewildered and stung us. But what cut deepest, I suppose, was that the refugees spoke English better than many of us did and, among themselves, had the effrontery to talk in the abhorred German language. (Richler, 1969, 59)

In W. Gunther Plaut's words, the refugees must have made the impression of being "arrogant know-it-alls who were not properly grateful for the marvellous opportunity afforded them in the New World" (Plaut, 1981, 58).

The initial incomprehension was only reinforced by the internal debates that structured the Jewish community in Canada after the Holocaust. In the context of the making of 'ethnic groups' in the mosaic-Canada, Jews slowly emerged as one. However, with regard to the conflict between various traditions and traumas, the Yekkes' memory and voice was gradually submerged. The unveiling of Nazi atrocities had a "delayed impact" (Bialystock) on Canadian Jews. First of all the Holocaust awareness led to a questioning of Canada's anti-Semitic past. According to Irving Abella,

> [t]he world [after World War II] had become too dangerous a place for Jews to allow themselves the luxury of internal dissent and divisiveness. […] Jewish energies were now totally devoted to protecting the State of Israel, to welcoming the influx of Holocaust survivors and to breaking down the barriers in Canadian society. One Yiddish pundit labelled postwar Jewry the 'sha shtill generation', literally the silent generation, afraid to rock the boat for fear of sinking with it. (226)

Post-war Canada opened its doors to approximately 20,000 Holocaust survivors. Within this "silent generation", the German-speaking Jewish exiles' voice could not but be even quieter. The community's new priorities, united around a well-organized Jewish Canadian Congress, excluded dissident voices. Numerous German-

speaking Jewish refugees, who represented an alternative memory, express, in varying degrees, their feeling of 'not fitting in', even after six decades in Canada. Furthermore, the idiosyncratic mechanisms of 'institutional' multiculturalism led to a profound divorce between German-Canadian and Jewish-Canadian historiography, despite the fact that the immigration of Jews from Germany is, in Canada like in the United States, an integral part of the wider immigration of Germans to North America with regard to settlement patterns and socio-economic adaptation.

But it should also be noted that certain forces within the German-Canadian community did not facilitate dialogue. Ernst Zündel, a German immigrant from the 1950s, was the leader of a series of hate propaganda actions directed at the Jewish community in the 1980s (Prutschi). In a pamphlet written by "concerned parents of German descent", he vehemently criticized the University of Toronto for offering History 398Y, a course on the Holocaust taught by Prof. Michael Marrus.

Franklin Bialystock, who coined the term of "delayed impact", distinguishes three phases in the Canadian Jews' reception of Holocaust memory. Before 1960, the trauma was still too overwhelming: "most survivors were not prepared to talk and most Canadian Jews were not willing to listen" (8). The actual work of memory took place in the 1960s, as testimonies were collected locally and commemorations started. The third phase coincides with the implementation of the multiculturalism policy in the 1970s. During this period, "the legacy of the Holocaust surfaced as a marker of ethnic identification for most Canadian Jews" (9). "By 1985", Bialystock continues, "most Canadian Jews felt that the destruction of European Jewry was *their* loss as well" (6) – revealing a mechanism of collective identification typical of the way in which multicultural profiling strategies work. Identification with the Holocaust hence became the accepted strategy of showing one's inclusion in the Canadian Jewish community within the larger framework of a multicultural society.

The refugees however, as "Holocaust survivors" of a certain type – those who escaped the Holocaust before it was too late – could not partake in this collective, identity-providing, commemoration. Their voice did not have the same legitimacy in the wider memorial arena. They could not be integral participants in the community and hence

did not fit into the categories of the mosaic. They bear witness to an impossible memory and their history is multidimensional and contradictory – too complex to fit. They consider their story "a minor event, dwarfed by the Holocaust", a mere "footnote to the Holocaust" (Schild, 40), i.e. an infra-paginal co-text to the master narrative of 20$^{th}$ century multicultural Canada. It is no coincidence that it is yet another German-Jewish refugee in Canada, Emil Fackenheim, one of the most renowned Jewish theologians, who warns that allowing the Holocaust to be central to Jewish experience amounts to giving Hitler a posthumous victory (quoted in Bialystock, 2000, 250).

**Conclusion**

In the course of half a century, the representation of Canada as a closed country worried about its population's ethnic "stock" was changed to a multicultural representation of the Canadian mosaic. The notion of 'multiculturalism' served and serves to describe a changed demographic reality, to metaphorically characterize contemporary Canada, and to designate specific political and institutional budgets and programmes. The study of Canadian culture thus requires a careful distinction between several layers. If multiculturalism as a way of managing difference did grant visibility and legitimacy to ethnic diversity, it also was an attempt at diluting the Francophone element and encouraged the emergence of fixed criteria of ethnic identification, as well as the competition between groups and memories. The present essay aimed at unveiling this paradox on the level of historiography and commemoration by taking the example of German-speaking refugees. This particular generation witnessed the changes that took place in Canada and was instrumental in bringing about these changes. On the one hand, the Sudeten-German Social-Democrats were able to take advantage of the existing framework and thus decisively contributed to creating a German-Canadian collective identity. On the other hand, the German-speaking Jewish refugees found themselves in an untenable position, bearing the impossible and somewhat illusory memory of a Judeo-German symbiosis, feeling alienated from German-Canadians and estranged from Canadian Jews. Their story and history is that of a successful acculturation and economic adaptation without feeling integrated. Identifying with Canada sometimes becomes a way of solving a biographical dilemma. When the existing framework does

not fit one's story, it is only legitimate to make sense, *à la carte*, of a 'soft' category.

**Works cited**

Abella, Irving. *A Coat of Many Colours – Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada*. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1990.

---------- and Harold Troper. *None Is too Many – Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948* [1983]. Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2000.

Bassler, Gerhard P. *Das deutschkanadische Mosaik heute und gestern*. Ottawa: German-Canadian Congress, 1991.

---------- "Silent or Silenced Co-Founders of Canada? Reflections on the History of German-Canadians". *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 22.1 (1990): 38-46.

Benz, Wolfgang (ed.). *Das Exil der kleinen Leute. Alltagserfahrungen deutscher Juden in der Emigration*. Munich: Beck, 1991.

Bialystock, Franklin. *Delayed Impact – The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.

Cahn, Charles. Personal interview. Montreal, 25/03/2003.

Day, Richard J. F. *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

Draper, Paula J. *Accidental Immigrants – Canada and the Interned Refugees*. PhD-Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1983.

Exton, Eric. *Zaidie Exton's Odyssey*, vol. 1. Toronto: Eric Exton, 1986.

Faist, Thomas. "The Crucial Meso-Level". In Tomas Hammar et al. (eds.). *International Migration, Immobility and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, New York: Berg, 1997, 187-217.

Farges, Patrick. "Culture politique de gauche et immigrants germanophones au Canada après la crise de 1929: une acculturation difficile". In Hélène Roussel et al. (eds.). *Résistances – mouvements sociaux – alternatives utopiques. Hommage à Jean Mortier*. Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2004, 35-45.

Foster, Kate A. *Our Canadian Mosaic*. Toronto: Dominion Council of YWCA, 1926.

Froeschle, Hartmut. *Die Deutschen in Kanada – Eine Volksgruppe im Wandel*. Vienna: Österreichische Landsmannschaft, 1987.

Gibbon, John Murray. *Canadian Mosaic. The Making of a Northern Nation*, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1938.

Grenke, Arthur. *Archival Sources on German-speaking Groups in Canada*. Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1989.

Gürttler, Karin R. *Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft zu Montreal, 1835-1985*. Montreal: German Society of Montreal, 1985.

Hurd, W. Burton. *Racial Origins and Nativity of the Canadian People*. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1937.

Iacovetta, Franca. *Immigrants in English-Canadian Historiography*. Ottawa: Historical Society of Canada, 1997.

Iggers, Wilma A. Personal interviews. Göttingen and Buffalo, 17/02/2003 and 19/08/2003.

---------- "Refugee Women from Czechoslovakia in Canada – An Eyewitness Report". In Sibylle Quack (ed.). *Between Sorrow and Strength – Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*. Washington (DC): Cambridge University Press, 1995, 121-128.

Kelley, Ninette and Michael Trebilcock. *The Making of the Mosaic – A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

Keyserlingk, Robert H. "The Canadian Government's Attitude toward Germans and German Canadians in World War II". *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 16.1 (1984): 16-28.

Koch, Eric. *Deemed Suspect – A Wartime Blunder*. Toronto: Methuen, 1980.

Laqueur, Walter. *Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees From Nazi Germany*. Hanover (NH): Brandeis University Press, 2001.

Loewith, Minna. Personal interview. Lynden (ON), 28/04/2003.

MacLennan, Hugh. *Two Solitudes*. Toronto: Collins, 1945.

Neutel, Walter. "'Geschichte Wie Es Eigentlich Gewesen' or The Necessity of Having Ethnic Archives Programmes". *Archivaria* 7 (1978): 104-109.

Plaut, W. Gunther. *Unfinished Business – An Autobiography*. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1981.

Porter, John. *The Vertical Mosaic – An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

Prutschi, Manuel. "The Zündel Affair". In Alan Davies (ed.). *Antisemitism in Canada – History and Interpretation*. Waterloo (ON): Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992, 249-277.

Puckhaber, Annette. *Ein Privileg für wenige – Die deutschsprachige Migration nach Kanada im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*. Münster: Lit, 2002.

Redfield, Robert, Ralph Linton and Melville J. Herskovits. "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation". *American Anthropologist* 38 (1936): 149-152.

Richler, Mordecai. *The Street* [1969]. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2002.

Roberts, Barbara. *Whence They Came – Deportation from Canada 1900-1935*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988.

Rome, David. *Clouds in the Thirties: On Anti-Semitism in Canada, 1929-1939. A Chapter on Canadian Jewish History*. 13 vols. Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1977-1990.

Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. *Final Report*. Vol. 4: Cultural Contribution of Other Ethnic Groups. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969.

Sauer, Angelika E. "A Matter of Domestic Policy? Canadian Immigration Policy and the Admission of Germans 1945-1950". *Canadian Historical Review* 74 (1993): 226-263.

Schild, Erwin. "A Canadian Footnote to the Holocaust – A Review Essay of 'Deemed Suspect – A Wartime Blunder'". *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 5.1 (1981): 31-44.

Schilling, Rita. *Sudeten in Saskatchewan – A Way to Be Free*. Saskatoon: Apex, 1989.

Tapper, Lawrence F. *Archival Sources on Jewish Canadians*. Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1987.

Traverso, Enzo. *The Jews and Germany – From the "Judeo-German Symbiosis" to the Memory of Auschwitz*. Trans. D. Weissbort. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

Troper, Harold and Morton Weinfeld. *Old Wounds – Jews, Ukrainians and the Hunt for Nazi War Criminals in Canada*. Markham (ON): Penguin, 1988.

Waldston, Gerry. Personal interview. Toronto, 13/05/2004.

Wanka, Willi. *Opfer des Friedens – Die Sudetensiedlungen in Kanada*. Munich: Langen Müller, 1988.

Weinfeld, Morton, William Schaffir and Irwin Cotler (eds.). *The Canadian Jewish Mosaic*. Rexdale (ON): John Wiley & Sons, 1981.

Wieden, Fritz. *The Trans-Canada Alliance of German Canadians – A Study in Culture*. Windsor (ON): Tolle Lege, 1985.

**Cristina Petraş**
**Université « Al. I. Cuza » de Iaşi, Roumanie**
**Université d'Avignon, France**

# Alternance des marqueurs discursifs *but* et *mais* dans un corpus acadien de la Nouvelle-Ecosse : double emploi ou spécialisation sémantique / pragmatique?

**Résumé**

*Notre approche des marqueurs discursifs* but *et* mais *s'inscrit dans l'étude de la restructuration du paradigme des marqueurs discursifs sous l'influence de l'anglais en français acadien de la Nouvelle-Ecosse. En nous appuyant sur l'appareil théorique fourni par la pragmatique et l'analyse de la conversation, notre analyse, qui part d'un corpus constitué de deux émissions d'une radio communautaire de la Nouvelle-Ecosse enregistrées sur internet, aboutit à l'idée que dans certains contextes il s'agit d'une véritable spécialisation des emplois des deux marqueurs discursifs. Si l'on se rapporte au début du contact linguistique dans la communauté étudiée, on conclut à une évolution du paradigme étudié sous l'influence de l'anglais.*

**Abstract**

*Our approach to the discourse markers* but *and* mais, *based on a corpus of two Nova Scotia radio recordings, takes forward the analysis of the restructuring of discourse marker paradigms in Nova Scotian Acadian French in contact with English. According to the theoretical framework provided by pragmatics and conversational analysis, our analysis leads to the conclusion that we are dealing with a specialized use of the two discourse markers.Bearing in mind the beginnings of linguistic contact in our sample community, we can conclude that a real evolution of the paradigm has taken place in contact with English.*

## 1. Cadre théorique du travail

Dans cette partie théorique nous nous proposons d'expliquer notre démarche dans la perspective de la théorie de la variation et du

français zéro de R. Chaudenson (voir, parmi d'autres, Chaudenson et al., 1993). Le "changement (dans la durée)" est conçu, par Chaudenson, comme le résultat de l'action de plusieurs types de facteurs, à savoir les facteurs extrasystémiques, les facteurs intrasystémiques et les facteurs intersystémiques (1993, 10). Comme facteurs extrasystémiques, on peut citer les facteurs sociolinguistiques (pression normative, contact linguistique, statut de la langue, etc.). Les facteurs intrasystémiques sont représentés par les processus autorégulateurs (restructuration), par des changements intervenant dans un point du système et ayant des retombées sur d'autres points du système ou le phénomène de complexification structurale. Comme facteurs intersystémiques on peut mentionner les processus d'interférences (dans le sens de Weinreich) qui peuvent prendre les formes les plus diverses.

Les cas les plus complexes sont évidemment ceux où plusieurs facteurs sont impliqués ; l'introduction d'un élément étranger dans le système (facteur intersystémique), par exemple, peut déclencher une restructuration du système (variation intrasystémique). Le but de notre travail est en fait d'analyser ce processus dans le cas des marqueurs discursifs. Dans le cas des marqueurs discursifs cela se manifeste soit par la substitution de l'élément étranger à son équivalent français, soit par la coexistence des deux équivalents avec une spécialisation sémantique. Notre approche ne pouvant être que synchronique, avec des renvois à d'autres études du même type, il serait peut-être parfois risqué de tirer des conclusions catégoriques concernant l'évolution d'un emprunt chez un même individu ou dans une communauté linguistique. Si donc, par exemple, un emprunt apparaît chez un locuteur en alternance avec son équivalent français, rien ne peut indiquer comment ce phénomène s'est produit, si cela est le résultat d'un emploi collectif ou pas, si ce phénomène est en cours d'évolution. Le cas de substitution totale de l'emprunt à son équivalent français ne peut être envisagé qu'au niveau de la communauté ; au niveau individuel cette situation ne peut être interprétée que comme une reprise et une répétition d'un usage collectif. Certes, les phénomènes sont beaucoup plus complexes et leur analyse nécessiterait l'entreprise d'enquêtes sociolinguistiques de grande envergure, qui prennent en compte les facteurs les plus divers de la variation (âge, sexe, statut socio-professionnel, degré et type de bilinguisme, situation d'interview, etc.).

## 2. Présentation du corpus

Le corpus utilisé pour la rédaction de ce travail a été constitué à partir d'enregistrements d'émissions d'une radio communautaire du Sud-Ouest de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Ces émissions ont été enregistrées du 1er octobre 2004 au 31 janvier  2005 sur internet et elles ne constituent qu'une partie des enregistrements qui vont servir à la constitution du corpus de notre thèse de doctorat. Le corpus restreint de ce travail comprend 2 émissions, d'une durée d'environ 1 heure et 10 minutes.

Il est nécessaire de faire des précisions concernant le type d'émissions retenues. Il s'agit d'une émission thématique, qui traite de sujets médicaux. Nous précisons que les invités ne sont pas forcément des professionnels. Sans qu'une terminologie propre au domaine de la médecine en soit complètement exclue, cette émission se caractérise tout d'abord par le fait qu'elle s'adresse à un public très large, professionnels comme non professionnels.

S'il fallait caractériser notre corpus du point de vue des outils utilisés en (socio)linguistique et plus généralement dans le domaine des sciences humaines, nous dirions que nous avons affaire à une situation formelle (la situation d'interview imposée par une émission de radio) mais nous tenons à souligner le caractère particulier de ce type de corpus. Bien qu'il s'agisse toujours d'une situation d'entretien, notre type de corpus se distingue de l'entretien classique utilisé en sociolinguistique, où, dans la plupart des situations, l'enquêteur est une personne étrangère au groupe. Dans notre corpus, le rôle de l'enquêteur (l'animateur de l'émission, qui dans la plupart des cas connaît ses invités) n'est pas celui du linguiste préoccupé − même dans le cas des entretiens modernes où l'interviewé n'est pas informé du but réel de l'interview, d'orienter l'entretien vers ses buts linguistiques. À notre avis, de ce point de vue, ce type de corpus est plus proche d'un discours authentique que celui produit par l'entretien classique.

Etant donné le type particulier de notre corpus, les seules informations concernant nos locuteurs sont celles fournies, explicitement, dans le cadre de l'émission soit par l'animateur dans la présentation de son invité, soit par le déroulement de l'émission lui-même. Elles concernent la tranche d'âge et le statut professionnel de nos locuteurs. La possibilité d'obtenir des informations implicites n'est pas exclue. Comme tranche d'âge, pour nos locuteurs, il s'agit

d'adultes âgés de plus de 30 ans, la plupart dépassant la cinquantaine. Concernant le statut professionnel, et implicitement le niveau d'études,  nous avons affaire à des catégories très différentes.

Dans ce travail, nous employons les conventions de codage suivantes :  « L » désigne le locuteur, l'exposant désigne, dans le corpus, le numéro de l'émission et le chiffre qui suit le symbole « L », le numéro du locuteur dans l'émission. « L 1 » désignera dans chaque émission l'animateur / l'animatrice. Nous avons retenu 2 des 3 invitées de la première émission (28/01/05), $L^1 2$ et $L^1 4$ et l'invitée de la deuxième émission (27/05/05), $L^2 2$.

### 3. Méthodes et outils de travail

Pour ce travail nous avons retenu, dans le paradigme des marqueurs discursifs, la variable constituée des variantes *but* et *mais*. Nous avons déjà entrepris des analyses de la variable *well* / *ben*.  L'emploi, chez le même locuteur, de l'emprunt anglais et de son équivalent français nous a amenée à nous interroger s'il s'agit d'une spécialisation des deux variantes ou si elles remplissent la même fonction, faisant en fait double emploi. Nous précisons que, par rapport à un marqueur discursif comme *so*, dans aucun des cas analysés, *but* ne s'est complètement substitué à son équivalent français.

Nous avons placé notre analyse à deux niveaux, diachronique et synchronique.

(i) Pour parler de variation dans le temps, il faut prendre en compte un *terminus a quo*. Un indice en est le début du contact entre les deux langues. *Grosso modo*, dans la situation particulière qui nous intéresse dans ce travail, cette période peut être placée au début du $20^e$ siècle.

Les résultats des travaux antérieurs ne peuvent constituer un point de départ qu'avec la précision qu'il s'agit de situations différentes (domaines spatiaux différents, tranche d'âge différente, approche différente). Ainsi Roy (1979) définit-elle deux variables en français de Moncton de l'époque : *ben – mais – but* (+*well*) et *so – ça fait que*. Si Roy remarque un changement en cours (les conjonctions anglaises alternant avec leurs équivalents français), Perrot (1995) parle d'un changement qui semble accompli à l'époque et dans le groupe analysés. Les conjonctions *but* et *so* se sont complètement substituées à leurs équivalents français. Giancarli (2003), à son tour,

dans son analyse de la variable représentée par *ben – mais – but*, parvient à des conclusions différentes par rapport à celles de Roy, concernant l'emploi des trois variantes. Il soutient que ce ne sont pas des emplois aléatoires, mais bien des emplois motivés. Bien que différente du point de vue des méthodes et des outils employés, notre analyse aboutit à la même conclusion.

(ii) Au niveau synchronique, les outils utilisés dans notre analyse sont ceux de la pragmatique, de l'analyse du discours et de l'analyse de la conversation :

(a) l'unité d'analyse est l'*échange* (voir Roulet et al., 1985) ;

(b) nous tenons compte dans notre analyse des facteurs suivants : le type de structure à gauche (appartenant au même locuteur, appartenant à l'interlocuteur ou à l'environnement extraverbal) et la nature linguistique de l'environnement verbal (voir, par exemples, les études de Auchlin, 1981 a et 1981 b) ;

(c) nous faisons appel aux travaux précis portant sur les marqueurs qui nous intéressent, à savoir Ducrot et al., 1980, Rivara, 2004 pour le domaine français, ainsi que Lakoff, 1971 pour le domaine anglais ; notre démarche est très proche de celle de Ducrot et al., 1980 : elle ne tient pas compte, dans l'analyse des marqueurs envisagés, uniquement du contexte explicite, mais aussi du contexte linguistique plus large, du contexte extralinguistique, ainsi que des intentions et des croyances des locuteurs ; elle s'appuie aussi sur l'analyse du type de structure à gauche (voir (b) ci-dessus).

Dans notre analyse nous avons procédé comme il suit :

(i) dans un premier temps nous avons analysé et comparé, ensuite, les valeurs des deux marqueurs discursifs, pour chacun de nos locuteurs ; ce type d'analyse rend compte de la manière dont l'individu organise la matière linguistique en fonction des outils qui lui sont disponibles à un moment donné – emprunt / équivalent français, dans notre cas : soit il utilise indifféremment les deux marqueurs (donc, des cas de double emploi), soit il y a une spécialisation sémantique des emplois des deux marqueurs ;

(ii) nous considérons que l'analyse au niveau de chaque locuteur doit être doublée d'une analyse à un niveau global ; cela nous permettra de tirer des conclusions plus générales et répondra à la question s'il s'agit d'emplois généralisés au niveau d'une communauté

linguistique ; certes, ces données ne peuvent être maniées qu'avec une extrême prudence vu que nous avons affaire à un corpus extrêmement restreint.

Avant d'entreprendre l'analyse des valeurs des deux marqueurs discursifs, remarquons aussi que le nombre d'occurrences du marqueur discursif *mais* est de loin supérieur au nombre d'occurrences de son équivalent *but* et cela pour tous les locuteurs (voir le tableau ci-dessous).

| LOCUTEURS | BUT | MAIS |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| L $^1$2 | 4 | 25 |
| L $^1$4 | 8 | 12 |
| L $^2$2 | 7 | 26 |

### 4. Valeurs des marqueurs discursifs but / mais chez nos locuteurs

Dans ce qui suit nous analyserons les valeurs des deux marqueurs discursifs chez nos locuteurs. Nous avons relevé les principales valeurs et nous avons analysé le comportement des deux marqueurs discursifs en fonction de ces valeurs. Les catégories identifiées sont celles relevées par Ducrot et al., 1980; Rivara; 2004; Lakoff, 1971. A la fin de l'analyse un tableau reprendra le comportement de chacun des deux marqueurs discursifs pour chacune des locutrices.

**4.1.** Nous nous arrêtons premièrement sur deux catégories que nous appelons opposition explicite et opposition implicite. Dans le premier cas il s'agit de l'opposition sémantique qui s'établit terme par terme au niveau lexical et qui coïncide avec la relation d'antonymie (voir Lakoff, 1971). Ce que nous avons appelé opposition implicite correspond à la valeur argumentative décelée par Ducrot et ses collaborateurs et à ce que Lakoff appelle « denial of expectation » (1971, 133). Du point de vue du type de structure, nous avons décelé deux situations.

(i) Une situation très riche en valeurs de par sa nature même nous est fournie par la structure question / réponse. Dans le cas d'une réponse affirmative, on remarque la présence des deux marqueurs discursifs pour restreindre l'extension de la réponse affirmative. Une opposition s'établit alors entre la réponse affirmative (extension maximale) et la restriction imposée par la séquence introduite par *but* et *mais* (les exemples (1), (2), (3) et (4) ci-dessous). Nous avons relevé cet emploi chez deux de nos locutrices (L$^1$2 dans les exemples

(1) et (2) et $L^22$ dans les exemples (3) et (4)). Nous analyserons, dans ce qui suit, en parallèle, les valeurs des deux marqueurs discursifs chez nos locutrices.

(1) (a) $L^12$ : euh tu continues à perdre ta mémoire et progressivement tu perds ton passé t' t'oublies plus en plus là

(b) $L^11$ : le passé

(c) $L^12$ : oui *but* point trop loin comme ton passé d'hier et le mois passé

(d) $L^11$ : ok

(e) $L^12$ : et un an passé

(f) $L^11$ : ok

(g) $L^12$ : *mais* tu t'en souvins encore euh beaucoup

(2) (a) $L^12$ : euh le premier STAGE y a coutume i disent que ça peut durer autour de deux à quatre ans

(b) $L^11$ : deux à quatre

(c) $L^12$ : oui *mais* ça c'est tout individu je veux dire chaque personne va être différent

(3) (a) $L^22$ : pis là y a d'autre monde i faut qu'i se couchiont la WHOLE journée i sont fatiqués puis *needont* dormir

(b) $L^21$ : ça fait que ça ça te peut t'amener à c'te point-là là que faut que tu te couches

(c) $L^22$ : oui

(d) $L^21$ : et puis i faut que tu dormes

(e) $L^22$ : oui *but* c'est USUALLY c'est ç'affecte des différentes personnes différent

(4) (a) $L^21$ : ça fait que ça sera dans la vingtaine ou encore moins que vingt

(b) $L^22$ : euh moi h'en ai entendu des moins que vingt

(c) $L^21$ : oh des moins que vingt

(d) $L^2$2 : oui *mais* ça c'est pas mal   rare *but* /// ça arrive plus' en plus'

Au premier abord, les deux marqueurs discursifs font double emploi : on est, avec les quatre exemples, dans le même type de structure. Mais l'identité de valeur (le double emploi) n'est qu'apparente. La restriction opérée par les deux marqueurs discursifs est différente d'un cas à l'autre. Nous considérons que seul le marqueur *but* introduit une véritable restriction (restriction d'extension). On a affaire à une opposition explicite dans ce cas.

Dans l'exemple (1) on observe que la locutrice $L^1$1 reprend un élément de l'affirmation de son interlocutrice ; cette dernière y répond affirmativement, *but* introduisant une restriction à la réponse initiale. Dans le même échange on remarque la présence du marqueur *mais*, sa fonction étant de relier (g) avec (a), après le développement secondaire représenté par (b), (c), (d), (e) et (f). Dans l'exemple cité, l'intervention de notre locutrice vise à introduire une restriction par rapport à l'acception du terme « passé » ; on a affaire à une restriction de type synecdoque. L'opposition établie par *but* s'opère en fait entre « le passé » (extension maximale)   et « ton passé » (restriction). $L^1$2 intervient lorsque son interlocutrice donne une acception large au syntagme « ton passé » devenu « le passé » chez $L^1$1. Dans l'exemple (3) on signale la même situation que dans (1). Dans ce cas *but* marque une opposition entre l'idée impliquée par « tu » générique et l'idée que chaque personne est différente (opposition donc entre généricité et particularité).

En ce qui concerne l'emploi du marqueur *mais* pour le même type de contexte, nous avons constaté que dans les exemples (2) et (4), il y a deux éléments qui caractérisent le phénomène de restriction ; pour (2), il y a d'une part, la durée de l'étape dont on parle ; il y a, d'autre part, la spécificité de chaque personne devant la maladie ; pour (4), il y a, d'une part, l'âge des sujets atteints par la maladie ; il y a, d'autre part, la fréquence d'apparition de la maladie. *Mais* introduit une restriction, mais pas du même paramètre que celui sur lequel porte l'intervention de l'interlocuteur. L'intervention (c) de (2) sera interprétée en fait comme « il ne faut pas généraliser, chaque personne peut avoir sa propre réaction ». Pour (4), l'intervention (d) doit être interprétée comme « même si ce sont des personnes très jeunes, c'est quand même très rare ». La structure « pas mal + adjectif » va dans le sens de l'intensification de « rare ». La

restriction introduite par « mais » vise en fait à minimiser la portée de l'intervention de l'interlocutrice. Dans ce type de contexte on peut parler d'une opposition implicite, d'un *mais* argumentatif de relation indirecte (voir Rivara, 2004).

(ii) Nous analyserons dans ce qui suit le comportement des deux marqueurs discursifs du point de vue de l'opposition explicite /vs/ implicite dans les cas où le marqueur lie des séquences appartenant au discours du même locuteur. Concernant la répartition de ces valeurs entre les deux marqueurs discursifs, les résultats divergent d'une locutrice à l'autre. Si l'on ne peut pas tirer des conclusions concernant la répartition de valeurs entre les deux marqueurs discursifs, on peut dire avec exactitude que le marqueur *but* n'apparaît jamais pour marquer une opposition explicite (pour cette valeur voir l'emploi du marqueur *mais* dans l'exemple (8) dans **4.3.**).

(5) (a) $L^1 1$ : i sont-ti ensemble

(b) $L^1 4$ : non / pas asteure y ara / aoir soixante ans qu'i sont mariés le cinq février icitte / *but* i sont point ensemble *but* i sont HAPPY / et les NURSE allont les mener tous les fois lui va voir visiter MUM ielle va visiter lui tu sais i sont là i sont dans la même bâtisse

Dans l'exemple (5), le premier *but* marque une opposition entre l'inférence tirée à partir de « y aura soixante ans qu'i sont mariés », à savoir « ils devraient être ensemble » et la séquence introduite par *but*. La valeur que nous avons identifiée pour le marqueur *but* est remplie, dans les corpus analysés par Giancarli, par le marqueur *ben*. Selon lui, *but* apparaît dans le cas d'oppositions linéaires qui ne font pas appel à des inférences. Le second *but* dans l'exemple (5) est de la même nature que le premier. Cette fois-ci l'opposition s'établit entre l'inférence tirée à partir de « i sont point ensemble », à savoir « ils devraient être malheureux » et la séquence introduite par *but*. Dans cet exemple on a donc une structure complexe, où la séquence introduite par le premier *but* sert d'élément d'opposition pour la séquence introduite par le second *but*. On aurait dans ce type de contexte une opposition argumentative de relation directe.

**4.2.** Dans certains contextes les deux marqueurs discursifs n'établissent pas d'opposition proprement dite, mais assurent la cohérence argumentative (reprise de l'argumentation). Concernant la répartition des deux marqueurs chez nos locutrices, les résultats

divergent d'une locutrice à l'autre (voir le tableau dans la section consacrée aux conclusions).

(6) (a) $L^14$ : moi je *deale* avec la maladie à ma mère et mon père euh c'est point pour être mal *mais* moi je *deale* mieux que ma sœur peut *dealer*

> (b) $L^11$ : oui

> (c) $L^14$: *but* a fait bien a m'aïde beaucoup

> (d) $L^11$ : oui

> (e) $L^14$ : je nous aïdons iune à l'autre

> (f) $L^12$ : oui

> (g) $L^14$ : je sons là pour iune à l'autre / *but* moi moi je pense / WELL c'est pour tu sais / *but* c'est on peut point rexpliquer

> (7) (a) $L^14$ : qu'alle avait ça parce que je savions point qu'alle était malade alle a jamais jamais été malade jamais alle était point SO tout ça que MUM a c'est rinqu'Alzheimer mon père a plus' de complications qu'ielle *mais* ielle a rien / comparer ça que lui a / *mais* ielle est tranquille c'est comme j'ai dit a reste là et a broche encore puis a fait de la brochure et

> (b) $L^11$ : hm

> (c) $L^14$ : *but* ça qu'a s'en souvint a peut le faire puis ça qu'est dans asteure c'est pus là

Il n'y a pas, dans ces exemples, de rapport d'opposition proprement dit. On peut parler d'opposition uniquement au niveau extratextuel. Dans l'exemple (6), on a comme constituant à gauche une séquence appartenant à la même locutrice. Le premier *but* marque la reprise de l'intervention après la réaction de l'interlocutrice. Le rapport adversatif se manifeste dans ce cas entre la séquence introduite par *but* et toute la situation antérieure. Il s'agirait peut-être même, avec le deuxième *but*, d'un changement du thème. Avec le troisième on peut même parler d'une sorte de *but* cliché qui marque le début d'une intervention abandonnée par la suite. Dans (7), *but* intervient plutôt pour renforcer ce qui suit (qui constitue en fait une explication de toute l'intervention de la locutrice). La locutrice essaie de relier

non pas avec le fragment antérieur, mais avec le contexte non-textuel. On remarque également que ce *but* apparaît après l'intervention de l'interlocutrice ; il y a un besoin, après une interruption, d'introduire ce marqueur qui renvoie à la situation antérieure. Il faut noter dans le même exemple l'opposition entre les deux marqueurs discursifs, opposition qui traduit des valeurs propres : si *but*, comme on vient de le montrer, établit un rapport d'opposition au niveau extratextuel, avec *mais* on est dans l'explicite (pour le premier *mais*, l'opposition se fait terme à terme : « plus de complications » vs « rien »).

**4.3.** Une autre catégorie sur laquelle il faut s'arrêter est ce que nous avons appelé l'emploi métalinguistique.

(i) Une première sous-catégorie est représentée par des exemples comme (8). Dans ce cas l'opposition s'établit au niveau du contexte. Dans notre corpus, cette valeur est assurée par seul le marqueur *but*.

> (8) (a) $L^2$2 : SO ta BRAIN a de la a pense tu sais j'aimerais de marcher j'aimerais de mettre un pied devant l'autre puis marcher *but* c'te message-là se rend point à tes jambes pour qu'i te dit quoi faire SO ça fait que des fois on a de la misère à marcher ou on pourrait point marcher aussi vite et puis y a point rinque marcher ç'affecte comme y a du / tout le monde est différent tout le monde a MS il avont la même maladie *mais* ça les affecte tout' différent

> (b) $L^2$1 : asteure es-tu en train de me dire que toi asteure toi tu tu vas peut-être point avoir tu as un problème de marcher c'est ça

> (c) $L^2$2 : oui moi ça affecte plus à marcher *mais* d'autre monde que tu parles à ç'affecte plus' ieur bras

Dans (8) on remarque l'apparition du marqueur discursif *but* après un constituant à gauche formé de plusieurs phrases. On n'a pas de rapport d'opposition entre deux segments, mais plutôt un rapport d'opposition au niveau du texte. D'ailleurs le segment à gauche est repris par « c't message-là ». Il nous semble que la séquence introduite par *but* constitue une sorte de commentaire par rapport au segment antérieur. La généricité exprimée par le pronom « tu » à valeur générique et l'emploi du possessif avec la même valeur en témoignent.

Remarquons le fait qu'avec le marqueur *mais*, l'opposition peut être reconstituée terme à terme, à partir du contexte linguistique immédiat (voir **4.1**) : « la même maladie » vs « différent » ; « moi » vs « d'autre monde », « plus à marcher » vs « plus' ieur bras ».

(ii) Une valeur proche de celle que nous venons d'étudier est fournie par l'exemple (9).

> (9) L$^2$2 : pis ç'affecte tout le monde différent comme moi-même ma fatigue est plus' PHYSICAL c'est si que je marche beaucoup ou que : que je fais du PHYSICAL WORK WHICH moi j'appelle du travail *but* c'est point beaucoup et pis mon BODY vient fatiqué i peut pus *fonctionner* j'arais rinque besoin de m'assir pis me reposer pour un quart d'heure ou plus' et puis là ça vent BACK lorsque je vas BACK travailler

*But*, dans ce cas, introduit un ajout / explication. La locutrice revient et explique ce qu'elle appelle « travail ». L'opposition s'établit alors entre l'acception qu'elle donne à « travail » et ce qu'on comprend en général par « travail ».

> (10) (a) L$^1$2 : euh tendance à se perdre à les directions des dates et j'ai eu beaucoup de monde qui veniont qui disont i s'avont aperçu que ieur houmme ou ieur femme avaient Alzheimer quand-ce qu'i *driviont* en quèque part qu'il aviont été tout le temps tout d'un coup il étiont perdu
>
> (b) L$^1$3 : oui
>
> (c) L$^1$2 : tu sais *but* il aimont point de montrer qu'i sont perdus euh ça fait euh puis il avont de la difficulté à prononcer des mots ou trouver les bons mots pour

Dans (10) le marqueur *but* introduit un commentaire par rapport au fragment antérieur. L'existence de deux plans d'énonciation, celui du dit et celui du dire est illustrée clairement par la présence d'un autre marqueur, *tu sais*. Il s'agit donc bien d'un emploi métalinguistique.

## 5. Conclusions

Ce qui avait déclenché notre réflexion c'était la question : la
présence, chez un même locuteur, dans un même contexte, de
l'emprunt anglais *but* et de son équivalent français *mais*,
correspondait-elle à une spécialisation sémantique / pragmatique de
chacun des deux marqueurs discursifs ou bien l'emploi des deux
marqueurs discursifs se fait-il de façon aléatoire, et s'agit-il donc
d'un double emploi ?

Le tableau ci-dessous reprend les valeurs des deux marqueurs
discursifs pour chaque locuteur. Nous avons marqué chaque fois les
occurrences des deux marqueurs discursifs. Là où le corpus ne nous
fournit pas de données, c'est la marque 0 qui apparaît dans la case.

| VALEUR PRINCIPALE | VALEURS SECONDAIRES | $L^1 2$ | $L^1 4$ | $L^2 2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Restriction | Relation explicite (*but*) | *but* | 0 | *but* |
| | Relation implicite (*mais*) | *mais* | 0 | *mais* |
| Opposition | Explicite | *mais* | *mais* | *mais* |
| | Implicite | *but* / *mais* | *but* / *mais* | *mais* |
| Reprise de l'argumentation | | 0 | *But* | *but* / *mais* |
| Emploi métalinguistique | Opposition par rapport au Contexte | 0 | *But* | *but* |
| | Explication / commentaire | *but* | 0 | *but* |

L'analyse que nous avons entreprise nous permet de tirer des
conclusions tant au niveau individuel qu'au niveau global. Nous
précisons que notre analyse s'appuie sur les données fournies par
notre corpus.

La comparaison des valeurs des deux marqueurs discursifs chez
chacune de nos locutrices, suivie par une analyse globale, conduit
aux conclusions suivantes :

(i) pour la valeur que nous avons appelée restriction, les deux marqueurs se partagent les deux types de valeurs ; on enregistre le même comportement chez deux locutrices ($L^12$ et $L^22$) ;

(ii) en ce qui concerne le type d'opposition, explicite ou implicite, on ne peut pas parler d'une répartition précise des deux valeurs entre les deux marqueurs discursifs (ainsi chez les locutrices $L^12$ et $L^14$ l'opposition implicite est marquée tant par *but* que par *mais*); on remarque pourtant que *but* n'apparaît jamais pour marquer une opposition explicite ;

(iii) chez la locutrice $L^14$, seul le marqueur *but* est employé pour reprendre l'argumentation, alors que chez la locutrice $L^22$, la même valeur est assurée par les deux marqueurs ;

(iv) l'emploi métalinguistique semble être entièrement réservé au marqueur *but* ; cela pourrait s'expliquer par le besoin que le locuteur ressent de marquer explicitement le passage à un autre plan, celui du commentaire par rapport à ce qu'il vient de dire ; il le fait en employant un élément étranger.

On peut donc répondre affirmativement à la question annoncée dans le titre de ce travail, sans réserve toutefois avec la précision que ce ne sont là que des conclusions provisoires. Si nous avons pu identifier des répartitions des deux marqueurs discursifs en fonction de certains critères chez nos locutrices, nous ne pouvons pas encore conclure qu'une fonction précise est assurée uniquement par un certain marqueur. En même temps, nous nous demandons si la troisième variante identifiée par Roy et Giancarli (*ben*) existe – avec cette valeur adversative – dans la communauté que nous étudions. Certes, l'élargissement de notre corpus nous permettra d'affiner l'analyse.

Après cette analyse synchronique, nous pouvons revenir à la problématique générale du changement linguistique qui nous intéresse. Comme nous l'avons déjà souligné, les données fournies par les auteurs qui se sont intéressés à la même problématique ne pouvaient être employées qu'avec précaution. Tout d'abord, il ne s'agit pas du même type de démarche ; deuxièmement, bien qu'il s'agisse chez tous du français acadien, on n'a pas affaire exactement au même domaine.

Si nous prenons comme point de départ le début du contact entre les deux langues dans la communauté, à savoir le début du 20$^e$ siècle,

nous pouvons conclure à une évolution du paradigme des marqueurs discursifs dans le sens d'une réorganisation de la matière sémantique en fonction des valeurs du marqueur français et de son équivalent anglais.

## Bibliographie

Auchlin, Antoine. « Réflexions sur les marqueurs de structuration de la conversation ». *Etudes de linguistique appliquée*, 44 (1981), 88-103.

----------. « Mais heu, pis bon, ben alors, quoi ! Marqueurs de structuration de la conversation et complétude ».

*Cahiers de linguistique française*, 2 (1981), 141-159.

Chaudenson, Robert, Mougeon, Raymond, Beniak, Edouard. *Vers une approche panlectale de la variation du français*. Paris : Didier Érudition. 1993.

Ducrot, Oswald et al. *Les mots du discours*. Paris : Minuit. 1980 (chapitre 3 : « Mais occupe-toi d'Amélie »). 93-130.

Giancarli. Pierre-Don. *« Ben / mais / but : pluralité organisée de coordonnants adversatifs en acadien traditionnel et en chiac du sud-est du Nouveau-Brunswick, Canada ». In André Magord (éd.).* L'Acadie plurielle : dynamiques identitaires collectives et développement au sein des réalités acadiennes. *Moncton : Université de Moncton, Centre d'Études Acadiennes. 2003. 229-265.*

Lakof, Robin. *« IF's, AND's and BUT's about conjunction ». In Ch. Fillmore et J. Langendoen (éd.).* Studies in Linguistic Semantics. *New York : Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971. 114-149.*

Perrot, Marie-Eve. *Aspects fondamentaux du métissage français / anglais dans le chiac de Moncton (Nouveau Brunswick, Canada)*, thèse pour le doctorat. Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle. 1995.

Rivara, René. « Mais, le *but* anglais et les subordonnées de concession ». In René Rivara. *Pragmatique eténonciation. Études linguistiques (Recueil d'articles).* Aix-en-Provence : Publications de l'Université de Provence. 2004. 95-109.

Roulet, Édy et al. *L'articulation du discours en français contemporain*. Berne, Francfort-s Main, New York : Peter Lang. 1985.

Roy, Marie-Marthe. *Les conjonctions anglaises but et so dans le français de Moncton*, thèse de maîtrise. Université du Québec. 1979.

**Yvonne Völkl**
**Université de Graz, Autriche**

# Solitude entraînée par la guerre dans *Un amour maladroit* et *La femme de Loth* de Monique Bosco

**Résumé**

*Cet essai étudie l'effet de repliement qu'entraîne la participation involontaire à la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale des héroïnes dans deux romans de l'écrivaine franco-canadienne, Monique Bosco :* Un amour maladroit *et* La femme de Loth. *Après l'évocation du terme «solitude», qui connaît son histoire propre au Québec, et une présentation de l'écrivaine, l'essai examine la guerre en elle-même, c'est-à-dire une guerre extérieure, mais aussi une guerre intérieure, celle qu'on livre avec soi. En fait, ce sont les répercussions de la bataille réelle qui empêchent les héroïnes de vivre une vie dite normale, en interaction avec les autres. Les femmes se retirent de plus en plus en elles-mêmes. Elles ignorent la vie en dehors de leur propre univers puisque le passé les hante dans leur for intérieur. Afin de trouver un moyen de se libérer de cette obsession, elles doivent se souvenir de ce qui est advenu pour être capable de l'oublier. Car ce n'est qu'en acceptant leur passé qu'elles peuvent enfin s'accepter elles-mêmes, et trouver le chemin de leur solitude.*

**Abstract**

*The essay explores two novels,* Un amour maladroit *and* La femme de Loth, *by the French Canadian author Monique Bosco, and in particular the withdrawal in themselves of the two protagonists as a result of their involuntary participation in the Second World War. After a discussion of the term solitude, which has its own history in Quebec, and a presentation of the novelist, it focuses on the experience of war, both as an external phenomenon and as an internal battle fought within oneself.*

## La « solitude québécoise »

La perception commune du terme « solitude » dans l'usage quotidien du Québec date de la publication du roman *Two Solitudes*, écrit en

1945 par le Canadien-anglais de la Nouvelle-Ecosse Hugh MacLennan, qui a pour sujet l'amour fatidique entre un franco-catholique et une anglo-protestante. Depuis ce temps, le mot « solitude » représente une unité d'information culturelle, dénotant la relation tendue qui caractérise les communautés francophone et anglophone.

Le Québec bipolaire s'est cependant ouvert vers d'autres ethnies dans les décennies suivant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale et l'expression « deux solitudes » s'est adaptée à la réalité de *la mosaïque canadienne*. [1] Depuis les années 1980, on peut donc constater une période surnommée l'époque des « trois solitudes »[2] qui succède au clivage entre les « deux solitudes ».

Sur le plan littéraire, ce terme qui, en anglais, sert de titre à un livre de Michael Greenstein, se réfère aux auteurs juifs telle Monique Bosco qui se sont exilés au Canada après la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale et qui ont contribué considérablement à la littérature canadienne-anglaise et canadienne-française. Dans *Third Solitudes*, Greenstein met en relief le fait que la plupart des Juifs s'exilant au Canada sont venus s'établir à Montréal dans le *no man's land* entre les Français dans l'Est et les Anglais dans l'Ouest. Coincés entre les deux solitudes classiques, les immigrants luttaient avec leur marginalité, en quête de prestige et de reconnaissance.

Selon Greenstein, la littérature juive canadienne témoigne d'un sentiment amer qui provient de toute évidence de la vie en exil et du manque d'abri. L'auteur juif canadien est déchiré entre la vie au Canada et le passé riche en Europe. Entre la vie dans le Nouveau Monde et les traditions puissantes du Vieux Monde, il cherche une patrie pour se reposer. Mais il n'existe pas de lieu convenable, car les deux endroits constituent des parties essentielles de son identité personnelle. Il en résulte que l'auteur se déploie sur deux mondes distincts et incompatibles, ce qui mène au pire à la perte de l'un ou de l'autre. Voilà en fait d'où vient son rôle de médiateur, dont le but est de maintenir un véritable dialogue entre ces deux flancs.


## Monique Bosco

Monique Bosco[3] est l'une des écrivaines immigrantes de provenance juive qui a choisi le Québec comme lieu de sa création littéraire. Née le 8 juin 1927 à Vienne en Autriche, elle est la fille de parents

israélites d'origine autrichienne, Stella (Ménassé) et Robert Boscovitch. Elle est une double-émigrée qui change de pays pour la première fois à l'âge de quatre ans. C'est en 1931, à l'avant-veille de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, que ses parents divorcent et qu'elle quitte Vienne avec sa mère pour s'établir en France. C'est à Paris puis à Lyon, qu'elle reçoit son éducation primaire et secondaire. Cependant, l'imminence de la guerre contraint vite Monique Bosco à abandonner les cours qu'elle suivait alors au lycée.

Après la fin de la guerre et une fois majeure, elle décide en 1948 de s'installer au Canada, plus précisément à Montréal. De son plein gré, elle reste et s'inscrit à la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Montréal afin de continuer ses études. La deuxième émigration effectuée, les études intensives commencent. Deux ans plus tard, le recteur de l'Université de Montréal lui accorde son baccalauréat. En 1951, Monique Bosco obtient une maîtrise après laquelle elle s'engage dans un doctorat. Juste deux ans après le commencement, elle acquiert un doctorat en littérature pour sa thèse sur *L'isolement dans le roman canadien-français*. Avec ce travail, Monique Bosco s'aventure en terrain plutôt vierge, puisque sa thèse représente l'une des premières œuvres sur la littérature canadienne-française.[4]

Depuis ses années d'études, elle travaille également comme journaliste pour une multitude de périodiques et comme attachée de presse pour Radio Canada International. En 1962, elle accepte le poste de professeure[5] titulaire de littérature française à l'Université de Montréal où elle enseignera pendant plus de trente ans. À partir de 1961, elle publie plusieurs romans, des poèmes et une pièce dramatique: *Le cri de la folle enfouie dans l'asile de la mort*. Depuis 1997, elle n'enseigne plus et profite de sa retraite à Montréal.

Le premier roman de l'écrivaine « austro-canadienne » et d'expression française s'appelle *Un amour maladroit* (1961), pour lequel elle remporte le « First Novel Award » de l'Association américaine Phi Beta Gamma. Une décennie plus tard, en 1971, on lui attribue le « Prix du Gouverneur général » pour *La femme de Loth* (1970), qui est traduit en anglais par John Glassco et publié sous le titre « Lot's wife » en 1975, et qui remporte aussi un grand succès. Pour le recueil de poèmes *Miserere, 77–90* (1991), Monique Bosco reçoit le « Prix de poésie Alain-Grandbois » de l'Académie des lettres du Québec en 1993. En 1996, elle est honorée pour

l'ensemble de son œuvre avec le « Prix Athanase-David du Québec », un des plus anciens prix culturels québécois.[6]

Dans les romans *Un amour maladroit* et *La femme de Loth*, Monique Bosco fait naître deux femmes entre vingt et quarante ans, de provenance juive. Rachel et Hélène vivent tranquillement sans maris et sans enfants dans un petit appartement montréalais, entourées de la réalité franco-catholique dans laquelle elles végètent, et s'apitoient sur elles-mêmes et sur la vie. Cette incapacité à être heureuse ainsi que de prendre une place satisfaisante dans la société hétérogène du Québec, est mise en rapport avec l'enfance difficile des narratrices qu'elles racontent chacune à la première personne. Leur situation s'explique par trois raisons qui se cumulent et se renforcent mutuellement : d'abord, il s'agit d'une jeunesse sans père ou avec un père absent parce qu'occupé à d'autres engagements. Ensuite, les héroïnes ont connu la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale et ont émigré au Canada français. Enfin, elles se sont retrouvées dans des relations amoureuses frustrantes.

Avec ces romans, Monique Bosco prend donc le rôle de médiatrice dont parle Greenstein. Ici – et aussi dans certains romans qui suivent – la romancière se consacre au sujet de la femme désertée, qui, vivant à Montréal, est hantée par sa vie ou par celle des ses proches parents en Europe. Ce sont les souvenirs douloureux de là-bas qui éloignent les héroïnes de la réalité d'ici et qui expliquent que les protagonistes se retirent ainsi dans un isolement qui est à la fois physique et psychique.

### La guerre extérieure et intérieure

La guerre est une « lutte armée entre groupes sociaux […], entre États, considérée comme un phénomène social et historique », lit-on dans le grand Robert de la langue française. Un peu plus loin, une citation prégnante saute aux yeux: « La guerre est une chose si horrible que je m'étonne comment le seul nom n'en donne pas de l'horreur » (Bossuet, *Pensées chrétiennes et morales*, XXXVI). En conséquence, alors que le monde occidental a aujourd'hui la chance de connaître une vie paisible, l'évocation même de ce mot devrait nous horrifier. Donc imaginons-nous l'horreur et la peine de ceux et celles qui l'ont endurée.

Cependant, avant d'évoquer les répercussions de l'acte belliqueux, abordons les diverses natures qui peuvent contribuer à l'éclatement d'une guerre. La gamme s'étend d'un acte déclencheur venant d'un

seul personnage (Première et Deuxième Guerres Mondiales) jusqu'à l'oppression d'une ethnie, qui se forme et se révolte (la guérilla en Amérique Latine). Peuvent s'y ajouter des raisons religieuses (diffusion de la foi), économiques (convoitise des ressources naturelles), et gouvernementales (peur de perdre le pouvoir), mais aussi des actes terroristes que les gouvernements dirigeants utilisent comme justification morale de l'entrée en guerre.

Aussi nombreuses que soient les raisons initiatrices d'un conflit armé, les conséquences restent toujours les mêmes. Il y a un trop grand nombre de morts, surtout parmi les soldats se battant sur le front, mais aussi parmi la population civile qui n'est jamais épargnée. Elle doit se battre avec les pertes de l'infrastructure et des lieux de travail d'un côté, et avec les chagrins affreux entraînés par la perte de ses biens et/ou de ses proches parents de l'autre. Fréquemment, elle est obligée de faire face à l'hostilité et à la méfiance de ses voisins, ainsi qu'à la peur perpétuelle d'être assassinée.

Une fois cette guerre extérieure finie, les répercussions douloureuses de la réalité martiale ne s'arrêtent malheureusement pas. Après la fin des batailles physiques, c'est souvent un autre combat, plus atroce et plus long, c'est-à-dire une guerre intérieure – celle avec soi-même – qui commence pour beaucoup de gens qui ont participé, enduré et survécu à ce temps de privation et de misère. L'assimilation de ces événements souvent traumatisants est d'autant plus difficile pour ceux qui ont éprouvé des crimes de guerre comme des tortures ou des violations.

Or, ce sont les enfants qui sont particulièrement affectés et qui ont généralement le plus de problèmes avec la compréhension d'événements aussi terribles. Le fait que les enfants se trouvent au milieu de leur développement, que leur corps soit en croissance et qu'ils apprennent et mûrissent encore, les rend notamment vulnérables. Chaque expérience est renforcée par cette réalité, puisque le corps et l'esprit ne peuvent jamais rattraper la jeunesse manquée. Pour eux, la guerre est comme le pire des cauchemars qu'on puisse s'imaginer. Grandir en temps de guerre laisse donc des cicatrices à l'âme et parfois aussi au corps d'une jeune personne. Vu sous cet angle, les impacts physiques et psychiques caractérisent le temps d'après-guerre. Ceux-ci se construisent l'une sur l'autre et se renforcent mutuellement.[7]

*Un amour maladroit*

Dans *Un amour maladroit*, en particulier le double impact de la guerre sur les conditions de vie, comme son retentissement postérieur dans l'âme de la protagoniste, sont clairement visibles. Semblable à un journal intime, l'héroïne homodiégetique *raconte* toutes les privations qu'elle a dû subir pendant les années de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale et même avant.

Premièrement, il y a son père dont elle est privée à l'âge de cinq ans. Celui-ci « était devenu un sioniste convaincu et avait fui les responsabilités familiales pour chercher refuge en Terre promise » (Bosco, 1961, 112). En dépit de cette réalité, Rachel, qui ne l'apprend qu'à la fin de la guerre, considère sa propre apparence physique comme la raison de sa fuite. Avec ces reproches en tête, elle souffre de l'entourage féminin (composé de sa mère, sa sœur, sa grand-mère et sa tante) qui ne lui permet pas d'établir la relation père-fille indispensable à son évolution psychosociale. « Il n'est pas bon de demeurer toujours dans un monde sans homme, » (Bosco, 1961, 195) disait souvent sa grand-mère et dans le cas de Rachel, elle avait finalement raison. Grandir sans autorité paternelle retentit, dès sa plus tendre enfance, entre autres sur ses résultats scolaires qui sont inférieurs dans plusieurs disciplines dont le dessin, la peinture, le chant et la gymnastique. En outre, Rachel témoigne d'un handicap social qui l'empêche de se faire des amies parmi ses camarades de classe.

Une deuxième privation, qui renforce les problèmes de comportement, part de la relation insolite avec sa mère, Marguerite, qui lutte elle-même contre une propre guerre intérieure par suite de la disparition de son mari. Marguerite est une femme inaccessible qui suit la devise: « [m]oins on aime, moins on souffre » (Bosco, 1961, 35). Il s'ensuit qu'elle a « horreur des effusions » (Bosco, 1961, 14) et ne se permet pas de contact physique avec Rachel et sa sœur cadette – ni d'embrassements, ni de baisers pour dire bonne nuit. Pire, aborder les thèmes qui lui semblent importants est impensable pour Rachel:

> Je ne savais comment révéler à ma mère que je comptais sur elle pour m'éclairer en cette douloureuse adolescence où je me sentais si affreusement seule et démunie. J'aurais aimé qu'elle m'explique la guerre,

> notre guerre à nous, qu'elle me parle aussi de la paix,
> de l'avenir et de l'amour. (Bosco, 1961, 88)

Au bout du compte, Marguerite ajoute au vide psychique, qu'elle laisse à ses enfants, une absence physique puisqu'elle s'engage dans la Résistance. Quand Rachel a environ quatorze ans, sa mère, semblable à une criminelle, disparaît de l'appartement où les membres de la famille (maintenant avec un oncle par alliance) vivent tous ensemble et ne laisse derrière elle qu'une lettre dissimulée parmi ses vêtements. Cette note contient une courte explication de son départ, mais aucun mot d'affection à l'intention de ses filles, ce qui aurait été si important pour elles dans cette situation pénible. Au lieu d'éprouver de l'amour et de la douleur, Marguerite préfère ne rien sentir du tout.

Ensuite, Rachel perd une autre connexion avec le monde extérieur quand son oncle par alliance, qui ne montre pas non plus d'affection pour les enfants et ne les perçoit que comme un fardeau menaçant sa propre existence et celle de sa femme, lui enlève la liberté de sortir. Son oncle lui interdit même de fréquenter l'école parce qu'elle représente un danger pour toute la famille en raison de son « fort type sémite » (Bosco, 1961, 79). Provisoirement isolée du monde extérieur, cette réclusion domestique renforce la vie retirée et la solitude de la petite héroïne qui fuit dans un monde imaginaire dans lequel elle rêve de retrouver le père perdu – un rêve qui ne se réalisera pas. Il n'y a qu'avec sa grand-mère qu'elle maintient une relation tendre et profonde qui s'intensifie avec le temps. Mais l'irruption brutale de la guerre, qui les met en grand danger, finit par interrompre également cette relation cordiale, lorsque toute la famille se voit contrainte de se dissocier. Cette séparation, qui devait être aussi la dernière rencontre entre Rachel et sa grand-mère, représente une rupture significative pour Rachel :

> Jusque-là, elle [la grand-mère] m'avait protégée avec
> tendresse et amour, en m'acceptant dans ma vérité la
> plus profonde. Désormais, j'étais livrée uniquement à
> moi-même ; plus jamais je ne pourrais compter sur une
> tendresse totale et maternelle. (Bosco, 1961, 104)

Qui plus est, sa tante et son oncle la séparent aussi de sa sœur. Un déménagement de plus qui, du reste, ne devait pas être son dernier lieu de séjour jusqu'à la Libération, l'attend; cette fois-ci, elle va vivre toute seule chez un vieux couple qui paraît aussi affligé par son

arrivée qu'elle-même. Désormais, Rachel, qui est mal à l'aise à la campagne, se sent complètement anéantie et délaissée puisqu'il ne lui reste « vraiment plus personne à aimer » (Bosco, 1961, 105). La guerre lui enlève d'un jour à l'autre tout ce qui lui est le plus cher – sa famille – son père, sa mère, sa grand-mère et sa sœur.

Après cet arrachement, elle ne peut plus revenir en arrière. Les retrouvailles avec la mère après la fin de la guerre l'accentue encore: « C'était une autre femme, ce n'était plus ma mère » (Bosco, 1961, 111), affirme Rachel. De même, la relation étroite avec sa sœur s'effrite complètement avec le mariage et la grossesse de celle-ci. Tandis qu'au lendemain de la guerre, « [l]a vie 'normale' repr[end] » (Bosco, 1961, 113) pour les autres, Rachel se sent toujours perdue et désolée. Elle avait « tant compté sur le bonheur de la liberté, » mais sa « liberté semblait peser plus lourd que la captivité des années passées » (Bosco, 1961, 113). Au cours de la guerre, Rachel devait mener une vie en cachette par pure nécessité de survie; à l'avenir, elle sera libre de choisir sa manière de vivre et c'est justement ce qui lui fait peur. Elle n'a jamais été obligée de prendre de décision ni de porter la responsabilité de ses actes. Ce n'est donc pas surprenant que la protagoniste vit un état de guerre intérieure, se retire de plus en plus, et tombe dans d'autres dépendances dans les années qui suivent.

En 1946, Rachel déménage à Montréal où elle rencontre l'arrogant reporter Yves Dumont dont elle tombe amoureuse. Peu après, elle en devient la maîtresse, bien qu'il lui inflige des humiliations et des vexations à l'infini. C'est notamment à travers l'attachement unilatéral pour Yves, qui symbolise pour elle la gaieté et l'insouciance de la jeunesse, que Rachel essaie d'échapper à sa solitude et de retrouver sa joie de vivre. L'inverse se produit malheureusement puisque la relation maladroite avec Yves lui rappelle, plus que jamais, les douleurs de la guerre.

> Tout ce que j'avais pu souffrir ou éprouver, durant la guerre, m'atteignait à neuf, avec une lucidité que les étranges circonstances dans lesquelles nous avions vécu n'avaient pas permise plus tôt. (Bosco, 1961, 178)

Vers la fin du récit, elle prend conscience de la raison pour laquelle elle a permis cette liaison déchirante et destructrice. Elle remarque que le dédain d'Yves « justifiait les dédains passés. 'Je ne serai

jamais aimée.' J'y prenais un souffrant plaisir » (Bosco, 1961, 193). Seul le recours à un thérapeute l'aide à ouvrir les yeux. Avec son aide et dans une rétrospective délibérée, elle réussit enfin à interpréter son passé et à recomposer son identité déchirée par les privations multiples suscitées par la guerre et renforcées par cette étrange relation. Enfin, elle trouve la force de rompre avec Yves Dumont et de se résigner à son sort. À l'aide des séances chez le psy, elle comprend également que le bonheur a son prix. Au bout du compte, le lecteur peut même reprendre espoir, car Rachel ressent qu'elle est « prête à l'attendre [le bonheur] et […] à rêver du lendemain » ainsi qu'à « croire à nouveau en l'avènement fabuleux d'un amour véritable » (Bosco, 1961, 213).

### La femme de Loth

Il est intéressant de constater que le troisième livre, publié environ une décennie après le premier, approfondit, en insistant sur la répétition obsessive, l'espace clos et les nombreux dédoublements, les thèmes abordés dans *Un amour maladroit* (Greenstein, 1989, 164). Pour insuffler la vie, comme pour donner une voix, une personnalité et une identité propre à la protagoniste, Bosco applique à nouveau le procédé du monologue intérieur. S'y ajoute un style particulier de rédaction: il s'agit, en somme, d'une lettre de suicide. La narratrice, Hélène, a quitté son domicile de Montréal pour Venise après avoir été abandonnée par son amant Pierre avec lequel elle a maintenu une relation secrète pendant près de dix ans. Cette rupture, qui ouvre le récit, constitue l'expérience clé du voyage fatal à Venise au cours duquel Hélène est déterminée à se noyer dans la mer Adriatique mais non sans avoir d'abord mis par écrit sa vie, comme nous apprend ce passage: « Quand j'aurai soigneusement décrit les étapes qui ont rendu ce suicide nécessaire, inévitable, je le vivrai. Seule délivrance possible » (Bosco, 1970, 92).

Dans ce roman, les répercussions de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale ainsi que la perception de l'autre jouent un rôle fondamental dans la vie retirée d'Hélène. En effet, sa retraite se prépare déjà une génération avant sa propre naissance, à savoir dès le mariage de ses parents, mariage qui avait lieu sans l'accord de leurs familles respectives, qui, depuis, ont rompu tous les liens. Le fossé social entre les amoureux était trop grand pour qu'une union ait pu être approuvée par les familles: le père d'Hélène est issu d'une famille catholique pauvre de marchands d'huile et de savon de Toulon. Et lorsqu'il s'est rendu à Paris contre la volonté de son père, il a fait la

connaissance de la mère d'Hélène qui, comme « [u]ne fille de rabbin, par-dessus le marché » (Bosco, 1970, 23), a du sang juif dans les veines. Un mariage était donc mal venu, tout particulièrement à l'époque de la rencontre du jeune homme et de la jeune femme, c'est-à-dire entre la Première et la Deuxième Guerre Mondiales, lorsque l'antisémitisme français est encore modéré, mais se développe déjà. Dans les régions provinciales surtout, là où le pourcentage de travailleurs juifs est beaucoup plus bas qu'à Paris, leur union constitue une véritable violation des bonnes mœurs (Benbassa, 2001, 407).

À la dissociation des familles parentales s'ajoute une rupture spirituelle pour la mère d'Hélène: elle rompt avec la religion de ses parents et insiste pour se faire baptiser afin d'être en mesure de se marier avec le père d'Hélène à l'église. Or, Hélène est née dans une famille qui habite à l'écart de la protection familiale et se trouve hors de la communauté juive et hors du cercle catholique: malgré le mariage religieux et la conversion volontaire, ni le père ni la mère ne sont pratiquants. Hélène reçoit tout de même le baptême afin de tenter une réconciliation avec les parents du père, ce qui, cependant, reste sans succès et Hélène ne fera jamais la connaissance de ses grands-parents paternels.

Seules quelques rencontres avec sa grand-mère maternelle lui sont accordées pendant la vie à Paris. Ces visites sont d'une grande importance pour Hélène parce qu'elles l'aident à comprendre sa propre identité et à découvrir en elle-même les traits de cette grand-mère qui ne lui parle jamais et ne la touche que du regard. Après les dernières retrouvailles, Hélène s'aperçoit qu'elle a non seulement hérité de sa ressemblance physique, mais aussi de ses chagrins et de sa rancune. L'héroïne est convaincue que sa provenance juive la condamne à souffrir, car depuis toujours la vie des Juifs a été accompagnée de peines, de pertes et de persécutions.

Pour son grand-père maternel, Hélène n'a que des mots sévères: « Je ne l'ai jamais vu. Je n'ai pas su, non plus, dans quel camp on réduisit à néant l'irréductible aïeul qui refusa de revoir sa fille, de connaître sa seule petite-fille » (Bosco, 1970, 23). Avec cette phrase, Hélène exprime la haine qu'elle porte envers cet homme qui a renié sa mère, puis elle-même. Simultanément, ce jugement dur et amer trahit la douleur qu'éprouve Hélène face à ce désaveu qui lui fend le cœur et la laisse toujours dans l'ombre au sujet de sa propre origine.

Lorsque la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale approche et que les paroles
antisémites s'amplifient en Allemagne et en France, la mère
d'Hélène comprend qu'il faut abandonner Paris pour sauver leur vie.
Comme elle parle l'allemand, elle écoute avec attention la radio
germanophone et traduit le plus important au père d'Hélène. La mère
sent que le temps presse mais son mari est un patriote qui n'a
nullement l'intention de quitter son pays. À cette occasion, son
épouse trouve des arguments très persuasifs, comme nous le montre
cette citation :

> Moi aussi, j'ai trahi les miens […] Je t'ai choisi. Et tu
> me laisserais seule. Pour une sale guerre. Tu m'as
> menti. Tu jurais que tu n'étais pas un petit Français
> revanchard comme les autres. (Bosco, 1970, 33)

Poussé dans ses retranchements, le père finit par se laisser
convaincre, et, pour le bien de sa famille, se décide enfin à fuir la
France pour s'installer aux États-Unis. Pendant la traversée en
bateau, le père a les yeux en larmes tandis que la mère regarde en
avant – contrairement à la femme de Loth dans la tradition biblique –
confiante quant à leur future existence au « pays de toutes les
possibilités. »

Ils échappent ainsi aux atrocités de la guerre, mais ce qui reste
encore devant eux, ce sont les cruautés de la vie, qui ne devaient pas
leur être épargnées. Leur existence à New York est pénible, car il y
a, d'un côté, la barrière de la langue et, de l'autre, l'impossibilité de
trouver un travail. S'ajoute à cela l'expérience traumatisante
d'Hélène: un après-midi, elle ouvre la porte à un inconnu qui pénètre
dans le petit appartement et essaie de la violer, mais finalement
l'abandonne à cause d'un bruit soudain dans l'escalier. Cet incident
répugnant, qu'elle garde pour elle jusqu'au jour où elle le met sur
papier, empêchera désormais Hélène de se sentir en sécurité avec des
hommes, à l'exception de Pierre. Peu après, elle reçoit avec
soulagement la nouvelle du déménagement à Montréal qui apporte
plusieurs améliorations. Dans cette ville, Hélène peut bouger enfin
librement, aller à l'école et oublier la vie étriquée à New York. Qui
plus est, ses parents arrivent à s'établir plus facilement grâce à
l'environnement francophone et à l'amélioration du marché du
travail pendant la guerre en Europe.

Malheureusement, ce nouveau bonheur n'est que de courte durée: les
parents ont beau fuir la guerre, le destin les rattrape également. La

mort, qui les aurait très probablement attendue à Paris – la mère à cause de ses origines juives et le père à cause du service militaire – les frappe sur une route canadienne quelques mois plus tard. Comme pour Rachel dans *Un amour maladroit*, Hélène doit maintenant faire face à une privation parentale, qui pourtant est infligée ici de l'extérieur et n'est pas attachée aux décisions des personnages en question. Malgré cet inévitable revers de fortune, la protagoniste éprouve un sentiment de culpabilité en tant que survivante :

> Ils adoraient la vie. Ils étaient venus, de si loin, pour ne pas en perdre une journée. Ils ne parlaient jamais de mort, de maladie. 'Il faut croire au bonheur.' Ils y avaient cru. Cette vie qui me faisait si peur, ils l'aimaient. Volontiers, j'aurais changé de place avec eux. (Bosco, 1970, 60)

Hélène, pour qui la vie est sans importance, a été épargnée et doit maintenant subir les pires douleurs. Partager le sort de ses parents, partir au lieu d'eux lui semble plus tolérable que de continuer à vivre. Selon la devise « peine partagée mieux se supporte, » elle aurait souhaité rester en France pour ne pas avoir à souffrir toute seule dans un endroit où personne ne comprend ses chagrins. En conséquence, elle accuse ses parents de l'avoir abandonnée et de l'avoir dépossédée de son appartenance et de la vérité de ses origines. Elle admet que parfois elle souffre « davantage de la mort de cet inconnu [le grand-père maternel] que de la leur [les parents] » (Bosco, 1970, 64). C'est donc le fait de ne pas avoir subi les privations de la guerre, à cause de son expatriation, que la protagoniste dénonce et qui la fait souffrir. Elle aurait certainement préféré rester avec les autres Juifs en France et être parmi les victimes plutôt que de végéter seule à Montréal.

À l'âge de quarante ans, Hélène subit encore ces événements, qu'elle n'a jamais assimilés, auxquels s'ajoutent d'autres, comme par exemple la relation échouée avec Pierre. À Venise, après avoir trouvé la distance nécessaire, elle a la force d'en *parler* pour la première fois dans sa vie. D'un certain point de vue, Hélène peut comprendre, après la rédaction de son autobiographie, ce qui lui est arrivé; de l'autre elle est capable d'en tirer une leçon. Le projet d'écrire, l'ascension dans l'univers des mots, dans l'espace fictionnel, symbolise donc une manière de survie. Comme « tout est littérature » (Bosco, 1970, 173) à la fin, elle se débarrasse de son

passé à travers une destruction imaginaire. La mort vécue fictivement a un effet cathartique qui permet à l'héroïne de purifier son âme des démons qui l'accablent et de recommencer une vie nouvelle. Elle se résigne enfin :

> Pauvres pages. Preuve dérisoire qu'en fin de compte tout est littérature. La vie, l'amour, la mort. Simulacre et dérision. Fragile passe-temps pour oublier la mort de la passion. Le suicide se dérobe comme l'amant de passage. 'Patiente un peu, oncle Vania.' La vie reprend sa proie. (Bosco, 1970, 173)

**Conclusion**

Prisonnières du labyrinthe de leurs ancêtres, les héroïnes boscoviennes s'attachent à leur passé dans le but de mieux saisir le présent et d'envisager l'avenir. C'est notamment à travers le retour à soi-même qu'elles travaillent la question de l'origine et qu'elles retrouvent l'identité perdue. Le rôle central est attribué au souvenir et à l'oubli. D'un côté, les personnages doivent prendre conscience de ce qui s'est passé, et puis de l'autre, ils doivent aussi effacer ce qu'il leur était impossible d'oublier jusqu'à présent, car l'on sait bien que ceux qui n'oublient pas le passé courent bien souvent le risque de le répéter indéfiniment. En se remémorant les souvenirs réprimés, les protagonistes peuvent s'éloigner successivement d'eux. De même, ce n'est qu'en acceptant la vérité, qu'elles peuvent en apprendre les leçons, la neutraliser et laisser derrière elles le passé pour mémoriser enfin de nouveaux souvenirs. Dans ces circonstances, oublier est un processus indispensable, car le fait de vivre avec toutes ces informations non digérées, crée une guerre intérieure infinie, guerre dont les effets psychologiques sont l'isolement et la solitude.

En d'autres termes, la mémoire joue un rôle essentiel dans la composition, la création, l'imagination et la reconstruction du passé. Le processus de mémorisation est habituellement douloureux et s'effectue à l'intérieur des romans étudiés dans le cadre de formes et d'actions linguistiques spécifiques. Ainsi, la remémoration de l'enfance et de la jeunesse avec l'aide du psy dans *Un amour maladroit* et la rédaction des mémoires dans *La femme de Loth* sont des prises de conscience libératrices. Grâce à une reconstruction fine des situations clés, les protagonistes sont capables de reconstituer le

fil de leur vie depuis l'enfance. Et c'est ainsi que naît une identité diachrone, qui réconcilie passé et présent, tout en préparant l'avenir.

**Notes**

1 . Au Canada, la vision d'une société officiellement bilingue, multiculturelle et multiraciale – donc le concept de la *mosaïque canadienne* – émerge à la fin des années soixante et constitue aujourd'hui un des traits le plus significatifs de l'identité canadienne. Contrairement au melting pot américain, la mosaïque canadienne accueille et encourage la diversification qui enrichit la compréhension de l'autre et mène à une plus grande tolérance.

2. La désignation de « trois solitudes » a été lancée par les créateurs du magazine transculturel *Vice Versa* à Montréal afin de décrire le phénomène de l'écriture migrante au Québec. Tiré de: Ertler et Löschnigg (éds.), 2000, 149–56.

3. Pour une introduction à la vie de Monique Bosco, les œuvres et sites suivants ont été cités: Bosco, 1951; New, 2002, 550; Légaré, 1983, 69; Guérin et Hamel, 2001, 107.

4 . La littérature canadienne-française prend le terme « littérature québécoise » au milieu des années soixante où une redéfinition de l'identité culturelle est entraînée par la Révolution tranquille.

5 . Pour former des noms féminins, le morphème *–eure* est généralement utilisé au Québec. De la sorte, une femme qui enseigne à l'université est une professeure et une femme écrivant des romans est une auteure. Cf., Boulanger, 1993, XIII.

6. L'information sur les œuvres de Monique Bosco et sur les prix qui lui ont été remis provient des pages Internet suivantes : <http://mcc.quebectel.qc.ca/sites/mcc/communiq.nsf/0/ed136c4637d 6f3be8525691f0064a41f?OpenDocument> (1 août 2005); Le site officiel des onze prix culturels et scientifiques au Québec : <http://www.prixduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/recherche/desclaureat.asp?no Laureat=48 >(1 août 2005).

7. Regarder aussi la déclaration de principe de l'UNICEF « Kinder im Krieg. Ein Kinderrechte-Notfall ». Ds., <http://www.unicef.at/shop/dbdocs/krieg.pdf> (6 avril 2005). L'UNICEF est une organisation qui, depuis sa création en 1946, agit pour protéger la vie des enfants du monde entier. Depuis cette

époque, l'UNICEF plaide et travaille pour la protection des droits de
l'enfant, afin d'aider les jeunes à satisfaire leurs besoins de base et à
élargir leurs possibilités de réaliser tout leur potentiel.

## Bibliographie

Benbassa, Esther. « Frankreich ». Ds., Kotowski, Elke-Vera et
Schoeps, Julius H. et Wallenborn, Hiltrud (éds.). *Handbuch
zur Geschichte der Juden in Europa. Band I: Länder und
Regionen*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft,
2001, 402–18.

Bosco, Monique. *L'isolement dans le roman canadien-français*.
Université de Montréal. Thèse de doctorat, 1951.

----------. *Un amour maladroit*. Paris: Gallimard, 1961.

----------. *La femme de Loth*. Montréal: Bibliothèque québécoise,
2003. (Éd. originale: Montréal: HMH Hurtubise, c1970).

----------. *Et bien! La guerre*. Montréal: HMH Hurtubise, 2004.

Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne. Pensées chrétiennes et morales, XXXVI.
Ds., Robert, Paul. *Le grand Robert de la langue française*.
*Tome V*. Montréal: Les Dictionnaires Robert-Canada S.C.C.
2e éd, 1985. 35s.

Boulanger, J.-C. (Ed.). *Le Robert. Dictionnaire québécois
d'aujourd'hui*. Montréal: Dicorobert, 1993.

Greenstein, Michael. *Third Solitudes*: *Tradition and Discontinuity in
Jewish-Canadian Literature*. Kingston, Montreal, London:
McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989.

Guérin, M.-A. et Hamel, R. (Eds.). *Dictionnaire des poètes d'ici de
1606 à nos jours*. Montréal: Guérin, 2001.

Klaus, Peter. « Une troisième solitude? – Les Québécois face à
l'écriture migrante ». Ds., Ertler, K.-D. et Löschnigg, M.
(éds.). *Canada 2000: Identity and Transformation*.
Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 2000,149–56.

Légaré, Yves. *Dictionnaire des écrivains québécois contemporains*.
Montréal: Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1983.

MacLennan, Hugh. *Two Solitudes*. Toronto: McClelland & Steward
Ltd, 2003.

New, William H. (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*.
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

<http://mcc.quebectel.qc.ca/sites/mcc/communiq.nsf/0/ed136c4637d
6f3be8525691f0064a41f?OpenDocument> (1 août 2005).

<http://www.prixduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/recherche/desclaureat.asp?no
        Laureat=48> (1 août 2005).
<http://www.unicef.at/shop/dbdocs/krieg.pdf> (6 avril 2005).

**Fanny Macé**
**Sorbonne Paris IV, France**

# Identité(s) métisse(s) canadienne(s): cadre

**Résumé**

*«La diversité existe à l'intérieur de la diversité elle-même. Les Autochtones sont souvent considérés à tort comme une seule communauté uniforme.» (Cameron, 1996, 12). C'est parce que la réalité autochtone est souvent erronée ou mal interprétée que je me suis proposé d'effectuer cette recherche sur les Métis canadiens et plus particulièrement sur leur identité, ce qui fait d'eux des Autochtones distincts. Il faut garder présent à l'esprit que le Canada doit beaucoup à ses communautés aborigènes et qu'il ne serait pas tel qu'il est aujourd'hui sans leur contribution. Cependant, vu que le rôle joué par ces peuples dans le développement d'un pays tel que le Canada n'a été reconnu que partiellement, et ce très récemment, la question de leur intégration reste ouverte. Dans un contexte largement défavorable, les Métis n'échappent pas à la règle et apparaissent comme les véritables oubliés de la politique de reconnaissance. En effet, bien qu'ayant fait l'objet du rapatriement dans la Constitution de 1982 (article 35) et considérés dès lors comme Autochtones − du moins dans les textes − les Métis n'ont pas vu leur sort évoluer pour autant. Peut-on espérer une amélioration du sort des Métis sur le sol canadien ? Leur identité distincte constitue-t-elle un frein à leur intégration ?*

**Abstract**

*When we try to define a Canadian Métis identity we are immediately faced with a problem: is there only one, or are there in fact several, Canadian Métis identities? It seems that we know very little about the development and evolution of the Métis identity in Canada. This ignorance is due primarily to three factors: in the first instance, the difficulty in providing a precise definition of who the Métis are — the label itself has been, and continues to be, controversial. Secondly, an ambiguity in their constitutional status persists; this has been difficult to define due to the bicultural aspect of the Métis identity (with their status of "internal minority"). Finally, there is a lack of*

*primary sources concerning the Métis. The censuses have, until the early 1980s, proved to be inconclusive insofar as they did not include the category of "Métis", As a consequence, a number of ambiguous and depreciatory terms such as "half-breed" or "mixed-race" were used that, in themselves, excluded the possibility of claiming a distinct Métis identity that could have been qualified. Ultimately, would it not be tempting to consider the Métis identity as being unique, whilst assuming different characteristics according to the community to which it belongs?*

*In this context, it would seem advisable to define the circumstances that have brought about the need to affirm this identity along with its particular characteristics. Has the Métis identity been recognized as autonomous and autochthonous in its own right as a derivative of First Nations' identities, or is it just perceived as their poor relation? At first sight, this identity seems to have no context. From a legislative point of view, it is neither autochthonous nor un-autochthonous. Is the Métis Canadian identity a unique and distinctive one or is it rather a "mosaic" of identities which ultimately gives it a plural identity? In this research, my aim is to give my viewpoint on the existence or otherwise of one or several Métis Canadian identities. To do so, I will start with aspects of terminology. I will then proceed to define, or rather redefine, the notion of identity — firstly in a general context and then in the Métis context.*

## De l'ambiguïté des termes vers une définition du Métis et de son identité

Dès lors que l'on tente de définir l'identité métisse canadienne on se heurte à une première difficulté : existe-t-il une ou plusieurs identité(s) métisse(s) canadienne(s)? Il semble que l'on connaisse peu de choses sur le développement et l'évolution de l'identité métisse au Canada. Cette ignorance est due à trois facteurs en particulier : d'abord, une difficulté à définir précisément qui sont les Métis − l'appellation elle-même a toujours suscité et continue de susciter une grande controverse au Canada − puis une ambiguïté constitutionnelle concernant leur statut − celui-ci étant difficile à définir de par la bivalence de l'identité métisse (statut de « minorité interne », (Ivison, Patton, and Sanders, 2000, 11)) et enfin, un manque de sources primaires les concernant; ainsi, il apparaît que

jusqu'au début des années quatre-vingts les recensements étaient peu clairs et n'incluaient pas directement la terminologie « Métis ». Aussi, se trouvaient-ils en présence de termes ambigus et péjoratifs tels que *half-breed* ou « sang mêlé » qui omettaient dans leur terminologie même l'appartenance à un patrimoine distinct : celui de l'univers identitaire métis. Finalement, ne serait-il pas tentant de concevoir l'identité métisse comme unique mais revêtant différents aspects selon la communauté d'appartenance ?

Dans cette perspective, il convient de définir les circonstances ayant engendré le besoin d'affirmation de cette identité ainsi que ses principales caractéristiques. Est-elle reconnue en tant qu'identité autochtone à part entière, distincte et autonome dérivée de l'identité des Premières Nations ou n'en est-elle qu'une parente pauvre? Au premier abord, cette identité ne semble s'inscrire dans aucun cadre. Ni tout à fait autochtone législativement, ni non autochtone pour autant, cette identité aux multiples facettes s'avère délicate à définir. S'agit-il d'une identité unique et distincte ou bien se compose-t-elle d'une « mosaïque » d'identités qui ferait de cette « métissité » canadienne une identité plurielle ? Dans la présente recherche, il s'agira simplement d'apporter un point de vue sur l'existence ou non d'une ou de plusieurs identité(s) métisse(s) canadienne(s) et de déterminer qui sont, au fond, les Métis canadiens. Pour ce faire je propose donc de commencer cette étude par des questions d'ordre terminologique, puis je définirai ou plutôt redéfinirai la notion d'identité d'abord dans son aspect le plus général puis dans le contexte métis.

Le premier élément que j'ai choisi de développer ici est l'évolution de la terminologie employée pour faire référence aux Métis canadiens. En effet, il se trouve que l'identité d'un groupe repose en premier lieu sur la faculté pour ce dernier à demeurer facilement identifiable. L'identification à un niveau collectif ou même individuel ne peut se concrétiser que par l'appartenance à une catégorie clairement établie. Pour ce faire, il s'avère indispensable que ce groupe réponde à une appellation à laquelle l'on puisse faire référence. Cette nécessité d'appartenance à une catégorie facilite la reconnaissance, élément moteur du processus d'intégration.

Cependant, la tâche n'est pas aisée. En effet, définir précisément qui est Métis s'est toujours révélé délicat pour le chercheur dans la mesure où

une [grande] ambiguïté réside dans le terme [même] de « métis ». Dans l'Ouest et au Nord, il réfère généralement à la société métisse distincte [ou nation métisse] qui a émergé au XIX$^e$ siècle (…). Ailleurs, ce terme est souvent utilisé pour désigner les descendants d'origine mixte indienne et européenne.

*Confusion exists over the term "Métis". In western and northern Canada it generally refers to the distinct Métis society which emerged in the nineteenth century (...). Elsewhere, it is often used to designate anyone of mixed Indian-European heritage.* (McMillan, 1995, 376, my translation)

Cette première définition d'Alan McMillan nous donne une idée très générale de ce que l'on entend par « métis » dans le contexte canadien. Ici, nous constatons que le chercheur ne s'est attaché qu'aux éléments géographiques et historiques qui apparaissent comme les plus déterminants. Toutefois, il ne faudra pas oublier que l'ambiguïté qui règne autour de la signification du terme « métis », est, selon John Foster, le résultat d'une perception erronée de l'histoire (Foster, 1998, 77-86). Dans cette perspective, une grande prudence s'impose quant aux sources.

D'un point de vue purement sémantique, le terme « métis » fait référence à une idée de mixité entre différentes origines ethniques et, par conséquent, culturelles. Ainsi, selon *Le Trésor de la langue française*, le substantif « métis » vient du bas latin *mixticius* signifiant « né d'une race mélangée » dérivé lui-même de *mixtus*, participe passé de *miscere* (mêler, mélanger). Si l'on s'en tient à la racine du mot, le terme *mestis* correspond à ce « qui est moitié d'une chose, moitié d'une autre.». Ainsi, de par cette origine étymologique, ce mot rend bien l'idée dont il est chargé. (De Trémaudan, 1995, 434). Dans le contexte canadien, le terme « métis » découle de *metice*, qui est cité comme mot indigène dès 1615, et qui décrit « [toute] personne née d'un homme blanc avec une indienne ou inversement» (Pyrard, qtd in De Trémaudan, 1984, 341). La prononciation et l'orthographe du mot "métis" ont subi quelques modifications au cours des décennies. Ainsi, primitivement, l'on disait *métif*. La modification en « métis » a été introduite par les voyageurs des grandes plaines au cours de leurs expéditions du Mexique au Canada. (De Trémaudan, 1995, 46).

Dans un premier temps, la prononciation du « s » final n'était pas systématique − probablement sous l'influence de l'anglais − puis elle s'est peu à peu imposée avec le temps et les mouvements de populations. Ainsi, la prononciation [metis] effective actuellement

> s'explique par l'influence des formes *metice*, *mestice*, courantes au XVII/XVIII$^e$ siècle et qui sont probablement une adaptation du portugais *mestico* (sang mêlé, XIV$^e$) ou de l'espagnol *mestizo* qui remontent également au bas latin *mixticius*. La forme *me(s)tif*, *me(s)tive* en usage du XVI$^e$ au XVII$^e$ siècle est issue de *mestif* par substitution de suffixe. (*Le Trésor de la langue française*)

Ainsi, le mot « métis » serait donc un dérivé des langues latine, espagnole et portugaise et résulterait des conquêtes ibériques des XV$^e$ et XVI$^e$ siècles. L'origine coloniale de ce substantif ne peut être démentie et se justifie historiquement. De plus, cette nouvelle appellation laisse déjà entrevoir les prémisses d'un racisme post-colonial à l'endroit des communautés métisses.

> [En effet], initialement, ce terme, issu du discours colonial, privilégiait l'idée de "pureté raciale" et justifiait la discrimination par l'utilisation de termes précurseurs de l'anthropologie physique afin de créer une taxinomie complexe et fictionnelle de termes racistes.
>
> *Initially, they emerged from a colonial discourse that privileged the idea of racial purity and justified racial discrimination by employing the quasi-scientific precursors of physical anthropology to create a complex and largely fictional taxonomy of racial admixtures* (Ashcroft, Griffith & Tiffin, 1998, 136, my translation)

Pourtant, le mot « métis » est progressivement passé d'un emploi péjoratif à un usage courant dès lors que la perception de la culture métisse a changé. Cependant, même si l'utilisation de ce terme s'est banalisée, les idées reçues sur les communautés métisses ont subsisté. Après avoir précisé ce que le terme « métis » renfermait, il reste à montrer qui est considéré et se considère comme Métis au Canada de nos jours.

Dans le domaine des sciences humaines, la notion d'identité apparaît comme un concept qu'il convient de redéfinir. D'une manière générale, l'identité d'un individu est constituée d'un ensemble de caractéristiques qui permettent de déterminer expressément ce qu'il est. Par extension, il s'agit de la manifestation de la perception que les gens ont d'eux-mêmes et des traits fondamentaux qui les caractérisent. Plus simplement, c'est ce qui permet à une personne de se définir par rapport aux autres, d'établir l'ensemble des traits particuliers qui la composent, ce qui, en somme, en fait un être à part. Cependant, l'identité individuelle est également le fruit de la reconnaissance ou de l'absence de reconnaissance des qualités de chacun résultant de la perception d'autrui. Il s'agit donc d'une notion relativement subjective ne pouvant pas être restreinte à une définition unique. Par conséquent, puisque les notions de reconnaissance et de représentation apparaissent comme fortement liées à la question identitaire, une définition de l'identité dans ce contexte s'impose. Elle apparaît comme « l'ensemble des traits ou caractéristiques qui, au regard de l'état civil, permettent de *reconnaître* une personne et *d'établir son individualité au regard de la loi*» (*Le Trésor de la Langue Française*). Un individu considérera réellement son identité dès l'instant où elle aura été reconnue légalement, condition nécessaire – à mon sens – au développement, à l'épanouissement et à la pleine expression de cette identité. En revanche, « lorsque les conditions de reconnaissance ne peuvent plus être remplies, le manque de reconnaissance mène à la prise de conscience du besoin d'être reconnu».(Trott, 1997, 37)[1] En effet, comme le souligne Charles Taylor,

> [La] découverte de [notre] propre identité ne signifie pas que [nous l'élaborons] dans l'isolement, mais que [nous] la négocions par le dialogue, partiellement extérieur, partiellement intérieur avec d'autres. C'est la raison pour laquelle le développement d'un idéal d'identité engendré intérieurement donne une importance nouvelle à la reconnaissance. [Notre] propre identité dépend vitalement de [nos] relations dialogiques avec les autres. (Taylor, 1994, 52)

Charles Taylor définit l'identité sur une base dialogique : pour lui, l'identité en tant que telle résulte de deux apports, l'un que je qualifierai d'interne et l'autre d'externe. En effet, c'est à la fois le dialogue interne (avec soi-même) et le dialogue externe (avec les

autres) qui vont être à l'origine de l'identité. Ainsi, l'identité d'une personne se forge non seulement grâce à l'expérience individuelle mais aussi et surtout grâce à l'exposition à l'altérité ; les apports extérieurs permettant une prise de conscience de l'identité de l'autre et donc de sa propre identité. Elle passe donc par une reconnaissance légitime. Dans un premier temps, ce principe d'identité apparaît comme un idéal dans la mesure où il a été engendré intérieurement par l'individu mais très vite l'on s'aperçoit que le besoin de reconnaissance se fait ressentir. L'identité ne se construit donc pas uniquement de manière interne. L'apport de l'extériorité est nécessaire. L'identité se construit donc sur un principe ambivalent. D'une part, la personne se trouve confrontée à un « idéal moderne d'authenticité »,(Trilling, 1969) qui consiste à être fidèle à soi-même dans la mesure où sa propre manière d'être ne dérive pas de la société mais doit être engendrée intérieurement (Taylor, 1994, 44). D'autre part, la genèse de la pensée humaine est dialogique puisqu'elle ne peut s'accomplir que dans le contact avec autrui. En effet, « nous avons besoin de relations pour nous accomplir, et pour nous définir» (Taylor, 1994, 44).

Par extension, l'identité d'un peuple n'a rien à envier à la définition de l'identité individuelle puisqu'elle suit le même cheminement. Ce constat permet d'établir le fait que cette identité sociétale renferme des caractéristiques et des desseins communs, particuliers et distincts aux membres se réclamant d'une même collectivité. Cependant, plus le groupe s'identifiera comme appartenant à une même communauté voire à une même nation (existence d'une origine commune), plus son identité distincte sera revendiquée de manière forte et déterminée et permettra une reconnaissance accrue. Dans cette optique, l'identité métisse se situe dans un entre-deux : en effet, bien qu'officiellement reconnue comme nation en raison des liens ethniques, sociaux, culturels qui les unissent les Métis revendiquent le droit de former une nation autonome pour la préservation d'un bien commun : le patrimoine métis. Toutefois, ce concept d'identité ne peut pas être uniquement limité aux éléments que nous avons précédemment abordés. Ainsi, selon Jean-Michel Dalpé, (Hébert and Théberge, 1997 ) la notion d'identité se trouve-t-elle souvent liée à une notion de frontières. Ces dernières sont « souvent géographiques mais pas nécessairement, elles peuvent aussi être d'un autre ordre : linguistique, religieuse, ethnique, (…) ce qui est sûr et certain c'est que cette fiction repose sur un a priori, celui qu'il existe une ligne de

démarcation *claire* entre Nous et l'Autre» (nos italiques, Hébert & Théberge, 1997, 91). Dans le cas du Métis canadien, cette « ligne de démarcation *claire* » n'existe pas dans la mesure où le Métis canadien représente la participation à « deux mondes étanches », (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996)[2] l'autochtone et le non-autochtone. C'est cette ambiguïté frontalière qui constitue toute la difficulté à définir l'identité métisse et qui inscrit le Métis dans un « no man's land », une espèce de zone frontalière, un interstice dont les limites restent floues.

### L'identité métisse : une identité autochtone distincte?

La première difficulté à laquelle j'ai pu me heurter relève du fait que bien que les Métis aient été officiellement reconnus comme Autochtones, dans la réalité, il en est tout autrement. Ainsi, les Métis sont souvent victimes de discrimination, de minorisation de par leur appartenance ambiguë à « l'autochtonie » canadienne. C'est dans ce contexte que la notion de « métissité » canadienne prend tout son sens : elle apparaît comme une identité distincte au sein des identités autochtone et non-autochtone.

Les recherches relatives à l'identité métisse ont pris leur essor avec les travaux de John Foster à la fin des années soixante-dix quand il commença à examiner et à découvrir la complexité de l'origine métisse. L'identité métisse a, au départ, puisé ses origines dans deux autres modèles identitaires : l'identité des Premières Nations et celle du colonisateur. Pourtant, elle a su s'en démarquer et développer ses propres caractéristiques distinctes. Dans cette optique, elle apparaît désormais comme une identité autochtone à part entière. Comme le fait remarquer Emma LaRocque, l'identité métisse contemporaine fait souvent l'objet d'une vision erronée. Cette identité autochtone distincte fait aujourd'hui l'objet d'une stigmatisation dans la société canadienne ce qui a tendance à augmenter sa vulnérabilité. Selon la thèse établie par Joe Sawchuk, la conscience métisse contemporaine peut être perçue comme une réponse aux pressions économiques et politiques subies. Cette théorie est toutefois réfutée par Emma LaRocque qui met en avant le fait que la revendication d'une identité métisse est antérieure à ces pressions. Elle avance que la « métissité » se distingue par des « marqueurs culturels » (*"cultural markers"*) tels que la langue, l'habillement, le type d'habitat ou l'appartenance à des valeurs communes (Eigenbrod, interview, 2005). En Europe, l'apparition du concept de culture comme synonyme d'éducation et de formation de l'esprit coïncide avec deux

phénomènes majeurs de la seconde moitié du XVIIIᵉ siècle : premièrement, l'émergence de l'individu en tant que sujet autonome et deuxièmement, l'avènement de la nation comme sujet collectif. La culture résulte du transfert du principe individualiste sur le plan collectif (Dieckhoff, 2002, 67). Ce transfert du particulier au collectif est relativement pertinent dans la mesure où il apparaît comme un principe fondamentalement autochtone ; l'expression de l'individu semblant passer au second plan contrairement aux coutumes des sociétés occidentales. De plus, contrairement à la notion d'identité, la culture n'est pas une entité dotée d'un caractère intemporel et permanent. Selon Alain Dieckhoff, elle ne constitue pas un tout dont les frontières imperméables empêcheraient la recomposition rendue possible par les processus d'emprunts, de métissages et d'échanges. Ainsi, la culture métisse a-t-elle survécu grâce à son contact avec d'autres cultures canadiennes. Auparavant, la culture métisse, véritable culture de l'entre-deux, se trouvait en situation de double aliénation à la fois par rapport à la société globale dans laquelle elle évoluait mais aussi par rapport à son groupe d'appartenance originel, celui des Premières Nations. Dans ce contexte, les Métis ne pouvaient pas maîtriser et définir leur destin collectif puisque l'existence d'une culture commune ne leur avait pas été reconnue. Bien qu'ils constituaient des communautés ethniques distinctes, ces Autochtones voyaient leurs revendications rester sans appel et dans la mesure où leur existence était tout simplement niée, ils ne leur restaient plus qu'à choisir entre être Blancs ou Indiens. Ainsi, jusqu'au milieu des années quatre-vingts, (jusqu'en 1996 pour certaines « écoles résidentielles » de la Saskatchewan) les Métis n'avaient pas la possibilité d'évoluer en interaction avec un environnement social varié, ils étaient alors cantonnés à une existence dans laquelle ils étaient emmurés à la fois physiquement mais aussi culturellement. Ils restaient les spectateurs d'un développement duquel on les avait exclus. Aujourd'hui, en revanche, la valorisation de cette culture métisse passe par une pléiade de manifestations telles que le Festival du voyageur au Manitoba.

En définitive, l'identité métisse s'inscrit comme une identité autochtone distincte dans la mesure où son expression vise la préservation d'un particularisme collectif : le patrimoine métis. Ainsi, dans le contexte canadien, nous ne sommes pas en présence de plusieurs identités métisses mais bien de l'expression d'une seule et

même culture métisse qui peut prendre diverses formes selon la communauté d'appartenance. Selon Paul Chartrand,

> la culture métisse distincte et la conscience politique commune se sont développées bien avant l'établissement de la fédération canadienne. Les Métis apparaissent comme l'un des peuples fondateurs de la Confédération mais la place qui leur revient dans la trame constitutionnelle canadienne ne leur a jamais été accordée. (Chartrand, 1990, 147) [3]

L'existence et la revendication d'une conscience métisse ne datent donc pas d'hier. Ce peuple apparaît ainsi comme distinct au sein de l'autochtonie canadienne dans la mesure où son rôle dans la construction de la Fédération canadienne ne peut pas être négligé. L'identité d'une nation telle que celle des Métis est donc enracinée dans l'histoire canadienne. La reconnaissance, il est vrai tardive, de l'impact historique exercé par un personnage tel que Louis Riel a permis de consolider un sentiment identitaire métis très fort qui était déjà présent depuis l'épisode de Batoche. « Après Batoche, [les Métis] furent plongés dans une culture législative différente, étrangère, qui offrait superficiellement la citoyenneté et l'égalité sociale, mais qui en réalité accentuaient leur inégalité» (Brodgen, qtd in Barkwell and Corrigan, 1991, 1).[4] Cependant, ces progrès restent bien modestes car malgré tout ils ne semblent pas changer fondamentalement les choses : les Métis demeurent ce peuple de l'entre-deux dont l'identité autochtone distincte même si elle s'avère bien réelle n'est pas véritablement reconnue.

Afin de déterminer si l'identité métisse est bien une identité autochtone distincte il convient de préciser ce que l'on entend par-là. Dans l'article 35, la Charte des Droits et des Libertés de 1982 définit comme Autochtones, les Indiens, les Inuit et les Métis. Ainsi, ces derniers sont-ils reconnus comme l'un des peuples aborigènes du Canada. Selon Thomas Berger, cette reconnaissance apparaît comme insuffisante dans la mesure où elle omet un « détail » qui a son importance : les Métis forment un peuple dont la vie et l'histoire, entrelacées dans le tissu de la vie canadienne, leur donnent le droit de défendre leurs revendications. Un problème se pose toutefois : comment satisfaire les demandes des Métis d'aujourd'hui ? Les Canadiens peuvent-ils effacer un siècle d'une histoire constitutionnelle dans laquelle les Métis n'ont jamais trouvé leur

place ? De plus, un autre problème se pose : de quelle façon les autorités gouvernementales canadiennes vont-elles s'y prendre pour traiter collectivement aujourd'hui les revendications d'un peuple voire d'une Nation dont les ancêtres ont, pour la plupart, reçu, à titre individuel, un certificat au siècle dernier ?

Il reste du chemin à parcourir et l'avancement du processus ne permet pas de trancher pour le moment. Un point positif se dégage néanmoins de ces constats : le Canada a reconnu son obligation d'examen des questions métisses ainsi que l'urgence d'une réconciliation qui inclurait les Métis. En reconnaissant, en 1992, le rôle joué par Louis Riel dans l'histoire canadienne, un premier pas a été franchi vers la reconnaissance du peuple métis. Bien que l'article 35(2) de la Charte de 1982 reconnaisse déjà le Métis comme un Autochtone à part entière, une quinzaine d'années plus tard, en 1996, la définition a un tant soit peu évolué ; ainsi, le *Rapport de la Commission Royale sur les Peuples Autochtones* définit « les Métis comme des peuples autochtones distincts issus d'un croisement entre Premières Nations […] et Européens, et qui s'identifient à une culture proprement métisse. » Ainsi, pour être reconnus en tant que Métis aux yeux du gouvernement fédéral, encore faut-il nécessairement avoir à la fois des ancêtres autochtones et non-autochtones. Cependant, ces liens ancestraux peuvent également être autres que de nature génétique, c'est-à-dire qu'ils peuvent tout aussi bien résulter d'un mariage ou d'une adoption. De plus, il apparaît, à la lumière de cette définition, que la notion d'identité revêt encore une fois toute son importance, en particulier, la perception et la représentation de cette identité autochtone distincte par les Métis eux-mêmes.

Finalement, on retiendra trois critères nécessaires pour déterminer qui est véritablement « Métis » au sens de la Charte canadienne des Droits et des libertés de 1982 : d'abord, l'auto-identification en tant que Métis, puis, l'existence de liens ancestraux avec une communauté métisse historique et enfin, l'acceptation par une communauté métisse. Il semble que

> le mot « Métis » à l'article 35 de la Charte ne vise pas toutes les personnes d'ascendance mixte indienne et européenne, mais plutôt les peuples distincts qui, en plus de leur ascendance mixte, ont leurs propres coutumes, une façon de vivre et une identité collective

> reconnaissables et distinctes de celles de leurs ancêtres indiens ou inuit d'une part et de leurs ancêtres européens d'autre part. Il convient donc de préciser ce que sont les communautés métisses historiques […] possédant leurs propres coutumes et leur propre identité collective avant que celles-ci aient été assujetties aux lois civiles françaises et anglaises. (Corporation Métisse du Québec)

Le demandeur doit également être en mesure de pouvoir prouver qu'il est accepté par une communauté métisse dont la continuité avec la communauté historique constitue le fondement juridique du droit revendiqué.

L'élément central du critère de l'acceptation par la communauté est la participation, passée et présente, à une culture commune, à des coutumes et traditions qui constituent l'identité de la communauté métisse et qui la distinguent d'autres groupes.

C'est ainsi que de nouvelles précisions sur la notion d'identité vont nous permettre de démontrer l'existence mais surtout la constance des critères qui font l'homogénéité de la Nation métisse. Ainsi, selon le *Trésor de la langue française*, « l'identité se définit comme étant le caractère de ce qui, sous des dénominations ou des aspects divers ne fait qu'un ou ne représente qu'une seule et même réalité.»

Ce premier postulat souligne une certaine homogénéité entre la nation métisse de l'Ouest et les autres communautés métisses canadiennes et tend à montrer que l'on a affaire à une seule et unique entité : la Nation métisse, dont les caractéristiques culturelles apparaissent comme étant distinctes des autres nations autochtones. De plus,

> l'identité métisse peut se traduire de différentes façons selon les contextes : il y a l'identité personnelle de l'individu qui a rapport avec son moi intime ; ensuite, il y a l'appartenance à une communauté métisse particulière ; en troisième lieu, il peut y avoir la revendication des droits reconnus aux Métis en vertu de l'article 35 de la Loi constitutionnelle de 1982. (Ministre des Approvisionnements et Services Canada, 1996, XIV)

C'est ici que la dimension identitaire métisse prend tout son sens dans la mesure où c'est le contexte qui va déterminer le visage que va revêtir cette identité. Ainsi, selon les cas apparaîtra-t-elle sous telle ou telle forme. Cette complexité dans l'aspect que peut prendre l'identité réside dans le fait qu'il n'existe pas une identité métisse mais une infinité de traits qui, mis bout à bout, constituent l'identité métisse canadienne, identité plurielle dans un certain sens. Subséquemment, nous pouvons remarquer que trois degrés d'identité cohabitent au sein du Métis canadien : l'identité euro canadienne, l'identité autochtone et la singularité de l'identité métisse. Cette dernière s'avère finalement être à elle seule une identité à part entière que l'on a trop souvent tendance à assimiler à celle des Premières Nations vu son caractère autochtone saillant.

**Conclusion**

Au fil de cette étude, les différents cadres de l'identité métisse canadienne ont été abordés. Il en résulte que même si l'identité métisse puise ses origines dans les cultures et identités européennes et dans celles des Premières Nations, elle a quand même su s'en démarquer et n'en demeure pas moins une identité autochtone à part entière. Finalement, cette identité autochtone distincte est à la fois un mélange entre héritage génétique et vie collective, histoire, culture, traditions et attachement à la terre. Elle apparaît comme le premier élément responsable des difficultés d'intégration des Métis dans la mesure où les critères identitaires des Métis s'avèrent difficiles à déterminer compte tenu de leur diversité. Ainsi, les Métis demeurent un peuple relativement hétérogène à l'échelle canadienne : leur intégration ne pourra donc pas être traitée de manière globale. La création d'une « super » nation métisse semble rouvrir le débat car elle poserait la problématique du rapport entre nation aborigène et identité moderne. Finalement, même si le Métis canadien demeure un membre vulnérable de l'autochtonie, son identité semble néanmoins constituer un atout car elle revendique l'appartenance à un patrimoine distinct. Toutefois, il semble que la reconnaissance du statut d'identité autochtone distincte ne suffise pas à la pleine intégration des Métis. Selon Donald M. Taylor, il apparaît que les groupes minoritaires ont des difficultés à s'intégrer dans la mesure où ils n'ont pas qu'une identité collective à intégrer mais deux : dans le cas du Métis, celle de l'Autochtone et de l'Euro Canadien (Taylor, 2002, 71).

Les Métis − tout comme les Premières Nations − ont été écrasés par la conquête et le régime colonial puis maintenus dans une marginalité économique et politique. Ils demeurent ainsi une diaspora, un prolétariat marginal sur son sol natal, qui a du mal à s'intégrer. Néanmoins, si l'on se place dans une perspective d'intégration, une première étape consisterait en la reconnaissance des droits collectifs des Métis et une deuxième étape permettrait de tendre vers une large autonomie interne établie sur une base territoriale, la terre ancestrale des Métis. En somme, la population métisse canadienne se situe en marge du territoire national et est considérée comme véritable immigrée de l'intérieur, appelée à entrer dans une civilisation qui n'est pas la sienne car bien que partie intégrante de la société canadienne, les Métis restent considérés comme des immigrés dont l'unique recours reste l'intégration. Dans le cadre de l'histoire canadienne, l'intégration peut être vue comme une réponse à la problématique identitaire métisse. Dans cette optique, il ne faudra donc pas perdre de vue ce qui existe au-delà du terme même d'intégration : la reconnaissance et la réconciliation du peuple métis avec l'ensemble de la société canadienne et probablement une adaptation de la politique multiculturelle.

1 *"When the conditions of recognition no longer can be assumed, lack of recognition leads to our awareness of the need to be recognized."* (Trott, 1997, 37)

2 *"Two separate words."* (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996)

3 *"Métis cultural distinctiveness and our common political consciousness developed long before the establishment of the Canadian federation. The Métis are one of the founding peoples of Confederation, but have been denied their rightful place in the constitutional scheme."* (Chartrand, 1990, 147)

4 *"After Batoche, [the Métis] were embedded in a different, alien, legal culture, which offered – superficially – citizenship and social equality, but which in reality degraded them as unequals."* (Brodgen, qtd in Barkwell and Corrigan, 1991, 1)

### Bibliographie

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & H. Tiffin. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London: Routledge, 1998: 136-137.

Cameron, D. *Le Point sur les études canadiennes: les années 90*. Montréal: Association d'études canadiennes, 1996: 12-37.

Berger, T.R. *Liberté fragile. Droits de la personne et dissidence au Canada*. Traduit de l'anglais par M.-C. Brasseur. Québec: Hurtebise HMH ltée, 1985.

Canada. *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. "Arts and Heritage-Language," in Gathering Strength (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples). Ottawa: Canada Communication Group Publishing (Minister of Supply and Services), Vol.3, 1996: 602-615.

----------. *Looking Forward, Looking Back*: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ottawa: Canada Communication Group Publishing (Minister of Supply and Services), Vol.1, 1996.

----------. "Métis Perspectives," in *Perspectives and Realities* (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples). Ottawa: Canada Communication Group Publishing (Minister of Supply and Services), Vol.4, 1996: 199-386.

----------. *Restructuring the Relationship*: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ottawa: Canada Communication Group Publishing (Minister of Supply and Services), Vol.2, 1996.

Chartrand, P.L.A.H. *Riel et les Métis canadiens*. St Boniface: La société historique de Saint Boniface, 1990: 147-182.

Corporation Metisse du Québec. "La définition du Métis, selon la Cour supreme". *Corporation Métisse Du Québec et de l'Est du Canada.*
<http://www.metisduquebec.ca/fr/defcourmetis.htm> 05/09/05.

Corrigan, S. W. & L. J. Barkwell. *The Struggle for Recognition: Canadian Justice and the Métis Nation*., Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications Inc., 1991: 1-38.

De Trémaudan, A.-H. *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l'Ouest canadien*. 4ème édition (1936). Saint-Boniface: Editions des Plaines, 1984 : 46, 71-377, 434-435.

Dieckhoff, A. *La Nation dans tous ses Etats. Les Identités nationales en mouvement*. Paris: Champs Flammarion, 2002: 67, 80-82.

Eigenbrod, R. *Interview*. Department of Native Studies, University of Manitoba, 2005.

Foster, J. "The Métis: The People and the Term," in A.S. Lussier. *Louis Riel & The Métis*, 1998: 77-86.

Hébert, R.-M. & R. Théberge. *Canada: Horizons 2000*. Winnipeg: Presses Universitaires de Saint-Boniface, 1997.

Ivison, Duncan, Paul. Patton, and Will. Sanders. *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 2000. 1-25.

Laplantine, F. & A. Nouss. *Le Métissage*. Flammarion (Dominos n°145): France, 1997: 7-34.

McMillan, A.D. "The Métis," Chapter 11, in *Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre Ltd., 1995: 293-308.

Sawchuk, J. *The Métis of Manitoba: Reformulation of an Ethnic Identity*. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1978: 1-15, 33-44, 68-78.

Taylor, C. "La politique de reconnaissance" in *Multiculturalisme: Différence et Démocratie*, 1994. France: Champs Flammarion. Traduit de l'anglais par D.-A. Canal. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992): 41-55.

Taylor, D. M. The Quest for Identity: From Minority Groups to Generation Xers. Wesport: Praeger, 2002: 33-37, 71-8.

Trilling, L. *Sincerity and Authenticity*, New York, Norton, 1969.

Trott, Elizabeth. "Multiculturalism, Charles Taylor, and the Idea of Canada." *Alternative Frontiers*. Allan Seager, Leonard Evenden, Rowland Lorimer, Robin Mathews, eds. Montreal, PQ: Association for Canadian Studies, 1997. 35-50.

Le Trésor de la Langue Française. <http://atilf.inalf.fr/tlfv3.htm> accessed 25/05/04.

**Delphine Jeanroy**
**Université Nancy2, France**

# *Atanarjuat* : représentation cinématographique d'une identité inuit contemporaine

**Résumé**

Atanarjuat *est un long métrage canadien, le premier fait par des Inuit. Le film est une adaptation en inuktitut[2] d'un conte oral traditionnel, intégralement interprété par des acteurs inuit, sur le fond d'une reconstitution de leurs anciennes coutumes.* Atanarjuat *a connu un grand succès, et a remporté de nombreux prix, notamment en Europe. En tout premier lieu, je propose d'aborder les enjeux du passage d'un conte oral inuit vers un récit cinématographique. De l'oralité, qui prend en compte la conception inuit de la prééminence du verbe, d'un temps cyclique et d'un amalgame entre passé mythologique et passé historique, vers la cinématographie, un médium traditionnellement occidental où l'image domine, où la structure temporelle est relativement linéaire, et où le documentaire s'oppose strictement à la fiction, le conte perd certaines propriétés pour en acquérir d'autres, sans perdre sa fonction sociale fondamentale. J'évoquerai ensuite le potentiel subversif du film au sein du Canada. D'une part il s'agit d'un film qui est né en dépit d'un système canadien de subventions qui ne favorise pas le cinéma des minorités ethniques. D'autre part il est en soi une appropriation du médium occidental pour promouvoir la langue et l'héritage culturel inuit. La caméra est maniée de sorte à démystifier l'Arctique et les Inuit, et à poser un regard intime sur la vie communautaire et spirituelle au point de désorienter régulièrement le spectateur occidental. Cela étant dit, et il s'agit du dernier point de l'article,* Atanarjuat *est un film par et avec des Inuit en priorité destiné au public inuit, ce qui fait du film non pas une tentative de subversion dirigée vers la culture dominante, mais une affirmation de l'existence d'un art cinématographique inuit indépendant. Paradoxalement sa valeur subversive est ainsi d'autant plus percutante que le film semble accueillir le regard occidental comme un hôte imprévu.*

**Abstract**

Atanarjuat *is a Canadian feature-length film, the first one to be made by Inuit. The film is an adaptation in Inuktitut[2] of a traditional oral tale, with Inuit actors only, and is based on a reconstruction of their ancient customs.* Atanarjuat *was very successful and won many awards, especially in Europe. This essay touches first on what a shift from an Inuit oral tale to a cinematic one implies. From orality, a medium which takes into account the Inuit conceptions of the preeminence of the spoken word, of a cyclical time and of a mingling of the mythological and the historical past, to cinematography, a traditionally Western-created medium in which the image is paramount, the temporal structure relatively linear, and the notion of documentary/history strictly opposed to fiction/mythology, the tale loses some features and gains others without necessarily losing its fundamental social function. The essay then continues with an analysis of the subversive potential of the film within Canada. First, the film was made in spite of a Canadian funding system which penalizes the projects of ethnical minorities. Secondly,* Atanarjuat *is itself an appropriation of a Western medium to promote Inuktitut and the Inuit cultural heritage. The camera is used in a specific way which demystifies the Arctic and the Inuit, and which gives one an insight into the intimate spirituality and community life of the Inuit, so much so that Western viewers recurringly feel disoriented. Nevertheless, and this will be the last issue dealt with in this essay,* Atanarjuat *is an Inuit film initially meant for release to the Inuit only, a fact which implies that the film is not so much an attempt to subvert the dominant culture, but an assertion of the existence of an independent Inuit cinematographic art. Paradoxically, its subversive value is thus all the more forceful in that the film seems to be welcoming the Western viewer as an unexpected guest.*

Atanarjuat (2001) est un film de Zacharias Kunuk, vidéaste inuit d'Igloolik au Nunavut, lauréat entre autres de la Caméra d'Or au festival de Cannes en 2001. L'équipe qui entoure Kunuk est entièrement inuit à l'exception de Norman Cohn, vidéaste New Yorkais qui s'est associé à Kunuk il y a une quinzaine d'années. Les acteurs du film sont des Inuit canadiens venant pour la plupart de la communauté d'Igloolik. Ecrit et tourné en inuktitut, le film s'inspire d'un conte inuit local ancien.

L'histoire porte sur un conflit à Igloolik entre deux chamanes, l'un bon, mais mis an déf et tué par l'autre malveillant. Ce conflit divise la communauté car le mauvais chamane transmet son agressivité à Sauri, le fils de son rival, et le désigne en tant que nouveau leader. En effet, ce dernier éprouvait du ressentiment envers son père qui ne le considérait pas comme son héritier. Ainsi la communauté doit faire face à la tyrannie de Sauri et de ses enfants, Oki et Puja. Deux frères, Atanarjuat et Amaqjuaq, descendants d'une famille opprimée, affrontent le méchant Oki et sa sœur Puja, et Atanarjuat épouse la promise d'Oki. Oki et Puja tentent de se venger en essayant de tuer les deux frères. Amaqjuaq meurt, mais son petit frère Atanarjuat parvient à s'enfuir, en courant nu sur la banquise, dans une scène épique qui tient le spectateur en haleine. Le héros est finalement recueilli et caché par un bon chamane et sa famille. Pendant ce temps à Igloolik, Oki tue son propre père Sauri, pour devenir le chef du clan, et traumatise Atuat, la femme d'Atanarjuat. Ce dernier passe l'été à se remettre physiquement de sa course, et à trouver en lui la confiance nécessaire pour rentrer et rétablir l'ordre à Igloolik. L'hiver venu il retourne au campement et se mesure à Oki et sa bande. Au moment crucial où il les domine physiquement, il choisit de les épargner. Après une séance de chamanisme intense pour chasser le mal qui hante la communauté, les semeurs de trouble sont pardonnés mais néan moins tout bannis d'Igloolik.

Ainsi résumée, cette histoire possède des allures de tragédie dite « universelle », qui ne laisse guère entrevoir les enjeux multiples et complexes qu'implique le film. Commençons par rappeler que la vie des Inuit canadiens a été profondément bouleversée par l'arrivée du cinéma dans les communautés de cette partie de l'Arctique durant les années 60 et de la télévision dans les années 80. Les images venant du sud ont été, et sont toujours, une forme de colonisation culturelle radicale touchant chaque foyer. Parmi les effets de ce bouleversement figurent la perte d'un sentiment identitaire fort, étant donnée la nature occidentale du contenu des programmes, la réorganisation de la journée autour des programmes télévisuels, de l'espace du foyer autour du poste, la diminution de la communication entre les jeunes générations et les aînés et donc l'oubli d'histoires et de savoirs traditionnels (Bernard-Bret, 1999). Rappelons également que le début du XXIème siècle correspond pour les Inuit du Grand Nord canadien à la mise à l'épreuve du nouveau territoire du Nunavut, lequel est issu de trente ans de

négociations entre les Inuit et le gouvernement fédéral canadien. Dans ce contexte culturellement et politiquement marqué de changements violents et d'espérances, l'adaptation au grand écran d'un conte oral ancien en inuktitut ne peut se soustraire à un certain nombre de questions. Cet article en aborde trois, à savoir les enjeux narratifs du transfert de l'oralité au cinéma, le rapport très post-colonial entre le film et le monde occidental, et enfin la spécificité et la légitimité du film en tant qu'art véritablement inuit, par et pour les Inuit.

### De l'oralité au cinéma

L'oralité est un medium tout à fait particulier. Les Occidentaux perçoivent généralement les contes oraux à travers le filtre de la littérature, or l'écrit est un medium typiquement occidental, qui peut faire barrière à la compréhension des histoires (Wiebe, 1989, 82). Nous allons voir dans quelle mesure il en est de même ou non pour le cinéma.

Tout d'abord, la culture et la langue des Inuit reflètent un ensemble de valeurs qui caractérisent leur rapport spécifique au monde:

> […] the point here is that the hunter-gatherer way of using language to describe the world makes allowances for realities that are full of ambiguity, and for places where rationality and irrationality, the facts and the supernatural, intertwine. This is not a point about language or grammar, but about how people know, understand, and relate to their surroundings. (Brody, 2002, 61)

Comme l'explique ici Hugh Brody, il existe pour les Inuit des catégories (entre éléments de la terre et animaux, entre visible et invisible) mais aucune catégorie n'est absolue car tout interagit (Birket-Smith, 1995, 191-193). La perception par les sens est acceptée et assumée et le monde est vu et évoqué avec à la fois la prudence d'un être qui connaît ses limites physiques, et la familiarité d'un être qui accepte sa place dans le vaste monde. Le passé est strictement mythologique et le temps est flexible et sensoriel. Ainsi la narration de chaque conte ramène le passé dans le présent, et au même titre que les sens, la mémoire et ses variations ne sont pas remises en question. Opposons à cela la vision du monde des Occidentaux, dans laquelle les catégories sont absolues, notamment entre réel/objectivité et fiction/subjectivité. Dans l'idéologie

occidentale les sens sont une barrière plus qu'un médium entre la réalité et l'esprit. Ainsi dans la relation occidentale de l'esprit au monde, on trouve une aspiration constante à l'objectivité, et par conséquent la subjectivité intrinsèque n'est assumée que dans le cadre de la fiction, à laquelle les occidentaux opposent strictement le réel. De la même manière, les aléas de la mémoire, des sensations, et des sentiments sont considérés comme des entraves à la connaissance du passé, et le passé mythologique est nécessairement fictionnel, d'où la séparation fondamentale entre histoire/*story* et Histoire/*history*.

Dans le film *Atanarjuat* se rencontrent le passé mythologique réel des Inuit et la conception occidentale de la fiction. Sachant que les contes oraux sont de plus en plus remplacés dans l'Arctique par les programmes télévisuels venant du sud, nous pouvons nous demander si les productions d'Igloolik Isuma et *Atanarjuat* en particulier peuvent être considérées comme une forme de substitut au conte oral.

Par définition, les contes oraux inuit s'inscrivent à la fois dans la continuité, puisque leurs thèmes sont transmis de génération en génération, et dans le changement, puisque chaque conteur doit rendre le conte vivant à sa manière, et l'adapter à son auditoire. Renouvellement et adaptation renforcent le mythe, le rendent toujours plus présent dans la vie de ceux qui écoutent les contes. Nous ne devons pas oublier que les contes étant inscrits dans la continuité, les notions d'auteur et de propriété de l'œuvre sont naturellement exclues. Le récit cinématographique quant à lui est forcément fixé, et même s'il peut être toujours réinterprété par des spectateurs différents dans des contextes différents, le récit lui-même ne peut évoluer dans le temps. Qui plus est il est intègré à un système rigide de droits d'auteurs et de valorisation d'un artiste unique.

Pour ce qui est de la forme, le récit oral *dit*, tandis que le récit filmique *montre*, ce qui en fait deux formes de récits aux antipodes l'une de l'autre. Cela étant, elles ont en commun la capacité de suggérer un continuum espace-temps, une série d'événements et une atmosphère. La littérature possède elle cette aussi capacité narrative, mais un certain nombre de caractéristiques rapprochent de façon particulièreuese étroite le cinéma du conte oral Inuit. Il y a dans le cinéma l'expérience simultanée de l'écoute et du regard, la salle de projection est sombre, ce qui donne une sensation de reunion intione,

et dans cet espace les spectateurs sont rassemblés pour partager une histoire. De plus, dans le cas d'*Atanarjuat,* les spectateurs non-inuit sont plongés dans l'environnement sonore de l'inuktitut et de l'arctique, ce qui les rapproche toujours plus de l'expérience de l'oralité inuit, et ce, même s'ils doivent lire le sous-titrage pour comprendre les paroles (Ashcroft, 2002, 51). Nous pourrions même aller jusqu'à suggérer que le cinéma est une forme spécifique d'oralité. Quoi qu'il en soit il ne peut certes techniquement remplacer le conte oral, mais il peut s'en inspirer et y puiser des histoires, comme il le fait déjà avec la littérature. Une interaction entre cinéma et oralité ne peut être qu'enrichissante autant pour le cinéma que pour les contes et ce qu'ils véhiculent (Gardies, 1993, 7).

*Atanarjuat* n'est pas simplement la transposition au cinéma d'un conte inuit ancien, car le récit permet de reconstituer à l'écran un passé de vie nomade, tout en adaptant le récit aux idées et aux besoins inuit contemporains. Le film permet notamment de montrer le chamanisme en pratique, alors que dans bien des communautés de l'Arctique canadien le christianisme en a fait un sujet tabou, sur lequel il ne faut pas mettre de mots (Rodgers, 1996, 49). La subtilité du film tient an fait qu'il rend visible le chamanisme sans que le sujet ne soit jamais abordé verbalement.

Le christianisme n'est pourtant pas exclu du film. *Atanarjuat* se termine sur le discours d'une chamane qui prône la non-violence et le pardon, tandis que dans la plupart des versions orales du conte, le récit se termine par l'exécution pure et simple des perturbateurs (Angilirq, 2002, 203). Le passage du chamanisme au christianisme parmi les Inuit est donc aussi symbolisé dans le film. Le thème du discours final sur le besoin de la communauté de rester réunis et de cesser la violence pour mieux faire face à l'avenir a d'ailleurs une signification contemporaine très forte. Le cinema associé a le tradition orale et aux valeurs locales apparaît comme un médium cohérent pour établir un pont entre un passé mythologique en train d'être oublié et un présent en pleine mutation.

## Le film et le monde occidental

Le cinéma est un médium très populaire, très efficace, et *Atanarjuat* a connu un grand succès bien au-delà de l'Arctique, ce qui pose la question de la relation entre le film et le monde occidental. Le fait que les Inuit utilisent un médium issu du monde occidental et souvent utilisé à des fins colonisatrices (Honigmann, 1968, 176-179)

pourrait passer pour une forme de soumission à la culture dominante et pour un abandon des traditions, au même titre que le Nunavut est parfois désigné comme une « fiction » qui

> se propose réellement, sous des travestissements symboliques qui laissent imaginer un avenir vers l'autonomie ou l'indépendance, de capturer la civilisation inuit, désormais moribonde, et de transformer ses instances en chambres d'enregistrements qui accélèrent les consignes américano-canadiennes. (Onfray, 2002, 125)

Par contre, loin du scénario catastrophique fantasmé par le philosophe Michel Onfray, le chercheur Lionel Larré affirme que l'appropriation d'outils discursifs dans ce contexte est avant tout un acte de résistance: « C'est ainsi que le contenu des premiers écrits indiens n'est jamais un aveu de totale soumission. Ils sont surtout, enfin, des affirmations d'identités qui ne veulent pas disparaître sous la chape sémiotique qu'est la représentation du monde euro-américaine » (Larré, 2004, 48). Ce qui fait d'*Atanarjuat* non pas une perversion de l'oralité inuit en une forme de culture populaire occidentale mais une récupération du passé par un enrichissement culturel. Qui plus est, l'auto-représentation dans un contexte post-colonial peut être vu comme un miroir sans tain, grâce auquel les autochtones voient reflétés leur vision du monde et leur mode de vie, et qui présente simultanément aux regards extérieurs occidentaux les images d'une expérience en marge de la leur. Cette fenêtre sur l'Autre ne peut être une réflexion nette et parfaite de la réalité, mais étant produite par l'Autre, l'image gagne considérablement en justesse et en légitimité. Dans le cas du cinéma, la culture autochtone a d'autant plus de chances d'être vue à l'extérieur de l'Arctique que le cinéma est sans doute le médium le plus populaire du monde occidental actuel.

Le contexte financier dans lequel *Atanarjuat* a été fait a tout d'abord été celui d'un bras de fer entre les vidéastes et l'Etat, les fonds disponibles pour les cinéastes autochtones canadiens étant très inférieurs aux fonds réservés autres cinéastes. Igloolik Isuma Productions a donc du faire tomber quelques barrières qui révélaient une certaine discrimination institutionnalisée au sein du système de subventions.[3] Les longues négociations par lesquelles a dû passer Isuma Productions pour réaliser leur projet se font l'écho de celles

qui ont permis aux Inuit de mettre en place le Nunavut, ce qui donne de fait au film une dimension politique marquée.

 *Atanarjuat,* pour autant*,* n'est pas un film post-colonial ouvertement militant, mais certains aspects du film peuvent être perçus comme étant subversives: notamment les problèmes de compréhension qui se posent pour le spectateur occidental, comme les scènes de chamanisme, les ellipses et les flashbacks qui fragmentent le déroulement de l'histoire, et l'absence d'indications précises de temps ou de lieu. A cela s'ajoutent certains comportements ou paroles des personnages qui sont propres à la culture inuit, et qui peuvent paraître énigmatique pour un spectateur qui n'a pas de connaissances particulières en la matière. En définitive, que cela soit intentionnel ou non, les passages quelques peu obscurs du film sont déstabilisants pour les spectateurs non-inuit. Le film est un médium très familier, un langage qu'ils comprennent, mais il les confronte soudainement à leur position extérieure, en marge de la culture qu'ils observent, et à la nécessité d'admettre que les Inuit se sont approprié le cinéma et qu'ils en ont une maîtrise bien à eux. En découle une remise en question de la culture occidentale comme centre absolu (Spivak, 1988 105) et donc un point de départ pour une véritable compréhension de l'Autre, ainsi que l'a indiqué Abdul R. JanMohamed dans *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*: « a genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness is possible only if the self can somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture » (JanMohamed, 1988, 18).

Un autre élément à tendance subversive est l'utilisation de la vidéo. La caméra vidéo est très maniable, de sorte que le point de vue est facilement subjectif. Tout au long du film la caméra suit les mouvements des personnages de près, et représente souvent leur propre point de vue. Ainsi le spectateur occidental est-il contraint de voir l'histoire à travers le regard de l'Autre. Cette technique du plan subjectif pourrait sans doute être comparée à l'utilisation du narrateur à la première personne dans certains écrits post-coloniaux autochtones, tels que le roman *Slash* (1985)de Jeanette Armstrong. Qui plus est l'utilisation de la vidéo numérique est un outil privilégié au sein de l'industrie cinématographique pour l'auto-représentation et la subversion, comme l'indique Norman Cohn:

> As a marriage of art and politics, Isuma's videomaking synthesizes several related themes in a new way. First,

> Inuit oral story-telling is a sophisticated mix of fact, fiction, performance, improvisation, past and future, which has maintained Inuit culture successfully through art from Stone Age to Information Age. Second, being colonized offers artists a fertile reality for original progressive self-expression. Third, the invention of low-cost video at the end of the 1960s enabled people from Harlem to the Arctic to use TV as a tool for political and social change in local communities. [...] (Angilirq, 2002, 27)

Tout semble ainsi désigner le travail d'Isuma comme étant un parfait exemple de subversion post-coloniale des codes occidentaux.

## Le film et le monde inuit

Il est étonnent donc de constater que, la toute première vocation du film n'était pas d'être vu en dehors du Canada, ni même de l'Arctique (Judell, 2002). Aussi, hors des considérations politiques, la valeur artistique du film et son caractère proprement inuit doivent être pris en considération.

Commençons par le concept de nature. La manière dont la relation entre les personnages et le territoire est filmée dans *Atanarjuat* n'a rien à voir avec la plupart des films que l'on connaît et qui se déroulent dans le Grand Nord, car on n'y perçoit pas la séparation habituelle entre l'Homme et la Nature. Là où dans d'autres films les hommes sont soit plongés dans un dur combat avec la nature, comme dans *Shadow of the Wolf* (1992) de Jacques Dorfman, soit dans une fascination totale pour celle-ci, comme dans le très à la mode *Dernier Trappeur* (2004) de Nicolas Vanier, la nature n'est pas un sujet dans *Atanarjuat*. Elle est partout dans le film mais n'est jamais filmée pour elle-même, au point que le froid et la faim dans le film sont les conséquences d'un déséquilibre au sein de la communauté, de l'oppression volontaire d'une famille par une autre, et non de ce que l'on appelle souvent une nature hostile et un climat impitoyable.

Le territoire est un autre élément particulier, qui traditionnellement selon les Inuit n'est pas une aire géographique, mais un réseau de lignes, d'itinéraires reliant des points importants (Gagné, 1968, 30-38). En effet le territoire détient des ressources vitales, le groupe doit rester uni pour les exploiter, et sans le dense réseau d'itinéraires/liens qui relient les lieux/hommes entre eux, chaque lieu/homme serait dépourvu de sens et d'intérêt. Dans le film, les plans larges en

extérieur reflètent le concept territorial de mouvement et de distance, car on y trouve une présence humaine presque toujours en mouvement. Ces scènes forment un contraste avec les scènes d'intérieur, dans lesquelles la lampe à huile notamment entre en jeu, comme nous le verrons plus bas.

Le concept de réseau humain est quant à lui présent dans les relations familiales renforcées et multipliées par la transmission des noms. Cette pratique vient de la croyance en l'*attiq*, la partie de l'esprit d'une personne qui réside en son nom. Les noms des défunts, ou des mourants, sont transmis aux nouveaux-nés, qui héritent ainsi d'une partie de ces esprits.[4] Si par exemple un enfant porte le nom de son oncle, sa tante l'appellera son « petit mari » ses cousins l'appelleront « père » et son père ou sa mère l'appelleront « frère » Ce système crée des relations de parenté fortes qui dépassent les liens de sang, et qui peuvent atteindre une grande complexité. Dans *Atanarjuat*, la plupart des personnages s'appellent par leurs noms afin de simplifier l'histoire, mais le système de transmission est illustré par le fait qu'Atuat, la promise d'Oki, porte le nom de l'arrière grand-mère d'Oki, ce qui fait que la grand-mère d'Oki, Panikpak, appelle Atuat « mere » ou « petite mere » :

> **Panikpak**   Mother… You're just as beautiful as I remember when I was a child in your arms.
>
> […]
>
> **Atuat**  When I was your mother?
>
> **Panikpak**  Hmmmm….
>
> **Atuat**  Was my Named One very beautiful?... Did you love me very much?
>
> **Panikpak**   Of course! That's why I named you 'Atuat.' I recognized you right away…

De plus le jeune fils d'Atuat porte le nom du défunt mari de Panikpak, ce qui croise les liens de parenté à plusieurs niveaux.

Pour revenir à de plus simples symboles, tout au long du film la lampe à huile de phoque est révélée comme source de vie. Elle procure en effet la chaleur et la lumière durant l'hiver, et c'est par elle que l'on devine l'opulence d'une famille et le succès du chasseur ou au contraire sa pauvreté. La lampe est aussi un lien fort entre les

chasseurs, qui procurent l'huile, et les femmes, qui veillent constamment à l'entretien de cette lampe. Dans le film, la femme chamane, Panikpak, se penche toujours vers sa lampe pour faire appel aux esprits de deux chamanes, son défunt mari et son frère exilé. A chacune de ces occurrences, l'importance de cet objet est amplifiée par un gros plan du visage de Panikpak, pris « point de vue » de la lampe.

Plus généralement, la précision de la caméra vidéo numérique permet de mettre en avant l'approche sensuelle du monde qu'ont les Inuit. Les détails visuels et sonores font ressortir la texture du cuir, de la chair crue du gibier, on perçoit les craquements de la neige et le souffle des personnages. Chacun de ces détails contribue à une ambiance toute particulière. Les sons ambiants sont rarement masqués par la musique, qui est utilisée de manière relativement subtile. Plutôt que d'être ajoutée à la plupart des scènes pour créer une atmosphère dramatique ou sentimentale, ainsi que l'on peut le voir dans tant de films typiquement occidentaux, la musique est méticuleusement insérée dans les séquences clés. Les percussions et le didgeridoo accompagnent les chasseurs en pleine course, et amplifient le rythme de leur corps et de leur souffle. Les voix sont utilisées pour suggérer l'utilisation ou la présence du chamanisme, remplaçant une profusion d'effets spéciaux, ainsi un simple geste peut prendre une dimension totalement mystérieuse.

Le film a aussi été écrit et tourné d'une manière tout à fait inuit, pour ainsi dire. L'histoire a été recueillie auprès de plusieurs conteurs, et les anciens de la communauté étaient constamment consultés pour reproduire aussi précisément que possible la langue et les coutumes qu'ils avaient connues. Le fonctionnement du tournage n'était pas hollywoodien, et les valeurs de consensus et de collaboration remplaçaient la hiérarchie que l'on connaît (Angilirq, 2002, 27). Finalement Igloolik Isuma a préféré l'éclectisme en introduisant des valeurs contemporaines dans le scénario, et un fond sonore de didgeridoos et de violons, à l'authenticité qui se trouve être de toute façon un concept illusoire, comme nous l'indique Salman Rushdie: « Authenticity is the respectable child of old-fashioned exoticism. It demands that sources, forms, style, language and symbol all derive from a supposedly homogeneous and unbroken tradition » (Rushdie, 1992, 67). De cette façon, le film reste une œuvre créative plutôt qu'un musée sur pellicule. Lors d'une interview pour le magazine en

ligne IndieWIRE, Norman Cohn explique très clairement le rôle premier d'Igloolik Isuma tel qu'il le conçoit:

> **IndieWIRE**: What is your company producing now? Can you see your company making any genre films? Westerns? Comedies?

> **Cohn**: Well, we just made a genre film. « The Fast Runner » is an epic. A historical epic. The Japanese made those. « Gone with the Wind » was a historical epic. It's a genre film. The next film which is about shamanism and Christianity is a western.

> **iW**: Oh, really ?

> **Cohn**: Well, sure. It's a showdown. A « Gunfight at the OK Corral » Shamans and missionaries duke it out with supernatural powers. We can make a comedy. We have a children's film we want to make. We're just filmmakers. (Judell, 2002)

Le fait que le journaliste demande à Cohn s'il imagine possible de faire un film de genre maintenant qu'*Atanarjuat* est sorti est très parlant, car l'idée sous-entendue est qu'un film sur les Inuit constitue un genre à part entière, les Inuit étant trop particuliers pour jouer autre chose que « des Inuit ». La réponse de Cohn révèle à quel point Isuma est avant tout une équipe de vidéastes qui hors de toute consideration ethnique et identitairene saurait être restreinte à un seul genre de film. Il s'agit d'une émancipation vis-à-vis du regard occidental et de la logique post-coloniale qui voudrait que toute oeuvre autochtone s'inscrive dans un rapport de force simpliste avec la culture dominante.

*Atanarjuat* a partout été célébré, généralement au nom du fait qu'il d'être est le premier film Inuit, mais le regard occidental doit problématisé être mesuré. En effet la cinéaste métis Loretta Todd nous rappelle que « the discussion about Native theories of representation, about our 'art,' of 'diverse aesthetic values' continues to be reinterpreted according to dominant values, whether mainstream or on the peripheries » (Todd, 1992, 77). Ainsi plutôt que de n'être apprécié que pour son potentiel subversif – comme on aurait facilement tendance à le faire dans le domaine des études post-coloniales – ou bien pour son exotisme et son caractère authentique (très à la mode en ce moment), *Atanarjuat* devrait avant tout être vu

comme une oeuvre d'art inuit d'un nouveau genre, avec les qualités et les défauts que l'on peut trouver à n'importe quelle oeuvre, mais dont la légitimité est indéniable, et qui reflète la vitalité de cette culture.

**Notes**

1. Cet article est fondé sur une partie de mon mémoire de maîtrise soutenu en juin 2005 sous la direction de Mme Claire Omhovère et intitulé « Where Fiction, Non-fiction and Real Life Overlap: Defining the Inuit – Aesthetic and Political Representation in *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Eskimo* (1933), and *Atanarjuat* (2001). »

2. Inuktitut est la langue parlée par les Inuit canadiens. Le mot signifie littéralement « la manière inuit. » Inuktitut is the language spoken by Canadian Inuit. It literally means « the Inuit way. »

3. « *Atanarjuat : The Fast Runner* Launched as First Inuit Feature Film » (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development: 17 Aug. 2004) (nov 2004). <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/nr/ecd/ssd/otm15_e.html>.

4. « Entretien de l'anthropologue Bernard Saladin d'Anglure » *Au Pays des Inuit,* DVD. (Editions Montparnasse, 2002)

**Bibliographie**

Angilirq, Paul Apak, Zacharias Kunuk, Norman Cohn, and Bernard Saladin d'Anglure. *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner.* Toronto: Coach House, 2002.

Armstrong, Jeannette. *Slash*. Penticton, BC: Theytus Books, 1985.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures.* 2nd ed. London & New York: Routledge, 2002.

Birket-Smith, Kaj. *Moeurs et coutumes des Eskimo*. Paris: Payot, 1955.

Bernard-Bret, David. « Canadian Inuit's Experience of Television. » *The Inuit in the 'Global Village'* (1999) (dec 2004). . <http://www.iquebec.ifrance.com/inuit/pages/2a.htm> Dec. 2004.

Brody, Hugh. *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers and the Shaping of the World.* New York: North Point, 2002.

*Le Dernier trappeur*. Dir. Nicolas Vanier. MC4, 2004.

Gagné, Raymond C. « Spatial Concepts in the Eskimo Language. » dans Victor F. Valentine and Frank G. Vallee (eds.) *Eskimo of the Canadian Arctic* The Carleton Library 41. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968. 30-38.

Gardies, André. *Le Récit filmique.* Coll. Contours Littéraires. Paris: Hachette, 1993.

Honigmann, John and Irma. « People Under Tutelage. » dans Victor F. Valentine and Frank G. Vallee (eds.) *Eskimo of the Canadian Arctic* The Carleton Library 41. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968. 173-185.

JanMohamed, Abdul R. « The Economy of Manichean Allegory » In Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds.). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* London: Routledge, 1995. 18-23

Judell, Brandon. « The Nimble Duo Behind 'The Fast Runner': Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn. » *IndieWIRE* (dec 2003).<http://www.indiewire.com/people/int_Cohn_Kunuk_0 20605.html>

Larré, Lionel. « L'Ecriture comme acte de résistance. » *Le Passant Ordinaire* 48 (Apr. 2004 – June 2004) (jun. 2004). <http://www.passant-ordinaire.com/revue/48-627.asp>

Onfray, Michel. *Esthétique du Pôle Nord.* Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 2002.

Rodgers, Wendy. « Circumscribing Silence: Inuit Writing Orature. » *Northern Review* 17 (Winter 1996): 48-59.

Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Granta Books, 1992.

*Shadow of the Wolf*. Dir. Jacques Dorfmann. Films A2 Production, 1992.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics.* London: Routledge, 1988.

Todd, Loretta. « What More Do They Want? » dans. Gerald McMaster and Lee-Ann Martin (eds). *Indigena* Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1992, 71-80.

Wiebe, Rudy. *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic.* Edmonton: NeWest, 1989.

**Chloé Collin**
**Université de Nancy 2, France**

# Dis-covering the Arctic: Revisions of the Arctic Landscape in Postmodern Canadian Literature

## Abstract

*Canadians have long been fascinated with their land and their northern territories. When postmodern writers such as John Moss, Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk, or Robert Kroetsch went to the north, they brought with them a cultural background including representations of the Arctic such as Robert Service's poems, Sir John Franklin's expeditions' reports, or mad trapper stories. Once there, they realized that those representations did not correspond to their own perception of the landscape. Therefore they had to create their own vision, experiencing a shift in the perception of the Arctic because their goal was different than that of their predecessors – "No, I desire true NORTH, not PASSAGE to anywhere," Rudy Wiebe claims in* Playing Dead. *Such a study implies the analysis of the goals of the colonizers (appropriation of the land, Northwest Passage) and their codes of representation of the landscape. More generally, I am led to study the relation between the human being - both Western and Inuit – and the land/landscape, including the challenge of translating a wordless physical reality into narrative. Through an analysis of previous writings, I show the construction of a "mythical North" which formed the cultural background of the Occidental visitors. Sliding to a postmodern approach, I try to find out what their use of the land is (if there is such a use) - the creation of a Canadian identity, an exploration of the self, etc. – examining the postmodern devices which allow them to "dis-cover" the Arctic, including a form of indigenization of their narratives.*

## Résumé

*Les Canadiens sont depuis longtemps fascinés par leur territoire et leurs régions nordiques. Quand les écrivains postmodernes tels que John Moss, Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk ou Robert Kroetsch se rendirent dans le nord, ils y apportèrent un bagage culturel qui*

*comprenait des représentations de l'Arctique telles que les poèmes de Robert Service, les comptes rendus des expéditions de Sir John Franklin, ou des histoires de trappeurs fous. Une fois sur place, ils réalisèrent que ces représentations ne correspondaient pas à leur perception du paysage. Par conséquent ils durent créer leur propre vision, opérant un glissement dans la perception de l'Arctique parce que leurs intentions étaient différentes de celles de leurs prédécesseurs – "No, I desire true NORTH, not PASSAGE to anywhere," revendique Rudy Wiebe dans* Playing Dead. *Une telle étude requiert l'analyse des intentions des colonisateurs (appropriation du territoire, Passage du Nord-Ouest) et de leurs codes de représentation du paysage. Plus généralement, je suis amenée à étudier la relation entre l'être humain – occidental comme inuit – et le territoire/paysage, y compris la question de la traduction d'une réalité physique dépourvue de mots en récit. A travers une analyse d'écrits antérieurs, je montre la construction d'un « Nord mythique » qui formait le bagage culturel des visiteurs occidentaux. Evoluant vers une approche postmoderne, je tente de découvrir quel est leur usage du territoire (s'il existe un tel usage) – la création d'une identité canadienne, une exploration du moi, etc. – en examinant les moyens postmodernes qui leur permettent de 'découvrir' l'Arctique, y compris une forme d'indigénisation de leurs récits.*

The Western Arctic literature gives much attention to the description of the land. The Occidentals, cloaked in a dominating attitude towards their environment which they inherited from an agriculturalist, Judeo-Christian vision of the world, developed codes of representation in order to visualise the land, to describe *landscapes*, defined by Simon Schama as the projection of the viewer's culture over the land (Schama, 1995, 7). W. H. New explains that "[c]ritics, writers, painters and philosophers – from Burke to Gilpin and beyond – all sought […] to demarcate aesthetic "laws" which might articulate (hence contain, within language) a "lawless" land" (New, 1997, 61). They set the use of norms such as perspective or categories such as the picturesque, the beautiful or the sublime which, like the contemporaneous development of Cartesian sciences, bore a pretension of objectivity and universality. Yet those norms rested on landmarks which, according to the Canadian Postmodernists, are anything but universal. "[T]here is no

perspective" (Pelly, 1991) in the Arctic, no vertical dimension. Therefore the representation of the Arctic through these European codes could not help but encounter resistance and the newcomers retreat to the description of an imagined, reassuring yet sublime landscape which could fit the codes, hence the development of a stereotyped North in Western literature. Robert Service, an Englishman who left for the Canadian Wild and wrote about the Klondike gold rush of 1896, even though he did not experience it himself, is the author of a ballad called "The Cremation of Sam McGee," the first stanza of which remained famous:

> There are strange things done in the midnight sun
> By the men who moil for gold;
> The Arctic trail has its secret tales
> That will make your blood run cold;
> The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
> But the queerest they ever did see
> Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
> I cremated Sam McGee. (Service, 1987, 95)

Without fully analysing it, we can extract the Gothic elements it contains: the night, a corpse, blood, the cold, strange and queer things, secrets. Through his writings, Service contributed to the shaping of the legend of the North. Explorer Vilhjalmur Stefansson mocked these Northern stereotypes in his account *The Friendly Arctic* in 1921:

> The land up there is all covered with eternal ice; there is everlasting winter with intense cold; and the corollary of the everlastingness of the winter is the absence of summer and the lack of vegetation. The country, whether land or sea, is a lifeless waste of eternal silence. The stars look down with a cruel glitter, and the depressing effect of the winter darkness upon the spirit of man is heavy beyond words. On the fringes of this desolation live the Eskimos, the filthiest and most benighted people on earth, pushed there by more powerful nations farther south, and eking out a miserable existence amidst hardship. (Stefansson, 1921, 7)

The reality is somewhat different. The Arctic is neither empty nor silent – just consider the fauna and the bugs, the amazing noise made

by the billions of bugs of the Arctic summer. It might be cold during winter, but it is a dry cold much easier to stand than a humid winter in London. One can even get hot up there, walking on boggy tundra. And contrary to popular belief, it seldom snows in the Arctic, the climate being of a desert type. It rains more in Paris than it snows in Iglulik. As for the "Eskimos'" way of life, the Inuit film *Atanarjuat* shows us that "[t]he people is neither struggling against the environment nor fighting the intrusion of outsiders, it is rather striving to find a way to deal with its own human failures and tragedies" (Jeanroy, 2005, 53), as any other people anywhere else on earth. Yet these stereotypes endure, and to most Westerners nowadays, the Arctic is still an icy and empty place.

Canadian literature reflects an obsession of the Canadians with their land, especially their northern territories. The Canadians have always felt an attraction/repulsion towards the land, caught between an Occidental need to tame nature, and a fascination for the wilderness, a state of nature which had disappeared from Europe a long time ago.[1] The newcomers who reached Canada were unable to cope with its wilderness, describing the classical *locus amoenus* – "véritable lieu commun obligé de la description d'un paysage aimable depuis la littérature antique" – instead of what they were actually discovering (Melançon, 1979, 26-27). Robert Melançon suggests that the New World was integrated into the European universe by refusing to see its reality, which "forçait à repenser complètement l'image du monde physique" (Melançon, 1979, 24). Consequently explorers resorted to a description of Canada as a form of Eden (Melançon, 1979, 27). With the advent of Romantic literature in the nineteenth century, the depiction of the new lands integrated sublime patterns, describing the Canadian land as, in Northrop Frye's words, a "sinister and menacing monster" which awes or terrifies (Frye, 1971, 142), a devouring mother. Northrop Frye even speaks of "deep terror in regard to nature" (Frye, 1971, 225) in Canadian poetry and compares entering Canada to being "silently swallowed by an alien continent" (Frye, 1971, 217).

When writers such as Rudy Wiebe, John Moss and Aritha van Herk went to the Arctic, they brought with them a cultural background which included the Canadian classics and explorers' accounts. Yet their eyes did not recognize what they had read. Wiebe realizes that "when one personally goes to the Mackenzie Delta, Franklin and Richardson seem amazingly irrelevant" (Wiebe, 1989, 43), in

reference to the first Franklin expedition which took place from 1819 to 1822 in the Coppermine river area. So they distanced themselves from previous narratives and tried to invent a new way of writing, rejecting the idea of North to dis-cover the Arctic.

"Language is the problem," John Moss repeats in *Enduring Dreams*, then adding: "[w]hat does cold mean, where survival depends upon the solidity of winter? […] How can you speak of snow in Tuktoyaktuk or Pangnirtung, where there are many snows and snow conditions, infinite textures, endless implications?" (Moss, 1996a, 13-14) Moss expresses here a difficulty concerning the adequacy of the English language to convey the human and physical reality of the Canadian Arctic. He resists linguist George Steiner's assertion that "[n]o language is […] concordant with any particular geophysical environment" (Steiner, 1975, 57). Steiner argues that "[w]ith the simple addition of neologisms and borrowed words, any language can be used fairly efficiently anywhere," concluding that "Eskimo syntax is appropriate to the Sahara" (Steiner, 1975, 57) – yet the "Eskimo[s]" live in a desert type of environment which is not so as different from the Sahara as Steiner seems to believe, which tends to weaken his argument.

"How do you write in a new country?" postmodern Canadian writer Robert Kroetsch asks (Kroetsch, 1989, 2). To answer that question, postmodern Canadian writers dwell upon three main concerns: the subversion of the dominant discourse, the reworking of history, and what Linda Hutcheon calls "the ex-centric" (Hutcheon, 1988a, 4). The subversion of the dominant discourse rests on a questioning of the authority of language. But while the Modernists and the American Postmodernists turned to self-reflexivity and completely rejected the dominant discourse, the Canadian Postmodernists favour a rethinking of it through parody and irony. They criticise the dominant discourse from within in a very postcolonial attitude. In doing so, they contest and re-evaluate their colonial history. History is indeed seen by the Postmodernists as a construction "having been made by the historians through the process of selecting, ordering, and narrating" the historical records (Hutcheon, 1988b, 15). Wiebe extensively refers to those historical records in order to rewrite history, as in *Playing Dead* when he lists the names of the voyageurs who died to make possible John Franklin's first expedition in the Arctic (Wiebe, 1989, 33). In doing so, he is making unknown French Canadian voyageurs the true heroes of this typically British

expedition. His approach questions the place of Europe-as-centre, and even rejects the very idea of centre. In fact the Canadian Postmodernists privilege the margins as a challenge of limits, in the content as well as in the form of their writings, blurring the borders between literary genres and between artistic conventions. A good postmodern book resists librarian classifications, as Aritha van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere* which is an essay as well as poetry, or Rudy Wiebe's *A Discovery of Strangers,* a fiction novel combining authentic historical records with personal production.

Ultimately Canadian Postmodernists who experienced the Arctic were unable to find words to express their thoughts. To overcome this difficulty, they mostly resorted to two schemes. The first scheme is a shift in perception. As Moss expresses in his article "Meta Incognita," "[t]he Arctic is place; north a direction" (Moss, 1996b, 161). Until then, for most Westerners the Arctic was not considered to be an end in itself. According to Bernard Saladin d'Anglure, "most present-day historians agree that after the pioneering days of discovery – from the end of the fifteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth century – explorers such as Cartier, Frobisher, Gilbert, Champlain, Smith, Barents, Davis, Waymouth, Hudson, Button, Munk, Fox and James were always searching for a direct route to China" (Saladin d'Anglure, 1984, 447). The Arctic was explored only to be bypassed. Postmodern writers express another will. "I desire TRUE NORTH, not PASSAGE to anywhere," Rudy Wiebe claims in *Playing Dead* (Wiebe, 1989, 114), referring to the famous, so long sought Northwest Passage. In order to achieve this desire, Aron Senkpiel suggests that:

> [i]nstead of looking into the distance, their eyes shift towards the foreground. Detail becomes important. They begin to look differently. […] This is a profound shift in perception: from distant horizon – the thing you focus on when your goal is to get somewhere else – to immediate foreground, the thing you focus on when "here" is where you want to be. It is the difference between, to explore the distinction as Moss does, between the North as means and the North as end, between seeking a Northwest Passage and Ultima Thule (135). It is the difference, to explore the distinction as Wiebe does, between desiring "True

NORTH" and "PASSAGE to anywhere" (114)."
(Senkpiel, 1997, 132-133)

The second scheme is what Terry Goldie calls "indigenization" (Goldie, 1989, 234). Acknowledging that the English language is inadequate to describe Arctic landscapes, writers such as Rudy Wiebe turn to the language of those who have been living there for millennia – the Inuit. They reject the concept of tabula rasa which was pretended by the colonizers in order to facilitate the appropriation of the "new" territories, and they rehabilitate the native civilization as part of their own culture, a sort of heritage by the soil alongside with the traditional heritage by blood.

To regard the Inuit as a source of valuable knowledge was not an obvious matter. The Western society of the nineteenth century, which grounded its expansion on racial hierarchy, inclined to what Francis Spufford calls *Borealism* (Spufford, 1999, 229), "which is a northern version of Said's *Orientalism* that inscribes the North Pole as a function of the English imagination, the Inuit as animals, and the English themselves as superior beings with nothing to learn from such primitives" (Grace, 1996, 178). For centuries the Inuit were maintained in what Anne McClintock calls "anachronistic space": "[a]ccording to this trope, colonized people […] do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of human agency – the living embodiment of the archaic "primitive"" (McClintock, 1995, 30). In the 1950s the Inuit were still not deemed a reliable source. In 1950 French missionary Roger Buliard's account *Inuk*, published in 1957, the map of Victoria Island labelled most of the island as *unknown* and *uninhabited* (Buliard, insert, 1950, 16-17). Apart from the contradiction of this label – how can knowledge, the uninhabited character of the island, be applied to an unknown land? –, such assertion carries on the stereotype of the North as empty and unknown long after the exploration of Canada was completed, resisting the encounter with numerous Inuit communities which, firstly, *were there*, and secondly, could have filled in the Westerners' deficiencies concerning the local geography. The Inuit voices were taken into account only very recently in the Western writings.

Moreover the process of assimilating native voices is problematic concerning landscape writing, because the native peoples do not write about landscape. Whereas Occidental literature gives much

way to descriptions of the land, the Inuit writings focus on the action of living beings.[2] Writing about landscape is an act of translation from a "non-verbal world" into "human language," to quote Albertan writer Thomas Wharton (Wharton, 2002, 14-15). According to George Steiner, every act of translation is an act of appropriation:

> Once the translator has entered into the original, the frontier of language passed, once he has certified his sense of belonging, why go on with the translation? He is now, apparently, the man who needs it least. […] It is only when he "brings home" the simulacrum of the original, when he recrosses the divide of language and community, that he feels himself in authentic possession of his source. […] The original is now peculiarly his. Appropriation through understanding and metaphoric re-saying shades, psychologically as well as morally, into expropriation. (Steiner, 1975, 399-400)

Appropriation is a concept which is foreign to the Inuit because they do not consider themselves to be above the land but part of it, therefore lacking the objectification necessary to the concepts of appropriation and ownership, as expressed by geographer Béatrice Collignon:

> [L]es Inuit construisent leur relation avec un territoire qu'ils ne peuvent s'approprier puisqu'il les contient. […]
>
> L'appropriation ne peut être réalisée que s'il y a extériorité du sujet par rapport à l'objet, or ce n'est pas dans cette position que les Inuit se placent par rapport à leur territoire. De plus, lorsqu'il y a appropriation, celui qui se proclame propriétaire s'octroie un pouvoir sur sa possession et instaure un rapport de domination. Dans la pensée inuit, c'est impossible car ce n'est pas l'homme qui est au cœur du système mais *nuna*, la terre, au sens large du terme (qui inclut *tariuq*, la mer). […]
>
> Les termes de l'appropriation se trouvent de la sorte inversés: on est du territoire bien plus que celui-ci est à quelqu'un. (Collignon, 1999, 39-40)

Ultimately and for the same reason, the Inuit do not have any "landscape", a notion which requires the perceiver to be an observer from outside. Therefore postmodern writers had to assimilate native voices more subtly than just by quoting them, even if they extensively refer to native narratives in what can be considered a real tribute to those who have always been there and yet were discarded and despised by the Westerners for centuries.

A first subtlety Canadian postmodern writers resort to is to assume a subjectivity of discourse which is very natural to the Inuit, a subjectivity which is everything but assumed by the Occident whose scientific heritage bears a pretension of objectivity and universality, as was mentioned earlier. The Inuit do not conceive a narrative otherwise than with an integration of the specific point of view – both spatial and temporal – of its author. This attitude reflects a great concern regarding the accuracy of accounts which paradoxically appear to be more reliable than the Occidental ones because they recognize their partialness. Rudy Wiebe plays on this radical difference when he displays a map of Canada at the beginning of *Playing Dead*. In the 1989 edition, the map is entitled "Inuit View to the South," in the 2003 edition it is called "The Canadian Arctic." This map places the south at the top, challenging the universalism of Occidental maps oriented with the north at the top for European navigational ease since the Mercator projection of 1569.[3] The evolution regarding its title is interesting. The removal of the reference to the "South" deepens the loss of landmarks for the Western reader who will need several seconds to adjust what he is looking at, moreover since the most populated areas of Canada – and therefore most likely to be familiar to the reader – are blank, devoid of toponyms. More subtly, the removal of the reference to the "Inuit" and the new title "The Canadian Arctic" acknowledge a value of truth and absoluteness to the orientation displayed, south-oriented as the Inuit see the world. It is ironically placing the Occidental viewer, so tied to the Mercator projection, in the position of a trickster figure, the *arroseur arrosé* of the Lumière Brothers caught at his own trick, his colonial scientific universalism turned against him.

The Trickster is indeed a very important feature of native mythology in North America. He is an animal, often a raven or a coyote, endowed with supernatural powers, who existed at a time when no clear distinction was made between men, animals and natural elements. Neither good nor evil, the character of the Trickster is

defined by his flaws – he is greedy, selfish, cowardly, childish, careless, impulsive – making him both loathsome and endearing. The Trickster is often at the origin of the birth of the world in many Creation myths, typically as a result of a blunder, depicted in indigenous narratives full of wit and irony such as *The Raven Steals the Light* (Reid) or *Green Grass, Running Water* (King). The use of the trickster figure pattern by postmodern Canadian writers is indisputably an expression of indigenization. As Delphine Jeanroy expresses:

> Just as the Canadian indigenous culture is rooted in the idea of shifts – shifts between the world of spirits and that of the living, between human beings and animals, between good and evil – as embodied in the trickster figure, Canadian postmodern writers focus on the possibilities of shifts between genres and cultures which are conventionally considered as impervious – and integrate the model of the trickster, along with the Trickster itself, in their own work. (Jeanroy, 2004)

I will conclude this paper by quoting the first words of Rudy Wiebe's novel *A Discovery of Strangers*: "The land is so long, and the people travelling in it so few, the curious animals barely notice them from one lifetime to the next" (Wiebe, 1994, 1). There is not doubt that Rudy Wiebe masters English language, and that he knows that in English a land should not be described as "long"' but as "wide". What Wiebe is doing here is applying the Inuit spatial concept to the English language. In *Playing Dead*, this concept is described as two-dimensional (Wiebe, 1989, 15). According to linguist Raymond Gagné, the Inuit conceive the space around them as either areal or linear. Areal are "[a]ll visible phenomena […] whose visible limits are in fact, or appear to the speaker to be, of roughly equal dimensions, such as a ball, an igloo […] or an ice surface." Linear are "[a]ll visible phenomena […] that are or appear to be of unequal dimensions (that is, things that are distinctly longer than they are wide), such as a harpoon, […] a rope, […] or a river" (Gagné, 1968, 33-34). Moreover, an areal element becomes linear "when in motion," and ""[a]ny area without easily definable limits, such as a wide expanse of land or sea, is automatically classified as of unequal dimension," that is, as being long and narrow" (Wiebe, 1989, 19). The Arctic geography often provides flat expanses of land, and therefore to the Inuit, the land is a linear notion.

Combining it with the linear dimension of the Inuit nomadic lifestyle – elements in motion are linear –, Wiebe is indeed right when he asserts that in the Arctic, the land *is* "long."

**Endnotes**

1. There is a perfect example on the campus of York St John's College. By the chapel, in striking contrast with the usual neat lawns, is the "wild life area," where the grass is allowed to grow as it feels. Still this piece of wilderness is framed, the disorder neatly organized with paths, benches and piles of cut wood.

2. Compare for example *Sanaaq* by Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk and *Roughing It in the Bush* by Susanna Moodie, two autobiographical works by novice writers.

3. The origin of the orientation of the north at the top of maps is probably related to the Pole Star, a fixed point in the European sky which indicates the north and was therefore of great importance for navigators to sail across the oceans. But in the high Arctic, the Pole Star is too high in the horizon "to yield an accurate directional bearing" (McDonald, 2000, 169), therefore the Inuit have no reason to place the north at the top of their orientation, as they are using the sun rather than the Pole Star.

**Works cited**

*L'Arroseur arrosé.* Dir. Louis Lumière. Gaumont, 1895.

*Atanarjuat*. Dir. Zacharias Kunuk. Igloolik Isuma Production, 2001.

Buliard, Roger. *Inuk: "Au dos de la terre!"* 1950. Paris: Saint-Germain, 1957.

Collignon, Béatrice. "Appropriation symbolique – appropriation légale: les sens du territoire." *Pour mieux comprendre le Nunavut, actes de la journée Nunavut 30 janvier 1999*. Eds. Sylvie Teveny and Michèle Terrien. Paris: INALCO, 1999. 35-49.

Frye, Northrop. *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: Anansi, 1971.

Gagné, Raymond C. "Spatial Concepts in the Eskimo Language." *Eskimo of the Canadian Arctic*. Eds. Victor F. Valentine and Frank G. Vallee. The Carleton Library 41. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968. 30-38.

Goldie, Terry. "The Representation of the Indigene." *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London & New York: Routledge, 1989. 232-236.

Grace, Sherrill E. Rev. of *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* by Francis Spufford. *Northern Review* 17 (Winter 1996): 177-180.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. London & New York: Routledge, 1988a.

----------. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study on Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988b.

Jeanroy, Delphine. "Where Fiction, Non-fiction and Real Life Overlap: Defining the Inuit: Aesthetic and Political Representation in *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Eskimo* (1933), and *Atanarjuat* (2001)." U of Nancy 2 Master's thesis, dir. Claire Omhovère, 2005. Unpublished.

----------. "Reinventing the West." 2004. Unpublished Term paper. Date unknown.

King, Thomas. *Green Grass, Running Water*. New York: Bantam, 1994.

Kroetsch, Robert. "The Moment of the Discovery of America Continues." *The Lovely Treachery of Words: Essays Selected and New*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford UP, 1989. 1-20.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*. London & New York: Routledge, 1995.

McDonald, John. *The Arctic Sky: Inuit Astronomy, Star Lore, and Legend*. Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, and Iqaluit, NU: Nunavut Research Institute, 1998, 2000.

Melançon, Robert. "Terre de Cain, Âge d'Or, Prodiges du Saguenay: Représentations du Nouveau Monde dans les Voyages de Jacques Cartier," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 4.2 (Summer 1979) 22-34.

Moodie, Susanna. *Roughing It in the Bush*. 1852. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989.

Moss, John. *Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape*. Concord, ON: Anansi, 1996a.

----------. "Meta Incognita." *The Northern Review* 17 (Winter 1996b): 148-165.

Nappaaluk, Mitiarjuk. *Sanaaq*. Trans. Bernard Saladin d'Anglure. Outremont, QC: Stanké, 2002.

New, W[illiam] H[erbert]. *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997.

Pelly, David F. "How Inuit Find Their Way in the Trackless Arctic." *Canadian Geographic* (Aug.-Sep. 1991): 58-64. Online. *National Library of Canada* <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/2/16/h16-5305-e.html> 28 April. 2005.

Reid, Bill and Robert Bringhurst. *The Raven Steals the Light*. Vancouver, Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1978.

Saladin d'Anglure, Bernard. "The Route to China: Northern Europe's Arctic Delusions." *Arctic* 37.4 (Dec. 1984): 446-452.

Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. Toronto: Random House, 1995.

Senkpiel, Aron. "Places of Spirit, Spirits of Place: The Northern Contemplations of Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk, and John Moss." *Echoing Silence: Essays on Arctic Narrative*. Ed. John Moss. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1997. 123-136.

Service, Robert. *Dan McGrew, Sam McGee and Other Great Service*. Davisburg, MI: Wilderness Adventure Books, 1987.

Spufford, Francis. *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination*. New York: Picador USA, 1999.

Stefansson, Vilhjalmur. *The Friendly Arctic*. New York: Macmillan, 1921.

Steiner, George. *After Babel*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975.

van Herk, Aritha. *Places Far from Ellesmere: A Geografictione* [sic]. Red Deer, AB: Red Deer College P, 1990.

Wharton, Thomas. "Translating the Icefields." *Lecture(s) du paysage canadien = Decoding and Telling the Canadian Landscape*. Eds. Michèle Kaltemback and Marcienne Rocard. Talence, France: Association Française d'Etudes Canadiennes, 2002. 13-19.

Wiebe, Rudy. *A Discovery of Strangers*. Toronto: Vintage, 1994.

----------. *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic*. Edmonton: NeWest, 1989.

----------. *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic*. 1989. Revised edition 2003. Edmonton: NeWest, 2003.

# *Bodies of Knowledge/Places of Resistance*

**Sabine Schlüter**
**Christian Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, Germany**

## Bodies, Bowels and B-Movies: The Grotesque Depiction of Violence in Two Plays by George F. Walker

**Abstract**

*In his plays, George F. Walker depicts the social and moral condition of contemporary Canadian society and of the Western world in general, often by using elements of the grotesque. The grotesque, being an aberration from the desirable norms of harmony, balance and proportion, often creates a comic effect while at the same time highlighting the horror behind it, among which violence plays a crucial role in Walker's plays. Two of his plays will be discussed in the following article,* Beyond Mozambique *and* Risk Everything*.* Beyond Mozambique *is a B-movie adaptation in which violence is presented in the context of the mass media and is depicted as a comically exaggerated form of sheer brutality. Contrary to this,* Risk Everything *appears to be, at least at first glance, a realistic play in which violence is shown as a concomitant of criminality. However, the unfazed way in which the characters react to situations of extreme danger and brutality can only be described as grotesque. Both plays demonstrate the indifference with which violence is accepted as normal by a society whose everyday life is flooded with representations of brutality and inhumanity. This also represents a metatheatrical comment on the audience itself. This raises the question of whether grotesque exaggeration is a necessary means of stirring the conscience of people who have grown so used to and become so dulled by representations of violence that they no longer realize it as such*.

**Résumé**

*Dans ses pièces de théâtre, George F. Walker présente la condition sociale et morale de la société canadienne contemporaine et du monde occidental en général en employant souvent des éléments grotesques. Le grotesque, en tant que déviation des normes désirables d'harmonie, d'équilibre et de proportion, crée un effet comique mais en même temps accentue des abus, parmi lesquels, chez Walker, la violence joue un rôle important. Deux pièces de théâtre seront discutées dans l'article suivant,* Beyond Mozambique *et* Risk Everything. Beyond Mozambique *est une adaptation du genre du «B-movie» pour la scène. Dans celle-ci, la violence est présentée dans le contexte des mass média et se montre sous forme d'une brutalité comiquement exagérée. Contrairement à* Beyond Mozambique*,* Risk Everything *semble être une pièce de théâtre réaliste, dans laquelle la violence est présentée comme un phénomène complice de la criminalité. Pourtant, les réactions indifférentes des personnages face à des situations de péril extrême peuvent être caractérisées de grotesques. Les deux pièces démontrent l'indifférence avec laquelle la violence est acceptée comme naturelle dans une société qui est submergée par de différentes représentations de brutalité et d'inhumanité dans sa vie quotidienne. Cela est aussi un commentaire metathéâtrale qui s'adresse au public et qui soulève la question de savoir si la représentation grotesque de la violence est un moyen incontournable pour secouer les esprits de moins en moins sensibilisés dans une culture médiatisée où parfois la brutalité peut paraître banale.*

George F. Walker is one of the most prolific contemporary Canadian playwrights whose main concerns are the moral and social condition of contemporary Canadian society. Walker therefore exposes his audiences to the depiction of social problems like drug abuse, criminality, social inequality, domestic violence and brutality in the mass media. At the same time, he questions society's moral standards and severely criticizes the way people react to the problems with which they are confronted. The world he presents in his plays is void of means of orientation; it is flooded by different parallel "truths" and "realities" and leaves both his characters and his audience in a perpetual state of confusion and disillusionment. Moral standards and ways of understanding and explaining the world are seriously challenged. Violence is, of course, one of the basic

problems in a society without roots and orientation. It plays a prominent role in criminality and drug abuse; it is permanently displayed on the mass media, be it as psychological violence or as simple physical brutality. Walker presents different forms of violence, ranging from the very obvious brutality known from splatter B-movies, to examples of domestic and sexual violence, to the depiction of very subtle forms of oppression exercised by authorities or other "higher forces." One of his means of bringing this atmosphere of a world lost in postmodernist confusion and existential anxiety across is the use of elements of the grotesque. In the following, the grotesque depiction of violence in Walker's dramatic work will be analyzed using the example of two plays, *Beyond Mozambique*, one of Walker's early plays, and *Risk Everything*, a play from his recent cycle *Suburban Motel*.

First, however, the term grotesque should be defined briefly. There have been a variety of different approaches toward a definition of the grotesque, but attempts to define a universal and timeless principle of the grotesque have so far proved to be futile. There is, however, a great deal of agreement about a couple of basic features. The most consistently distinguished characteristic of the grotesque is a fundamental element of disharmony and implies a conflation of disparities. The grotesque is generally considered to be a form of distortion of the "real world" or of the well-known, and always entails an aberration from the desirable norms of harmony, balance and proportion; its core, therefore, is the anti-norm. The tension arising from the non-congruence of norm and deformation often creates a comical effect. However, the defamiliarisation of the well-known more often than not makes defects visible and may even reveal a terrible truth or condition which is hidden in the "normal." Thus, the crucial factor in one's reaction to this aberration from the "normal" is a confusion between a sense of the comic and a feeling of revulsion, horror or disturbance. Examples of concrete manifestations of the grotesque are the deformation of human bodies, hybrids of human beings and animals or the enlivening of non-animated things, but it can also reveal itself in the contrast arising from an incompatibility of situation and behaviour. The latter is a form of the grotesque which is often used in Walker's plays. Moreover, Philip Thomson argues that

> [t]he essentially abnormal nature of the grotesque, and
> the direct and often radical manner in which this

> abnormality is presented, is responsible perhaps more
> than anything else for the not infrequent condemnation
> of the grotesque as offensive and uncivilized, as an
> affront to decency and an outrage to 'reality' and
> 'normality' – or [...] as tasteless and gratuitous
> distortion or forced, meaningless exaggeration.
> (Thomson, 1972, 26).

In this sense, the grotesque can be used as a means of provocation in that it repels while at the same time confronting its onlooker with his own shortcomings, which can, of course, be used as a powerful dramatic device.

In some of his early plays, Walker imitates genres that can be largely considered as grotesque in themselves like B-movies and cartoons. In the case of B-movies, the grotesque is partly due to the low budget, a circumstance which has immediate consequences for the quality of both production and acting: "[B-movies have] a really cheesy script and insanely bad actors who deliver all of that cheesy goodness to us with all the fervour that a dollar ninety-eight can buy" (Martin, n.p.). This often leads to an involuntary comic distortion as compared to so-called A-list films. B-movies are formulaic and campy, with cheap special effects and uninspired dialogue. Most of the characters in these films are mono-dimensional types who, along with vampires, cannibals, zombies, mad scientists and their mutilated victims can be considered as grotesque deformations of human beings in that they are reduced to a particular, mostly negative, character trait. The defamiliarised world of B-movies is compounded by the frequent use of gratuitous nudity, sexuality and/or violence. The latter plays a prominent role in war, jungle and horror films, its manifestations ranging from brutal war action to the malicious mutilation of human beings.

### Beyond Mozambique

*Beyond Mozambique* is an example of Walker's B-movie adaptations as it draws heavily upon the structural, stylistic and iconographic frame of jungle and horror B-movies. In this play, six disparate characters are thrown together in the jungle of Mozambique, whose centre is the mad scientist Rocco. This group of white trash represent different aspects of the "decline of the West and the uncontainable chaos caused by the confusion of civilized values" (C.S. Walker, 2002, 280). Science, religion, legal authority and culture are all

revealed to be empty and futile. The main thrust of the plot is the growing threat of violence from the natives as the characters drift into degeneracy and hallucination. The play is an orgy of diverse kinds of violence which are closely linked to racism, sexism and general contempt for fellow human beings.

The most obvious form of grotesquely depicted violence in *Beyond Mozambique* is the representation of splatter movie brutality, in which the mad scientist is the central figure as he conducts experiments on native cadavers. These are illegally exhumed (and later procured by murder) by his assistant Tomas who has himself been mutilated by Rocco and is now brain-damaged. As is the custom in horror B-movies, mutilations of human beings are depicted in gory detail. Even though the actions of mutilation and murder themselves are not represented on stage, their results are since the characters carry human body parts as the disgusting evidence of their doings. Tomas wears a foot on a string around his neck while Rocco himself keeps a range of preserved organs and intestines on his bedside table. When he and his wife Olga have a violent fight over whether or not to keep the bowels in their bedroom, their confrontation ends with a heap of bloody organs right on the centre of the stage. The demented assistant carries a mutilated corpse on stage, and Rita, a porn actress who has come to the jungle in order to do field research for her next film, finds a cut-off head next to her tent. The perversity of the display of amputated limbs is compounded by Rocco's philosophy of life: While absent-mindedly squeezing a blood-dripping piece of intestine, he says dreamily "[…] there's something about committing crimes against humanity that keeps you in touch with the purpose of the universe." (*Beyond Mozambique*, 126). The drastic exhibition of human organs and body parts, funny though the extreme exaggeration might be, demonstrates not only the brutality of the acts of violence, but is also grotesque in that the dissection of the victims reduces them to human material and thereby dehumanizes them.

Violence in *Beyond Mozambique*, however, does not stop at the dismemberment of natives and the perversion of the noble intentions of medical science. Sympathy for other creatures and acts of mercy are perverted in very much the same way, connected with violent action and turned into their opposite. Corporal Lance, for example, is a former RCMP officer who has been dismissed from service for shooting a farmer's cows in order to free them from the "evil

whining misery" (*Beyond Mozambique*, 121) which he believes to have detected in their eyes. His idea of mercy consists solely of mercy killings. As if the shooting of the cows were not enough, the notion of mercy killings is stretched to the point of total perversion when it turns out that Lance has a paedophile disposition. He abuses the daughters of the natives for sexual intercourse and describes the violation of a nine-year old native girl in all its gory detail: "It was good. We both liked it. But she went funny. Stole my pistol and tried to shoot off my you-know-what. I liked that too. But then she started to cry […] and I knew she was in 'misery'. 'Evil whining misery.'" (*Beyond Mozambique*, 130) The notion of "evil whining misery", of course, implies another "mercy killing." Corporal Lance completely ignores the fact that his violation is the cause of the young girl's desperation, and instead of feeling guilty, he unscrupulously praises himself as being her saviour. In his mind, the violation and the subsequent murder are wholly disconnected; what he considers as an act of humanity, is, in fact, shown to be an act of ignorance, selfishness and brutality. In this case, the motif of a mercy killing is disconnected from its original meaning and led *ad absurdum*. Moreover, as this example demonstrates, the contempt for the dignity of fellow human beings is also mirrored in the characters' sexual contacts. The native girl is not the only woman who is violated in the course of the play. Rita has engaged in a little arms trade with the natives in order to procure money for her next movie and has cheated them, upon which a couple of her angry business partners rape her. These men use sexual violence in order to take revenge on her, but they also employ it to demonstrate power and thereby show themselves to be an imminent threat to the white settlers.

This threat is chosen as a theme throughout the whole play and is not restricted to sexual violence. At irregular intervals, mumbling and drums can be heard from the bushes, and poison darts are shot at the white people. Even though this threat remains unseen by the audience, it creates an atmosphere of fear of the imminent violence. The situation culminates at the end of the play when apocalypse is closing in on the characters from all sides. While the drums and noises from the bushes become louder and more aggressive, Olga shoots herself for fear of losing her decorum, upon which Rocco uses his wife's corpse as a ventriloquist's dummy. Her body is dehumanized and perversely reduced to the appearance of a puppet

without dignity or a will of its own. She merely serves as a means of distracting and entertaining the violent natives who are threatening to take over.

The way in which these displays of perversion and brutality are being dealt with by the characters compounds the grotesque depiction of extreme physical and psychological violence. Instead of being utterly shocked, they seem to consider brutality as an absolutely natural phenomenon and their reaction is strangely unfazed, even when confronted with extreme perversions such as murder or dismemberment. When porn star Rita finds the head of the former priest next to her tent, she takes it to Olga in order to complain. Olga herself reacts fairly coolly:

> OLGA     What's that you're covered with.
> RITA     Blood.
> OLGA     From where.
> RITA     His head.
> OLGA     Whose head
> RITA     The priest. Father Ricci. Someone took an axe to him. I found his head outside my tent. It's in this bag. And I don't know what I'm supposed to do with it. I mean I can't carry it around forever. […]
> OLGA     Yes. That's Father Ricci all right. I recognize the disapproving look. Oh. Before I forget. You're invited for breakfast tomorrow morning. […] Will you come?
>
> (*Beyond Mozambique,* 92)

This dialogue demonstrates that the characters' feelings have been blunted in such a way that they have lost any kind of feeling for how horrible their doings and their surroundings really are. Even though Rita gets very upset, it is not because of the sight of the cut-off head, but because she is annoyed at the notion of having to deal with the head's disposal. As for Olga, she is only interested in decorum and chooses to largely ignore the horrors surrounding her. She is not disturbed at the sight of Father Ricci's head but coolly comments on his identity. This "normality" of even the most brutal display of violence unveils the characters' remarkable ability to adapt to the circumstances around them and at the same time reveals a frightening coldness and indifference.

Unrealistic and exaggerated though it may seem, *Beyond Mozambique* offers an insight, if only Walker's insight, into the nature of modern man. By referring to the structural and iconographic frame of B-movies, *Beyond Mozambique* metatheatrically reflects upon the effects of the permanent massive display of violence in the mass media, of which this type of film definitely is a part. The constant confrontation with violence and horror renders people immune to them. This is highlighted by the representation of the dramatic characters as mere types, devoid of feeling, let alone sympathy. Ronald Huebert considers *Beyond Mozambique* to be "an exploration into the psychology of evil" (Huebert, 1978-9, 366). This notion is true in so far as this play offers an insight into the self-protective nature of man. Extreme circumstances may lead to an evil disposition and to the readiness to harm others. In this play, the grotesque depiction of violence is symptomatic of "a world that is clearly at the point of collapse" (Gass, 1978, 13) as it constitutes quite the opposite of the values of civilization that the characters pretend to stand for, such as religion, legal authority and science. The representation of the mass media by the example of the B-movie becomes a symbol of the dangers lurking in a society that is flooded by a wide range of medial influences and different "truths." As Huebert puts it, "[…] the chaos is after all the jungle of modern experience" (Huebert, 1978-9, 368). Violence, in this context, cannot merely be considered as violence in the sense of the word. It becomes a symbol of overstimulation and the subsequent self-estrangement of man. With their one-dimensional qualities along with the dulling of their consciousness and the obvious perversion of their original intentions, the characters stand for the possible effects of being exposed to too wide a spectrum of influences.

### Risk Everything

In contrast to *Beyond Mozambique*, *Risk Everything* appears, at least at first glance, to be a realistic play, but in which violence still plays a major role and is depicted as a concomitant of criminality. It is used as a means of control within a hierarchy outside the mainstream of society. *Risk Everything* tells the story of Denise and R.J., a young couple stranded in a cheap motel room. Denise's mother, Carol, has stolen a considerable amount of money from a thug named Steamboat Jeffries who wants revenge. When Carol advises R.J. to go to Jeffries and negotiate on her behalf, he returns wired with

explosives. The same misfortune happens to Michael, a porn producer from the adjacent room who tries to help. The violence depicted in this play does not portray the naked brutality of mutilation and murder as in *Beyond Mozambique*. Although its representation is a little more subtle, it can still be considered as grotesque.

Although violence remains unseen, it is omnipresent in this play. All violent actions are performed offstage, but their results are visible. Carol is beaten up by Steamboat Jeffries' men, and so is R.J. Moreover, Carol's friend Murray Lawson is reported to have been brutally murdered, and Michael and R.J. are wired with explosives. All these representations of violence are not grotesque as such. What makes them appear grotesque and highlights the horrors of murder and threat is the characters' reaction when facing peril. Just like in *Beyond Mozambique*, they remain strangely unfazed by imminent death. In this context, Carol is the most prominent figure. Being a committed gambler, she likes taking risks and is continually looking for ways to improve her financial situation at all costs. She hardly ever takes into consideration that her behaviour may harm others. Even when she herself is beaten up by Jeffries' men, and her own health and even her life are at risk, her priorities still lie with keeping Steamboat's money. When R.J. and Michael definitely are in mortal danger, waiting to be blown up with explosives, they ask for the police to be called. For Carol, however, this is not an option because "[w]e don't go to the police about anything in my family." (*Risk Everything*, 303). This argument is completely absurd considering the seriousness of the situation. Instead of helping the two men, Carol comes up with the idea of doing something "really ballsy outrageous […] that sticks right in Steamboat Jeffries' big slobbering face!" (*Risk Everything*, 310). What she means by this is to convince Michael and R.J. to explode all over Jeffries, a grotesque notion that is totally inappropriate in this situation and that reveals a complete loss of touch with reality.

This unnaturally relaxed behaviour in the face of impending death reaches a peak when Michael reluctantly agrees to be blown up in Jeffries' presence and is rewarded with sexual favours. Wired with explosives and waiting to be blown up, Michael is delighted that Carol offers him oral satisfaction. She is even joking about this with a pun: "When you and I crawl into bed and begin to have free wild uninhibited sexual intercourse while we both face imminent

destruction it will be a blow for our side. […] A blow. […] Would you like a blow for our side, Michael." (*Risk Everything*, 313). Michael gets so aroused at the thought that he answers: "So this is kinda like a memorial blow job." (*Risk Everything*, 313). This notion of sexual intercourse in the face of death is the grotesque exaggeration of the stimulating effect dangerous situations and violent sexual practices may have on some people.

Like in *Beyond Mozambique*, violence is connected with the representation of mass media, although in a different manner. Whereas *Beyond Mozambique* is constructed after the model of a film genre, in *Risk Everything* the media are embedded in a realistic frame. While waiting for disaster to strike and for the two men to be blown up, the four people in the motel room watch television as a distraction. Although this may not appear entirely unrealistic at first glance, it does when it becomes clear that for R.J., television has become a substitute reality. His identification with the characters on television goes so far that he even identifies with a snake in a wildlife show: "At the end of it I felt like I knew the snake personally. […] I really think I knew how it *felt*, what made it *tick*." (*Risk Everything*, 275). By identifying with animals and characters from television, R.J. refuses to face his own reality. This evasiveness turns grotesque when he is faced with imminent destruction. When Denise and Carol are discussing the dangerous situation they are in, he cannot even be persuaded to switch off the TV set. Only after Denise has explained that all of them might end up being killed, he offers: "I'll turn down the sound a bit." (*Risk Everything*, 273). When wired with explosives, Michael and R.J. discuss their favourite television programmes. In a conversation with Denise, R.J. explains where his fascination with this medium stems from:

> DENISE   It's fucking television!
> R.J.       It's fucking … better.
> DENISE   Better than what!?
> R.J..      Than this!
> DENISE   This is life!
> R.J.       Life sucks!
>
>            (*Risk Everything*, 306)

Therefore, in *Risk Everything* the role mass media play in the context of violence is quite the opposite from their function in *Beyond*

*Mozambique*. Whereas the genre of the B-movie is the very source of violence, television in this play serves to escape from it.

## Conclusion

At first glance, the presentation of violence in these two plays seems to differ greatly. Whereas *Beyond Mozambique* is an orgy of blood, in *Risk Everything* violence mostly takes place in the characters' and the audience's heads. What the two plays have in common is the matter-of-fact attitude that the characters reveal toward the most extreme displays of brutality and even impending death. It is partly this indifference that makes the depiction of violence a grotesque one. The inappropriate coolness of the characters forms a comic contrast to the horrors of mutilation, murder, rape and death threats. At the same time the violence is emphasized and thereby rendered even more vivid in the audience's conscience. Violence seems to be so much a part of the characters' everyday life that they cope with it quite naturally – so naturally that their relation to it becomes, in fact, unnatural. By intermingling the characters' perception of reality with alternative, fictional realities as represented by the mass media, Walker portrays the world as a place that has lost absolute reference points and thus universal moral standards. Stephen Haff states that Walker's plays "gain their nightmarish quality from a scientific, objectifying approach, a following of implications to their logical extreme in order to expose 'truths.' He dramatizes obsessions which lie behind familiar types and presents them also as obsessions responsible for some of the most horrifying violence of our century." (Haff, 1991, 60). Whether it takes the form of belonging to the fictional universe of the B-movie or the identification with the world of television, the characters in Walker's plays are no longer capable of recognizing the deplorable state of the world. Violence becomes a symbol of the uncontainable chaos of the world that both the fictional characters and the audience are confronted with.

This of course constitutes a metatheatrical comment directed at the audience because by referring to the mass media, Walker relates to a common experience of modern man. He thereby creates a reference point that the audience cannot evade or ascribe exclusively to the world of fiction. In an interview with John Fraser, Walker describes the mind of modern man as a "media garbage bag" (Fraser, 1977, 23) and thereby questions the audience's ability to realize reality in general and its defects in particular. The grotesque depiction of violence shakes up the spectators and stirs their conscience. Stephen

Haff argues that "[t]he audience may laugh at the parody, but the laughter is designed to make people question the assumptions behind the source, and their own reactions to it." (Haff, 1991,60). They suddenly realize the voyeuristic pleasure they take in the characters' brutality as well as in their suffering. In this sense, the shock effect caused by the grotesque seems to be a necessary measure to reinstate the audience's perception of reality. Referring to Joseph Conrad, Craig Stewart Walker states that "[w]hat lies 'Beyond Mozambique,' […] is a moral state in which 'the horror, the horror' that Kurtz bore witness to with his last words has become an acceptable banality." (C.S. Walker, 2002, 281). By depicting violence in the funny and shocking mode of the grotesque, Walker seeks to create an awareness for this type of horror, and thereby prompts his audience to reflect upon the state of their society and their own moral disposition.

**Works cited**

Fraser, John. "Walker turns to murder with comedy". In *Globe and Mail* 19 Apr 1977: 23.

Gass, Ken. "Introduction". In Martin Kinch (ed.). *Three Plays by George F. Walker*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1978, 9-15.

Haff, Stephen. "Slashing the Pleasantly Vague: George F. Walker and the Word". *Essays in Theatre* 10.1 (1991): 59-69.

Huebert, Ronald. "Drama". *University of Toronto Quarterly* 48.4 (1978-79): 362-70.

Martin, Duane L. "What is a B-movie?" Online. http://www.bmoviecentral.com/bmoviecentral/articles/What%20Is%20A%20B-Movie.html. 29 Jan. 2006.

Thomson, Philip. *The Grotesque*. London: Methuen, 1972.

Walker, Craig Stewart. *The Buried Astrolabe: Canadian Dramatic Imagination and Western Tradition*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

Walker, George F. *Beyond Mozambique*. In Martin Kinch (ed.). *Three Plays by George F. Walker*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1978, 87-135.

----------. *Risk Everything*. In George F. Walker. *Suburban Motel*, Burnaby, B.C.: Talonbooks, 1999, 261-319.

**Krzysztof Majer**
**University of Lodz, Poland**

# Birth by Fire: Violent Reshaping in Mark Anthony Jarman's Short Story, "Burn Man on a Texas Porch"

**Abstract**

*The paper deals with the violent restructuring of body and identity, resulting from a propane accident in "Burn Man on a Texas Porch," a story by the promising Canadian writer Mark Anthony Jarman. The paper analyzes Jarman's work through the concept of entropy and the second law of thermodynamics, drawing on parallels with the writing of Thomas Pynchon: in a decentralized, unbearably random world, the disfigured character chooses to interpret his plight as a plot devised by powers beyond his control, personified and godlike, which are nonetheless rooted in the scientific. Meditating on mutability and irreversibility, Burn Man envisions the violence inflicted on him as a conscious act of a sentient and inimical force, not unlike a trickster figure of mythological origins. Moreover, the paper focuses on his heightened awareness of the now-disfigured body, its physical as well as psychological boundaries. Considering the relative scarcity of available resources, the author of the article has chiefly made recourse to interviews with Mark Anthony Jarman. The article strives to place the author's emerging voice in the context of North American postmodernism, focusing on its use of language shaped by media culture and acknowledging the influence of writers such as Don DeLillo and Raymond Carver.*

**Résumé**

*L'article traite la reconstruction violente du corps et de l'identité fortement endommagés lors d'une explosion de gaz dans* « Burn Man on a Texas Porch », *une nouvelle écrite par Mark Anthony Jarman, auteur canadien très prometteur. L'Article analyse l'œuvre de Jarman à travers les concepts de l'entropie et la deuxième loi de la thermodynamique tout en tirant des parallèles avec les écrits de*

*Thomas Pynchon: dans un monde décentralisé et insoutenablement arbitraire, le personnage défiguré choisit de comprendre son destin comme un scénario prémédité par des forces qui dépassent son contrôle et qui, malgré leur nature anthropomorphe et divine, sont pourtant d'origine scientifique. Ses méditations sur la mutabilité et l'irréversibilité mènent Burn Man à envisager que la violence qui lui a été infligée est un acte conscient commis par une force animée et malfaisante qui est semblable au trickster, personnage d'origine mythologique. De plus, l'article se focalise sur une conscience nouvellement sensibilisée du corps, maintenant défiguré, avec ses limites physiques et psychologiques. Vu la rareté relative du matériel disponible, l'auteur de l'article a surtout eu recours aux interviews données par Mark Anthony Jarman. L'article tente de placer la voix émergente de l'auteur dans le contexte postmoderne nord-américain en soulignant l'emploi d'un langage forgé par une culture de médias et en reconnaissant l'influence d'écrivains tels que Don DeLillo et Raymond Carver.*

"*You* may not be interested in absurdity," she said firmly, "but absurdity is interested in *you*."
(*A Shower of Gold* by Donald Barthelme)

Mark Anthony Jarman is among the distinct, emerging voices sadly omitted by the recent *Companion to Canadian Literature,* published by Cambridge University Press. Far removed from what Michael Bryson terms "soppy lyrical realism", with which, he argues, the Canadian short story has come to be associated (Bryson, 1999), the namesake of the considerably more famous Kentucky-born Guggenheim Fellow poet offers a refreshing breeze. According to Shane Neilson, the Canadian's audacious stunts in the field of stylistics are descended in a straight line from James Joyce and Rick Moody (Neilson, 2000).[1] However, in an interview with Michael Bryson, Jarman boasts a broad spectrum of influences, ranging from John Cheever to Louis-Ferdinand Céline, and repeatedly cites Raymond Carver, the master of what John Barth once termed "Post-Alcoholic Blue-Collar Minimalist Hyperrealism" (Barth, 1984, 256),[2] as his true literary mentor (Bryson, 2000). However, the sheer vivacity of his linguistic experiment, the blatant non-transparency of his language, as well as his penchant for alliteration and decorative sentence structure, would place him closer to the manner associated with the aforementioned John Barth or William Gass. Jarman makes

frequent use of popular culture, suffusing his stories with references to (or direct quotations from) advertisements, films and song lyrics; no stranger to the literary canon and contemporary criticism, he is as likely to invoke Edmund Spenser or Jacques Derrida as Radiohead or Guided by Voices. Born in 1955 in Edmonton, Alberta, and a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Jarman has thus far published one novel (*Salvage King, Ya!: A Herky-Jerky Picaresque*, 1997), three collections of short stories (*Dancing Nightly in the Tavern*, 1984; *New Orleans is Sinking*, 1998; *19 Knives*, 2000), a travel book (*Ireland's Eye: Travels,* 2002), and a volume of poetry (*Killing the Swan*, 1986). He has also edited an anthology entitled *Ounce of Cure: Alcohol in the Canadian Short Story* (1992), including the title story by Alice Munro.

Jarman's characters are no strangers to eerie, extreme situations that put their life at risk and force them to meditate on mortality and irreversibility. A good example is the short story entitled "Cougar," in which a suicidal man encounters the eponymous carnivore in a Canadian forest and rediscovers his will to live. Nonetheless, Jarman does not seem intent on arguing the preciousness of life; rather, the character's rebuttal of the cougar appears to be motivated by his rejection of chance and randomness. As his conscious decision to take his life is transmogrified into a deadly encounter with a fierce animal, he changes his mind, possibly to impose his will on the world even in the smallest way.

In "Burn Man on a Texas Porch," included in the writer's most recent collection of stories and shortlisted for the prestigious O. Henry Prize, Jarman addresses the restructuring of body and identity which results from a camping ground accident. After a propane tank leakage and subsequent fire, the nameless first-person narrator, scorched beyond the solace of plastic surgery, emerges as a new, alien and alienating entity: "I sprang from sleep into my new life [...], my new life on fire" (Jarman, 1999, 131),[3] "[f]lame created me with its sobering sound" (Jarman, 1999, 138). The narrative plunges into the accident with no preparation and, as a result, the reader has hardly any awareness of the narrator's previous self apart from the scattered and repetitive remarks concerning his past. Attendant upon this tragedy is a compulsion to understand, to endlessly relive the accident and to bemoan the hopes of a comfortable life that perished with it. From now onwards, the narrator becomes Burn Man, often addressing himself in the third person and creating a certain distance

between the narrative sensibility and the monstrosity that he has become: "Burn Man enters the Royal Jubilee burn unit, Burn Man enters the saline painful sea" (Jarman, 1999, 132).

The narrator achieves a heightened sensitivity of the body and, perhaps most importantly skin, as the interface through which a considerable amount of interaction with the world occurs. The previously existing, though perhaps unperceived, border becomes horrifically blurred as a result of fire and alien objects become entangled with the heretofore pristine skin; for instance, the tent with which fellow tourists try to extinguish the flames on the narrator's body: "Where does my skin end and the skin of their melted tourist tent begin?" (Jarman, 1999, 132) Elsewhere, the narrator observes: "I lack a landscape that is mine" (Jarman, 1999, 133), which might also refer to the destruction of privacy, the violent amalgamation of the private and public spheres of existence. The previously invisible or negligible skin now becomes foregrounded, a painful testimony to an altered relationship with the world, especially since the burns have not skipped the narrator's face. While reminiscing on the seemingly untainted past, the narrator makes conspicuous references to the impeccable body that is no more: "slept during the day with my *face* dreaming on a sudoral pillow" (Jarman, 1999, 132; emphasis mine) and "rested my *skin* on the sand-and-cigarette-butt beach" (Jarman, 1999, 134; emphasis mine). The narrator's remark, "Skin is your cage" (Jarman, 1999, 133), appears as the punch line in a paragraph devoted to skin grafts and muscles, and refers predominantly to the idea of skin containing the body within it. But this observation may also refer to skin as a now-tactile and openly prohibitive boundary between the self and the world. Predictably, it is not only the narrator's own body that becomes curiously visible and seemingly detached from the person in question; a similar strategy can be seen with regard to others: describing the nurse who attends to him while in hospital, the narrator mentions in the course of two paragraphs "the honed Andalusian face", "the determined Spanish face" and "unfucked-up skin" (Jarman, 1999, 135-6).

Since the craved social invisibility which relative handsomeness seems to guarantee is no longer possible, the narrator seeks various disguises in which to confront the world. The disguises, such as that of the clown in front of a flower shop and the mascot of Mighty Moose at the hockey match, obviously heighten his social visibility, making him as conspicuous as his mangled body would, but they

also withhold from a casual pedestrian the motive for such a costume – after all, under the guise of the clown or the moose there might be a perfectly presentable body. Another method of concealing the horribly disfigured body from the world is by receiving sexual gratification from Cindi, "an escort pulled out of the paper at random" (Jarman, 1999, 134), in the darkened basement of the narrator's house. The only light there is offered by a circling toy train, possibly a desperate attempt at holding onto a lost innocence and one of the several loop sequences in the story.

It seems that the narrator is now reduced to menial part-time jobs such as those mentioned above, whereas in the pre-Burn Man past he had held a highly sensitive post, not impossibly one connected with the Parliament: at the time of the accident he was reportedly "on holiday in the sun, a rest from work, from tree spikers and salmon wars, from the acting deputy minister on the cell-phone fuming about river rights, water diversions, and the botched contract with Alcan" (Jarman, 1999, 133). Thus, the fire at the camping ground creates a sense of the past as something irrevocably lost; the fire establishes an excruciating barrier between 'before' and 'after', with the Burn Man persona to stand for whatever happens from the fire onwards. The past is cancelled, leaving only scraps of memory, which are as incongruous with the present situation as to seem derived from a different life altogether.

More important, perhaps, than the abandoned career is the vanished emotional past, hinging on the memory of one passionate kiss on the eponymous Texas porch. This incident recurs endlessly in the tormented mind of the narrator: "her memory jammed on that loop of tape" (Jarman, 1999, 136) like the toy train endlessly circling track, the only nightmarish light in the darkened basement. Shane Neilson observes that the "hippocampus remembrance,"[4] here exemplified by the incessant reliving of the sensuous caress and of the propane accident, is a frequent theme in Jarman's stories (Neilson, 2000). As in Robert Lowell's famous line, "I myself am hell; nobody's here" (Lowell, 1998, 2537), Burn Man's hell is mostly his own – in this case that of endless, searing remembrance.

The clues pertaining to "the Texas woman," apparently a member of a country & western band, are few and far between; there seems, however, to have been no follow-up of any kind to the incidental kiss, although the reader is at a loss to determine how much time

passed between the porch scene and the camping ground disaster. The narrator, nonetheless, claims that the incident had a tremendous impact on him: "In that instant I was changed" (Jarman, 1999, 136), "a mysterious person falling towards me on a Texas porch with her tongue rearranging hope in my mouth" (Jarman, 1999, 141). The reader will note that this is not the only change mentioned in the story, the second and chronologically later one being the propane accident. The conspicuous passive voice seems to point to the fact that the character is at the mercy of some powerful forces, which elevate him only to thwart his ambitions more painfully. More than the particular person, the narrator might be missing the sheer participation in such a tender moment between two strangers, which in his present condition seems all but impossible. Strangely, the workings of the fire are seen to resemble those of the Texas woman in that both events change the narrator: "Flame created me with its sobering sound. Wake up, flame whispered in my ear *like a lover, like a woman on the porch*, like a muttering into cotton, a rush to action" (Jarman, 1999, 138; emphasis mine).

Upon subsequent readings of the story one notices that the Texas woman theme is almost subconsciously present from the very first, paragraph-length sentence, and that it is instantly coupled with the theme of fiery transfiguration: "Propane slept in the tank and propane leaked while I slept, blew the camper door off and split the tin walls *where they met like shy strangers kissing*" (Jarman, 1999, 131; emphasis mine). The image functions in several ways: ostensibly illustrating the weakness of the walls in the face of explosion, it might actually emphasize the fragility of human relationships, their proclivity to transform or evaporate. This is continued in the following passage: "We're so pliant, I thought, prone to melt, to metal, to a change of heart, to lend our tongue vows" (Jarman, 1999, 138). Either way, the explosion seems to tear asunder the walls of the camper as it does the lovers, since Burn Man no longer imagines the reunion as possible – his disfiguration gets in the way of love. The reader is left guessing whether that is actually the case, since the story never resolves the issue.

The relocations inflicted on the narrator, apart from those concerning bodily and mental identity, seem to include his sensitivity to human suffering. It is with a barely discernible emotion that he informs the reader that "Friday night a man was kicked to death in this bar" (Jarman, 1999, 138), and later "We watched a man kicked directly to

death" (Jarman, 1999, 140). Despite this detachment, the narrator observes a similarity between the man and himself in that both of them undergo an instant, irreversible change. The common experience here is the fragility of the human body and the irreversibility of certain processes relating to it, the entropic tendency towards disintegration that even the utmost human efforts cannot counter. The insufficiency of human effort becomes evident in both cases: plastic surgery fails to do wonders for Burn Man, whose seared body remains a walking atrocity, and science is at a loss to reverse the workings of fire. In a similar way, the man who is kicked to death is not resurrected by "the ambulance attempting to dispense miracles, a syringe quivering into muscle" (Jarman, 1999, 140). The narrator senses that in both cases the reality is already beyond human control and his only remaining absurd hope is for a reversal effected by the same force that have caused the initial alteration. Like Pynchon's film that is to be run backwards (Pynchon, 2000, 37),[5] towards the end of the story the narrator admits to harboring "that shy desire for the right fire to twist [him] back just as easily to what [he] was" (Jarman, 1999, 141), that is for a supernatural breaking of the spell, which would result in a negentropic, restorative action. Watching cartoons, where entropy does not operate and everything is perfectly reversible, Burn Man muses forlornly:

> The right fire. Doesn't that make sense?
> Like corny cartoons and television shows – amnesia
> victim loses memory from blow to head, but a second
> blow makes it right, fixes it all right up, no matter
> what. (Jarman, 1999, 141)

Despite his repeated attempts, the narrator has not been able to comprehend the ghastly event which led to his disfigurement; however, the anthropomorphization of propane and fire in his narrative is quite telling. Already in the opening sentence, "Propane slept in the tank and propane leaked while I slept, blew the camper door off and split the tin walls" (Jarman, 1999, 131), propane functions as an unpredictable, stealthily hostile, dangerously powerful presence, on a par with pagan deities or even trickster figures of certain mythologies. Like Pynchon's rocket, it is chaos enclosed in a man-made cage or frame, its entropic tendency wending its way into the seemingly de-mythologized, ordered, scientific world. Jarman seems to share with writers such as Pynchon

or DeLillo a vision of the contemporary world in which technology fulfils the role previously restricted to the divine or at least supernatural, where the individual is at the mercy of forces that are ostensibly under human control. [6]

It does little good to struggle against these forces: the narrator, carried to the hospital, inextricable from the blue tent, becomes "a litter borne from battle, from defeat on the fields of fire and disassembly lines" (Jarman, 1999, 132). Wishing to explain his predicament to himself, Burn Man envisions propane as an evil entity, metamorphosing into fire and taking possession of the unsuspecting narrator, and, to use Pynchon's Protestant nomenclature, changing his status from that of an Elect to that of a Preterit: "I'm not one of the chosen. Once, maybe, I was chosen, necking on the Hopper porch, that stunning lean of a Texas woman into my arms, my innocent face, our mouths one" (Jarman, 1999, 135). It is only once, at the outset of his narrative, that Burn Man is seen asking querulously, "What have I done?", seeking to explain his tragedy by the logic of misdemeanor and punishment: "brimming with Catholic guilt, thinking, Now I've done it, and then thinking, Done what?" (Jarman, 1999, 135) The idea of chastisement may be argued to resonate slightly with one of the two mottos that precede the story, namely, Orwell's "At fifty everyone has the face they deserve" (Jarman, 1999, 131).

The tragedy of Burn Man, the events painfully unpredictable and incongruous with his now cherished and pristine past – the incongruity well expressed by Stephen Crane in his famous remark, "Shipwrecks are *apropos* of nothing" (Crane, 1998, 748) – has its parallel in the darkly comical urban legend that the narrator has heard being repeated by various acquaintances and which involves a scuba diver scooped out of the water by an airplane quenching a fire in a nearby forest. [7] The narrator makes the connection, however tenuous, when donning the clown costume: "Instead I […] climb inside my mask and clown suit like a scuba diver" (Jarman, 1999, 142).

It is, however, possible to read the entire propane accident figuratively – as an extended metaphor for being burned by love, unable to continue one's life in the same way as a result of a failed relationship. The ubiquitous linguistic and referential game would suggest that Jarman is playing with the stock metaphor of love as

fire. Evidence of this may be the choice of music that the narrator enjoys in his post-combustive days, namely, "MC5 on vinyl" and "Johnny Cash's best known ballad" (Jarman, 1999, 132), as well as the fact that the Texas woman "sings in a band doing Gram and Emmylou's heartbreaking harmonies" (Jarman, 1999, 138). While the unidentified MC5 song might well be *Motor City is Burning*, possibly chosen for its title as well as its prevalent images of mayhem following incendiary riots, there can be no doubt that the Johnny Cash selection is *The Ring of Fire*, with its memorable opening line, "Love is a burning thing", and its classic burned-by-love tale.[8] The very phrase "ring of fire" occurs in the text twice: relating to accounts of sailors burned by oil that the narrator read while at school, "the burning ring of fire come to life on the Murmansk run" (Jarman, 1999, 133), and to Burn Man's motorcycle trips, "hoping for fractious friction and the thrill of metal fatigue, hoping to meet someone traumatic, a ring of fire" (Jarman, 1999, 136). As for Emmylou Harris and Gram Parsons, the most likely choice is *Hearts on Fire*,[9] which deploys fire imagery to tell a story of bitter disillusionment. [10] Further linguistic play concerning combustion as symbolizing carnal desire can be observed in the dating advertisement that Burn Man rejects, to wit: "FIRE & DESIRE, Sensuous Centerfold Girls, HOT Fall Specials, $150 per hour" (Jarman, 1999, 134). Despite the narrator's explanation that he was limited in the choice merely by financial constraints, the wordplay cannot be accidental, especially considering the fact that Cindi, the homely girl he dates for sexual gratification, is, in her own words, "*cool* with that" (Jarman, 1999, 134; emphasis mine), i.e., "unconcerned with Burn Man's disfiguration", but on another semantic level possibly "devoid of passion, disinterested."

Apart from sentimental country & western quotes, the text is peppered with references to and quotations from Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* sonnets (1595), dedicated to his beloved but obstinate Elizabeth Boyle, later to become his wife. Classic examples of poetry which explores fiery love rejected by an icy heart, the sonnets appear to furnish the context for Burn Man's torment. Among the recollections of the mysterious Texas woman, the narrator drops a quote from Sonnet XXII, "Her temple fayre is built within my mind" (Jarman, 1999, 141), which is inserted somewhat more forcefully in the following passage: "her warm image driven like a nail into my mind, her memory jammed on that loop of tape" (Jarman, 1999,

136). Elsewhere, Burn Man quotes from Sonnet XXI, "Such art of eyes I never read in books" (Jarman, 1999, 136), and paraphrases Sonnet XXII, "my dark-star thoughts attending her day and night like a sacred priest with his relics" (Jarman, 1999, 136).[11]

The theme of painful memory is underscored by the title of the story, bringing together the two turning points in the plot. Obviously, the porch scene had occurred before the narrator became, literally or figuratively, Burn Man. The title condenses the ineffable suffering, since the two – Burn Man and Texas Porch – seem to cancel each other out, and yet this is exactly what the protagonist insists on doing: revisiting the scene of his transient happiness as someone else, someone whose access to contentment has been violently denied.

Finally, some light can be shed on the hazy affair with the Texas woman through the invocation of the myth of Tristan and Isolde in the closing paragraph of the story:

> Ours really is an amazing world. Tristan falls in love on a Hopper porch, but Isolde loses faith in a Safeway parking lot, Isolde takes the magic bell off the dog. And a famous scuba diver rockets like a lost dark god into smoking stands of Douglas fir, into black chimneys burning. (Jarman, 1999, 142)

This last paragraph, apart from suggesting the real obstacle to the narrator's amorous desires – Tristan's story centering upon a classical *ménage a trois* situation – seems also to bring together all the crucial images on which the story is constructed: the paradise lost of the Texas porch, the scuba diver plunging into a fatal incongruity with the surroundings and Johnny Cash's "burning ring of fire." The ridiculous manages, miraculously, to blend with the sublime, and, to quote Shane Neilson again, to produce the "quirkiness, desperation, and hopeless tenderness" (Neilson, 2000) that suffuses Jarman's writing.

**Endnotes**

1. "Joyce is Jarman's (and every other modern author's) spiritual predecessor, along with Rick Moody." (Neilson, 2000)

2. Elsewhere, Barth mentions other labels used by various critics to describe the writing of Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, Bobbie Ann Mason or Frederick Barthelme, e.g., "K-Mart realism", "hick chic", "Diet-Pepsi minimalism" and even "post-Vietnam, post-literary, post-Postmodernist blue-collar neo-early-Hemingwayism" (Barth, 1995, 65).

3. There are two versions of the story: the collection entitled *19 Knives* features a slightly expanded text in comparison to the one printed previously in the *Turn of the Story* anthology. This article follows the text and pagination of the latter.

4. Hippocampus is the part of the brain which plays a major role in memory and navigation.

5. "Imagine a missile one hears approaching only *after* it explodes. The reversal! A piece of time neatly snipped out […] a few feet of film run backwards […] the blast of the rocket, fallen faster than sound – then growing *out of it* the roar of its own fall, catching up to what's already death and burning […] a ghost in the sky" (Pynchon, 2000, 37).

6. Compare with the description of the "the airborne toxic event" in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. "The enormous dark mass moved like some death ship in a Norse legend, escorted across the night by armored creatures with spiral wings. […] Our fear was accompanied by a sense of awe that bordered on the religious. […] This was a death made in the laboratory, defined and measurable, but we thought of it at the time in a simple and primitive way, as some seasonal perversity of the earth like a flood or tornado, something not subject to control" (DeLillo, 1986, 127).

7. Interestingly enough, a version of the tale was used as part of the plot by Mordecai Richler in his last novel, *Barney's Vesion* (1997).

8. The entire lyrics to the song are as follows:

> Love is a burning thing
> and it makes a fiery ring
> bound by wild desire
> I fell into a ring of fire
> I fell into a burning ring of fire
> I went down, down, down

and the flames went higher
And it burns, burns, burns,
the ring of fire,
the ring of fire.
The taste of love is sweet
when hearts like ours meet
I fell for you like a child
oh, but the fire went wild.

(Carter and Kilgore, 1963)

9. The relevant part of the lyrics runs as follows:

Hearts on fire
My love for you brought only misery
Hearts on fire
Put out the flames and set this cold heart free
One short year our love burned
Until at last I guess you learned
The art of being untrue and then goodbye
What could I do except to cry and moan
Lord, what have I done?

(Egan & Guidera, 1973)

10. "Love Hurts" is also an apt candidate here, with its rather more comical, memorable simile:

Love is like a stove
burns you when it's hot.

A sample extract from the lyrics:

Love hurts, love scars
Love wounds and mars.
Any heart not tough
Nor strong enough
To take a lot of pain
Take a lot of pain
Love is like a cloud
Holds a lot of rain.

(Bryant & Bryant, 1960)

11.    Her temple fair is built within my mind
       in which her glorious image placed is

on which my thoughts do day and night attend
like sacred priests that never think amiss.
(*Amoretti*, Sonnet XXII, 5)

## Works cited

Barth, John. "The American New Novel." *The Friday Book. Essays and Other Nonfiction*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1984, 255–257.

----------. "A Few Words about Minimalism." *Further Fridays. Essays, Lectures, and Other Nonfiction*, 1984–1994. Little, Brown & Company, 1995, 64–74.

Barthelme, Donald. "A Shower of Gold." *Sixty Stories*. London: Penguin Books, 1993, 7–16.

Bryant, Boudleaux & Felice Bryant. "Love Hurts". Sony BMG Entertainment, 1960.

Bryson, Michael. "Interview with Mark Anthony Jarman." *The Danforth Review* 1.3 (2000)

<http://www.danforthreview.com/features/interviews/jarman_intervi ew.html> June 6, 2006.

Bryson, Michael. "Review of Turn of the Story: Canadian Short Fiction on the Eve of the Millennium." *The Danforth Review* (1999);

<www.danforthreview.com/reviews/fiction/story.html> June 6, 2006.

Carter, June & Merle Kilgore. "Ring of Fire." Painted Desert Music Corporation, 1963.

Crane, Stephen. "The Open Boat." In Reidhead, Julia (Ed.). *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Fifth edition, vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc, 1998, 743–760.

DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1986.

Egan, Walter & Tom Guidera. "Hearts on Fire." Grievous Angel Music, 1973.

Jarman, Mark Anthony. "Burn Man on a Texas Porch." In Thomas, Joan and Harms, Heidi (Eds.). *Turn of the Story. Canadian Short Fiction on the Eve of the Millennium*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1999, 131-142.

Kröller, Eva-Marie. (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Lowell, Robert. "Skunk Hour." In Reidhead, Julia (Ed.). *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Fifth Edition, Volume 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998. [2537] (2537-2538)

Neilson, Shane. "Review of 19 Knives." *The Danforth Review* (2000).
<www.danforthreview.com/reviews/fiction/jarman3.html>
June 6, 2006.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow*. London: Random House, 2000.

Richler, Mordecai. *Barney's Version. A Novel*. London: Random House, 1998.

Spenser, Edmund. Ed. by Kenneth Larsen. Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti and Epithalamion: A Critical Edition*. Los Angeles: Renaissance Tapes, 1997.

**Natalie Diebschlag**
**Aachen University, Germany**

# Reading Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* in Light of "The Death of the Author"

**Abstract**

*This essay surveys the repercussions of the theory of intertextuality with special focus on the impact of Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" on the aesthetic practices of Michael Ondaatje and attempts to read the narrative related by the English patient on his deathbed as an allegorisation of this poststructuralist dictum. After a short introduction to Julia Kristeva's definition of intertextuality and the ways it manifests itself in* The English Patient*'s investigation of ontological boundaries and the characters' encounters with art, it will concentrate on several of the key issues to have emanated from Barthes's postulations and apply these to the character of the English patient himself. It will touch on questions concerning the nature of authorship, how it manifests itself in the semiotics of a literary text, what the consequences of the death of the author are with regard to a text's narrative situation, what role the reader plays in the imaginative reconstruction of an author via the text he is reading, as well as the degree to which the metaphor of the removal of the author from his text may be said to have contributed to the intense affinity between artistic discourse and death as it permeates the novel.*

**Résumé**

*Cet article a pour objet l'étude de l'impacte qu'a pu avoir la théorie d'intertextualité, et plus précisément celui de l'article « La Mort de l'Auteur » par Roland Barthes, sur la pratique esthétique de Michael Ondaatje. Ainsi, l'article formera une tentative de lire l'histoire telle qu'elle est transmise par le patient anglais sur son lit de mort en tant qu'allégorie de cette formule post-structuraliste. Dans un premier temps, il se consacrera à une présentation théorique de l'intertextualité selon Julie Kristeva ainsi qu'à ses différentes manifestations au niveau textuel du* The English Patient*, notamment les frontières ontologiques et les expériences que peuvent faire les*

*personnages quand ils se trouvent confrontés aux différents discours littéraires. Par la suite, il s'appuiera sur certains des principaux thèmes issus des proclamations de Barthes afin de les appliquer au personnage principal du roman. Il s'agira de répondre aux questions de savoir quel est le caractère essentiel du concept de l'auteur, comment celui-ci se manifeste au plan sémiotique d'un texte littéraire, quelles sont les conséquences de la mort de l'auteur pour la situation narrative d'un texte, quel rôle le lecteur peut jouer dans la reconstruction imaginaire de l'auteur à travers les éléments textuels, et enfin, dans quelle mesure la métaphore de l'élimination de l'auteur de son oeuvre a contribué, au sein du roman, à l'affinité prononcée entre les discours artistiques et la mort.*

In a 1984 interview Michael Ondaatje expressed his endeavour "to start each book with a new vocabulary, with a new set of clothes" (Solecki, 1985, 325). The exploration of a different topic and choice of a new setting with every new writing project appears to have been the reason for one of the most recurrent, if not clichéd, statements about the author and his work, that both elude the possibility of a definite classification. This applies as much to the category of genre as to that of a national literature. As such, literary critics have often expressed a certain illness-at-ease when it came to imposing generic paradigms on Ondaatje's works prior to his first formal novel, *In the Skin of a Lion*, preferring instead to talk of a typically postmodernist 'transgeneric' hybridity (Lernout, 1990, 94). In the introduction to *Spider Blues*, Sam Solecki focussed on the impossibility of situating Ondaatje within a specifically Canadian literary canon, opting instead to locate the author along the lines of such hybrid writers as "Aimé Césaire, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott and Salman Rushdie" because like them "he compels a rethinking of the notion of a national literary tradition" (Solecki, 1985, 7). However, it has been especially in more recent criticism that Ondaatje has been promoted, on the contrary, as an apt and symptomatic "reflection of Canada's inclusive and multicultural society" (Tötösy, 2005, n.p.). The issue which I would like to approach in the present article is not so much one which situates Ondaatje within a particular national context but rather in the tradition of poststructuralist thought.

If in the context of twentieth-century literary criticism and an author-oriented reading industry Michael Ondaatje has emerged as one of

the most prominent figures of contemporary Canadian literature, his aesthetic *practice* exemplifies the enormous impact on contemporary fiction of the poststructuralist dictum of the death of the author, epitomised by Roland Barthes in his 1968 article of the same title. This becomes particularly evident in such pronounced metafictional writings as *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, *Coming Through Slaughter* and, most importantly, *Running in the Family*, in which the author has introduced himself into the text and thus become his own protagonist. However, the main focus of the present essay will be on the title figure of *The English Patient* who equally thematises questions of authorship as they have emerged in poststructuralist theory, in such a way that the novel might be read as an allegorisation of "The Death of the Author".

The 'death of the author' has been one of the principal corollaries of the theory of intertextuality as it was first formulated in the mid-1960s by the semiotician Julia Kristeva. According to Kristeva's findings, a literary text can no longer be studied as a product which has emanated from an originating mind but has to be thought of as an intersection of texts and a repetition of antecedent discourses. As such, in accordance with Bakhtin's dialogism, Kristeva's notion of intertextuality conceives of "the literary word as an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (Kristeva, 1990, 36).

The recognition that literature is always a transformation of anterior texts is carried by Barthes to its logical conclusion when he declares the 'death of the author':

> A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focussed and that place is the reader, and not, as hitherto said, the author. […] the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author. (Barthes, 1977a, 145)

In Barthes's eyes, the words that we read in a literary text cannot be accounted for in terms of individualistic expression. Rather, he perceives it as a vast archive of culture which can best be pictured in the guise of an infinite library, a trope which has repeatedly been

deployed in postmodernist writings as, for instance, in Borges' "The Library of Babel", Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and, of course, in *The English Patient*.

Intertextuality takes into consideration that every writer is part of a literary tradition and is at the same time the reader of an anterior and contemporary textual corpus which he – consciously or not – inserts into his own text. But it also focuses on the inseparability of the acts of reading and writing and overthrows the one-directional communication model in which a message is emanated from the sender in order to be decoded by the addressee on the basis of a common code (Eco, 1979, 4). The reader of course also moves within a particular intertextual frame which encompasses the entirety of semiotic systems with which he is acquainted and thus "[w]hat is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross-fertilisation of the packaged textual material (say, a book) by all the texts which the reader brings to it." (cf. Worton and Still, 1990, 1f.).

The eternal deferral of a singular authorial meaning and the malleability of texts are quite beautifully exemplified in *The English Patient*. The books we encounter in the library of the Tuscan villa San Girolamo are shown to have a double nature. On the one hand, the narrative insists upon their material, almost organic existence: Ondaatje speaks of the "porousness of the paper" (Ondaatje, 1993, 7) and their changing shape and size, "the rain […] had doubled the weight of the books" (Ondaatje, 1993, 11). On the other, the stories they project are shown to be shifting universes which change as soon as a reader casts an eye upon them. Hana writes little notes about her everyday experiences into the books she is reading, such as Kipling's *Kim* or Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*. The most obvious example however is provided by the principal intertextual document of the novel, *The Histories* by Herodotus. The English patient, when still a desert explorer and known under the name of Almásy,[1] uses them primarily for geographical hints in his search for the lost oasis of Zerzura but over the years they have gradually become his own personal diary into which he writes his personal observations and glues clippings from all sorts of texts that have caught his eye until it grows to "twice its original thickness" (Ondaatje, 1993, 94). As a consequence, *The Histories* have totally detached themselves from their original author, Herodotus, and are more of a translation of their reader's personality onto paper. By adding their personal

remarks and experiences to the pages of books, the English patient and Hana are readers who literary rewrite the texts they read.

While the intertextual nature of every literary text simultaneously links the text to literary ancestors or contemporaries as to the 'world' in general, we need to keep in mind that this world, in accordance with Derrida's concept of *différance*,[2] is not one of signifieds, i.e. extratextual objects, but one of an interminable chain of signifiers, traces and texts. Literature cannot be studied as if it were a conventional sign system but requires a semiotics which transcends the Saussurean signifier-signified dyad. Therefore, a novel's relation to what has been called the world or reality can no longer be of a purely mimetic order. Intertextuality thus unsettles the humanist separation of art and life as it has existed since Aristotle's *Poetics* and especially refutes the narrative strategies of Realism as pure conventions. If literature has conventionally been thought of as a mirror held up to nature, postmodernist writings continually make us wonder on what side of the mirror we are standing. In the context of Ondaatje's prose it is certainly the semi-autobiographical *Running in the Family* which most challenges our capacity of separating ontological universes, what Sukenick has called "the truth of the page" (quoted in McHale, 1987, 198) from the fictional world it seeks to project. However, the affiliation between textuality and reality, artefact and nature, is also materialised in *The English Patient*'s main setting, the villa, whose frescoes and trompe l'oeils are imitations of the surrounding natural scenery.[3] After the villa has suffered severe damage through bombing the two realms of nature and art seamlessly flow into one another:

> [Hana] sat in the window alcove in the English patient's room, the painted walls on one side of her, the valley on the other. […] Some rooms faced onto the valley with no walls at all. She would open a door and see just a sodden bed huddled against a corner, covered with leaves. Doors opened into landscape. Some rooms had become an open aviary. (Ondaatje, 1993, 12)

*The English Patient* might stand apart from previous of Ondaatje's works in that it does not feature a tangible, material author figure, whether a historian-like researcher as in *Coming Through Slaughter* or a "writer at his desk" (McHale, 1987, 198) as was the case in

*Running in the Family,* or an oral storyteller who functions as the unifying and ordering consciousness of the polyphony of the forsaken voices of History, a role attributed to Patrick Lewis in *In the Skin of a Lion.* Even though the narrative of *The English Patient* also comprises several diegetic levels, its frame story (which is located in the villa and covers the time span between spring and August 1945) is no static situation used as a "springboard" into the past but rather a diachronic process which functions at the same time as the novel's main plot. While the narrative situation of the frame story/main plot constantly oscillates between auctorial omniscience and a complete self-effacement of the narrator and is as such indefinable, Ondaatje proves to be on his guard not to impose any ordering principles as we know them from realist fiction either upon the narrative structure or on his characters, thus placing his work in the tradition of those twentieth-century works which – because of their apparent narrator-less quality - gave rise to Barthes's declaration of the death of the author (Barthes, 1977a, 145 & Foucault, 1974, 12). At first sight, the novel defies one of the principal characteristics which Hutcheon has discerned in the sub-genre of historiographic metafiction, namely that of self-consciously exhibiting its own artificiality. Several techniques create the impression that the passages taking place at the villa are related to us in unmediated form: Hana's quotidian activities are mainly told in the behaviourist mode and the frequent use of the present tense equally effaces the notion of an authorial mastermind.[4] The past tense is of course a convention which we associate both with realist and historiographic discourse. It presupposes a closed and constructed universe which, because it is detached from writer and reader, can be overlooked and controlled by the former and translated into a coherent narrative (cf., Barthes, 1972, 26).[5] The present tense, on the other hand, reduces the distance between discourse and story to zero and consequently cancels out the impression of a controlling author. In a similar way, flashbacks are triggered in various ways, particularly through sensual associations (mostly visual or gustative)[6] or in a direct dialogue exchange between two characters.[7] Susan Ellis (building on Stephen Scobie's work) has discussed the novel's primordial concern with the act of naming as an expression of the exertion of power – either in the form of the colonial conquering spirit or in a lover's zeal to appropriate his object of desire. The power to name is, as she notes, also one that characterises an author's relationship to his characters. But in *The*

*English Patient* Ondaatje has renounced this fundamental authorial right. Hana is at first mostly designated as "she" or "the young nurse" (Ondaatje, 1993, 4) until Caravaggio, who also remains anonymous for a while, emerges to call her by her name and thus endows her with a concrete identity (Ellis, 1996, 27.). The desacralisation of the author as a text's final signified is, in Barthes's opinion, comparable to the negation of God: the removal of the author from the text and therefore of a singularised, essential meaning "liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases – reason, science, law" (Barthes, 1977a, 147). The novel's lack of a higher authorial ordering principle, the impression that the characters have an existence independent of what would normally be considered their creator, is thematically reflected on the story level by the decline of religious faith and apocalyptic atmosphere in the context of World War II. As such, Madox commits suicide in an Anglican church, "a place that he felt had lost its holiness" (Ondaatje, 1993, 260) and Hana has secularised the six-foot crucifix she has found in the bombed chapel by converting it into a common household item, a scarecrow (Ondaatje, 1993, 14).

Even if at first sight *The English Patient* runs counter to the postmodernist practice of *enunciation* (the fictional representation of the self-reflexive act of writing) as a means of addressing questions of narrative authority and of reflecting on its own artificiality, it is on the lower diegetic level of the story itself, and most notably through the characters and their encounters with art, that metafictional scrutiny takes place.

In postmodernist fiction, as Brian McHale has pointed out, nothing prevents the author from acquiring the status of a character (McHale, 1987, 197) – a concern of Ondaatje's which has attracted a fair amount of critical response, especially in the case of *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Running in the Family*. In *The English Patient* the fictionalisation of the author via his own text seems to have been reversed in the character of the title figure, who thus becomes an author figure.  In Kristeva's theory, the concept of the author as it emerged in the early modern novel is linked to the following characteristics: the author is the creator, the owner and the seller of his work. Furthermore, the work is always attached to the proper name of the author (this can of course also be a pseudonym).

Consequently, the work (as opposed to the epic) is not anonymous but refers back to the biographical person and is the expression of an individual subjectivity (Kristeva, 1976, 100). As we have observed, these are precisely the attributes rejected by Barthes when he proclaims the death of the author. Basing his argument on the recognition that "to write is through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs' and not 'me'" (Barthes, 1977a, 143), Barthes wants to liberate the text and its reception from the person who wrote it, conceived of as a clearly defined intellectual and psychological entity, and to return it to the "archive of culture, conceptualised as a ready-formed unabridged dictionary" (Leitch, 1992, 28). The text is no longer linked to a proper name, a decipherable identity, but on the contrary has lapsed into the anonymity of intertextuality. The English patient certainly carries about him all the attributes of anonymity that one can possibly imagine: everything that might identify him as a concrete person has been "consumed in a fire" (Ondaatje, 1993, 48). Furthermore, he is – at least in the beginning – partially amnesiac about his own past (or, what is more likely, he refuses to remember) and the novel certainly treats memory to a large extent as the essence of human existence. On the other hand, he seems to remember everything he has ever read. He defines himself as a man who "swallow[s] words like water" until he has "information like a sea in [him]" (Ondaatje, 1993, 18). Most important, however, is the fact that he does not have a name. Even though a name does not give us access to the true identity it designates (as the English patient has been taught by the desert), it is, in the post-war climate of hysteria and witch-hunt mentality, together with a person's nationality, the most important hint in the identification of a possible enemy.[8] What permits the patient to remain anonymous and not to be held responsible for his actions is the fact that he is a truly super-human "reservoir of information" (Ondaatje, 1993, 88). His mind is itself an intertextual patchwork behind which he can conceal his identity. In the course of the narrative we constantly witness his tactic of diverting his interlocutors' attention by drawing upon his knowledge until he is "driving them mad" (Ondaatje, 1993, 95f.). Just like Kip's invisible opponents, the engineers of explosive devices, the English patient effaces his identity from his narrative "brushing his tracks with a branch behind him" (Ondaatje, 1993, 99). Since his verbal excursions are of an oral nature the question of authorship should

normally not arise in relation to this character.[9] But both the English patient and his narrative exhibit certain attributes which are normally reserved to the author and/or his most common avatar, the omniscient narrator. The fusion of two characters' consciousnesses is nothing unusual in the novel,[10] but the English patient's voice is the only one which at times merges with that of an omniscient narrator.[11] The patient's capacity to recreate situations that as a character he could not possibly have witnessed and to enter other characters' minds is startlingly demonstrated by his identification with the Ancient Egyptian funerary gods Anubis and Wepwawet, "[t]he jackal with one eye that looks back and one that regards the path you consider taking" (Ondaatje, 1993, 259) travelling down into Katherine's past years before he met her.[12] It is notably the attribute of supernatural omniscience which makes the patient appear to be on a higher ontological level. In this respect, his quotations from Herodotus seem noteworthy: we are told that he is in the possession of an 1890 edition (Ondaatje, 1993, 96), translated into English by G.C. McCauley, and Katherine's recitation of the Gyges-Candaules story is drawn from this edition. On the other hand, when the English patient himself quotes Herodotus he uses the translation by David Greene, which was first published in 1988 (Ondaatje, 1993, 305). In a similar way, his notebook contains sections derived from Lyall Watson's 1984 book *Heaven's Breath.* Like the author the English Patient is beyond the time and date of the story he finds himself in as a character and through the citations from Herodotus and Watson his voice fuses with that of the author, who naturally is the only one within the peripheries of the text to have access to these intertexts.

The metaphor of the death of the author also operates on the level of the narrative situation underlying every literary text. In an oral everyday communicative situation sender and receiver can normally be identified as the two physical persons involved in the communication. In this case, deictics such as 'I', 'you', 'here' and 'now' – what Jakobson calls *shifters* - have a concrete, referential function (Eco, 1979, 10). In the context of the novel, the communication model is different: once a series of events is written down, frozen onto the page, the words have disconnected themselves from the person who originally wrote them and who is therefore no more than an absence or a ghostly trace within his/her own text. Therefore Barthes comes to the conclusion that "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that

neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing […] the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins"(Barthes, 1977a, 142). This observation has, as Foucault remarks, reversed a *topes* that existed in literature for several millennia. As such, the Greek epic was destined to render its hero immortal. In the same manner, in the famous frame story of the *Arabian Nights*, storytelling has for Scheherazade the purpose of escaping or at least of delaying death. Now, in the light of poststructuralist criticism, the act of writing has become an exhaustive task in its own rights which kills its author (Foucault, 1974, 12). *The English Patient* establishes a very strong affinity between death and writing (as well as other forms of discourse) and integrates both the traditional as well as the poststructuralist view. One of the primordial motivations for writing *The Histories*, as Herodotus writes himself in his prooemium and as it is quoted in the novel, is precisely this central element taken over from the Greek epic, the promise of immortality through narrative: "I Herodotus of Halicarnassus, set forth my history, that time may not draw the colour from what Man has brought into being" (Ondaatje, 1993, 240).

The desire to fight human mortality by translating oneself or a loved one into one form or another of textuality permeates throughout the novel. For instance, we learn from the English patient that the name of Zerzura as well as its earliest testimonies are the product of a man's love for a woman, "[s]ome old Arab poet's woman, whose white-dove shoulders made him describe an oasis in her name" (Ondaatje, 1993, 140). In a similar way, the English patient would have liked to dedicate his monograph, *Récentes Explorations dans le Désert Libique*, to Katherine Clifton. After Katherine has been severely wounded in a plane crash and is agonising in the Cave of Swimmers, he desperately tries to "make her immune to the human" by painting her body with the colours stolen from the cave paintings, a ritual he has borrowed from ancient customs: "[t] here were traditions he had discovered in Herodotus in which old warriors celebrated their loved ones by locating and holding them in whatever made them eternal – a colourful fluid, a song, a rock drawing" (Ondaatje, 1993, 248). On a less romantic level, just as some of the desert explorers want to leave their traces in the written records of geographical discoveries, it is in old age, once he has become

conscious of his own mortality "that Narcissus wants a graven image of himself" (Ondaatje, 1993, 142). At the same time, straight from the beginning the novel integrates the poststructuralist notion that storytelling or writing induces the death of its author: "[The patient] whispers again, dragging the listening heart of the young nurse beside him to wherever his mind is, into that well of memory he kept plunging into during those months before he died" (Ondaatje, 1993, 4). The patient thus seems an adequate illustration of the Kristevan and Barthesian metaphor of the agonising storyteller. In the confines of the villa, the principal storyteller is also the person who finds himself on the threshold of death: his bed reminds Caravaggio of the "coffin of a hawk" (Ondaatje, 1993, 116) and Hana is annoyed by his habit of "mocking a deathlike posture […] as if he wanted to slip into his own death by imitating its climate" (Ondaatje, 1993, 63). The closer the English patient comes to his own physical death, the more concrete do the outlines of his story become. Here, morphine plays an essential role as well: it compresses memory "onto a two-dimensional sheet of paper" (Ondaatje, 1993, 116) and soon Caravaggio is able to read the English patient like a book until the latter complains: "You must talk to me, Caravaggio. Or am I just a book? Something to be read, some creature to be tempted out of a loch and shot full of morphine, full of corridors, lies, loose vegetation, pockets of stones" (Ondaatje, 1993, 253). Even though the dissolution of the self through writing is a feature that characterises any form of narrative ("the 'I'", as Barthes writes in "From Work to Text", "is never more than a 'paper-I'" (Barthes, 1977b, 161)), it is particularly manifest in the structure of the novel (or we could say any form of third person narrative) (Barthes, 1972, 31). The author, or the subject of narration, Kristeva explains, eclipses his 'person' from the narrative and thus allows the narrative structure to exist as such. Out of the death of the author, the vanishing of the subjective, personal "I", the characters are born under the guise of a pronominal system or a proper name (Kristeva, 1990, 44). "Death means that you are in the third person" (Ondaatje, 1993, 247) the English patient accordingly tells Caravaggio as his first-person account turns into a third-person narrative, referring to himself as Almásy, thus describing his own self from an outsider's point-of-view. As we have noted above, for Barthes the author is forever lost from his text. In this respect, Kristeva's theory of intertextuality deviates to a considerable degree from Barthes's: Kristeva – in the same way as Foucault or Eco – considers that in

writing the author undergoes a transformation and is still present in the form of the various textual elements, such as style or the characters. The author, the subject of narration, as Kristeva understands it, is a "subject in process" whose subjective identity is disseminated into the plurality of voices that constitute a literary text, what Bakhtin calls polyphony (Waller, 1989, 281). It is through these different atavistic manifestations that the reader resurrects what Eco has called the "ghost" of the author (Eco, 1979, 10 & cf. Kristeva, 1990, 45).

The reader who is of course particularly keen on resurrecting the ghost of Almásy through his own narrative is Caravaggio. Hana or Kip are rather content to leave the English patient in his transcendental aura of namelessness. "As if falling into the arms of a stranger you discover the mirror of your choice" (Ondaatje, 1993, 90) are the words that aptly characterise Hana's relationship to the burnt pilot and both Kip and she project onto this "ebony pool" (Ondaatje, 1993, 48) whatever images they choose to see: a father figure, a teacher, the representative of a culture, the bearer of all the world's sufferings. It is especially Hana who is mostly seduced by the "eternally dying man's" (Ondaatje, 1993, 115) qualities of anonymity. Caravaggio's reasons to unveil the identity of the English patient and to thus turn him again into something human are mainly of a personal interest. While he considers it as his duty to the catatonic young nurse and simultaneously appears as the epitome of our desire for historical and poetic justice, he also reflects Foucault's critique of Barthes's removal of the author from his text. Contrary to scientific texts, which can be related to some objectively verifiable truth and therefore can most of the time be accepted for their own sake even when they do not bear the name of their author, it is in a literary text the author himself who provides his writings with an ontological foundation and coherence (Foucault, 1974, 19). The fundamental need and desire on the reader's part to evoke a clear image of the originating mind of a text is an essential characteristic of the 'reading' processes thematised by the novel: the English patient teaches Hana that a proper recitation of *Kim* can only occur once one has connected to Kipling, "the writer at his desk" (Ondaatje, 1993, 94). Bombs, as Kip has been indoctrinated by Lord Suffolk, are no inanimate objects which happen to be simply 'there' but are human designs which have to be read just like texts. Thus, when defusing an explosive Kip feels the threatening presence of its

author: "He felt he was being watched, and refused to decide whether it was by Suffolk or the inventor of this contraption" (Ondaatje, 1993, 192). And in the English patient's mind Herodotus becomes a distinct, material presence.[13]

The complicity between "reader" and "author" becomes especially apparent in the communicative situation that holds between Caravaggio and the patient. Caravaggio appears in many ways as the mirror image of his interlocutor. Even though the authorities venerate him as a war hero, Caravaggio is not so sure about this status since he might have spoken under torture and turned into a traitor.[14] The obsessive and even sadistic hunting down of Almásy as well as Caravaggio's dubious decision to forgive him in the end[15] make him the personification of a Europe torn between resistance and collaboration as well as of an at times questionable example of Allied retribution as it also finds expression in the short mentioning of Ezra Pound's detention and nervous breakdown at the criminal compound of Pisa military hospital (Ondaatje, 1993, 95). At the same time, he also illustrates Foucault's observation that the resurrection of the author through his own text by the reader is doomed to failure as it turns out to be nothing more than the psychological projection of the reader into this same text (Foucault, 1974, 20).

Since the repercussions of intertextuality and the death of the author have found their way into the numerous (and certainly more reader-friendly) theorisations of postmodernist literary criticism, the original texts as they have been formulated by members of the *Tel Quel* group might be considered somewhat superfluous. On the other hand, as I have tried to demonstrate in this essay, Kristeva's as well as Barthes's writings still seem valuable analytical tools when it comes to a close reading of the narrative strategies deployed by a contemporary author like Ondaatje as well as of his numerous artist figures and the act of artistic creation, such as the English patient and the story he relates on his deathbed. If Ondaatje's own artistic practice is in many ways symptomatic of the poststructuralist postulation of the death of the author, his deliberate tampering with historical fact in the name of "the truth of fiction" (a reformulation of Vargas Llosa's "truth of lying" (Wachtel, 1994, 258)) in the re-creation of a character like Almásy re-establishes him as the final authority over his works.[16]

**Endnotes**

1. The historical Count Lázló de Almásy is, just like his fictional homonym, a slippery figure. An illustrious desert explorer, he still figures in Egypt as a prestigious personality while his status in the Western world is, due to his willing collaboration with Rommel's *Africa Korps*, disputed. For a detailed presentation of Almásy cf.: Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "*The English Patient*: Truth is Stranger than Fiction". *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 53 (1994): 141-153

2. For a concise summary cf. Derrida, Jacques. "Sémiologie et Grammatologie" in Kristeva, Julia; Rey-Debove, Josette; Umiker, Jean. *Essays in Semiotics/Essais de Sémiotique*. The Hague & Paris: Mouton & Co., 1971, 11-27

3. Already in the opening pages, the wall paintings in the burnt patient's room are referred to three times: "She [Hana] turns into the room which is another garden – this one made up of tress and bowers painted over its walls and ceiling." (Ondaatje, 1993, 3), "He lies flat on his back, no pillow, looking up into the foliage painted onto the ceiling, its canopy and branches, and above that blue sky." (Ondaatje, 1993, 3) and "He wakes in the painted arbour that surrounds him with its spilling flowers, arms of great trees" (Ondaatje, 1993, 4).

4. "She moves backwards a few feet and with a piece of white chalk draws a rectangle onto the wood floor. Then continues backwards, drawing more rectangles, so there is a pyramid of them, single then double then single, her left hand braced flat on the floor, her head down, serious. She moves farther and farther away from the light. Till she leans back onto her heels and sits crouching" (Ondaatje, 1993, 15).

5. In *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*, Barthes discusses the function of the *passé simple* in literary as well as in historiographic discourse. Of course, the English past tense, the equivalent of the *passé simple* in literature and historiography, does not possess the same attributes of artificiality and 'high culture' as its French counterpart but I believe that we can say that both tenses are comparable as, in history writing, they can be seen as a manifestation of society's control over and possession of the past (Barthes, 1972, 27). In a similar way, Barthes's characterisation of the role of the *passé simple* in literature

is in my opinion also valid for the English past tense: «[d]errière le passé simple se cache toujours un démiurge, dieu ou récitant; le monde n'est pas inexpliqué lorsqu'on le récite, chacun de ses accidents n'est que circonstanciel, et le passé simple est précisément ce signe opératoire par lequel le narrateur ramène l'éclatement de la réalité à un verbe mince et pur, sans densité, sans volume, sans déploiement, dont la seule fonction est d'unir le plus rapidement possible une cause et une fin. » Barthes, Roland. «L'écriture du Roman». In *Le degré zéro de l'écriture suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972

6. cf. e.g., Caravaggio's reminiscence of the torture scene, (Ondaatje, 1993, 58)

7. cf. e.g., Caravaggio telling Hana of the fatal moment he was photographed at a party, (Ondaatje, 1993, 34)

8. Almásy's failure to rescue Katharine at the outbreak of the war in 1939 is caused by his mistake of giving his own name to the English military in El Taj. When Caravaggio asks him why no one wanted to listen to him he answers: "I didn't give them the right name. […] The war was beginning already. They were just pulling spies in out of the desert. Everyone with a foreign name who drifted into these small oasis towns was a suspect. […] I was yelling Katharine's name. Yelling the Gilf Kebir. Whereas the only name I should have yelled, dropped like a calling card into their hands, was Clifton's" (Ondaatje, 1993, 250)

9. It should be pointed out, however, that the English patient's endless oral monologues are intimately linked to his own personal copy of *The Histories*, as for example during his 'lecture' on the artistic activities of the Medici protégés and Savonarola's reign of terror in fifteenth-century Florence (Ondaatje, 1993, 56) or Hassanein Bey's description of desert storms (Ondaatje, 1993, 137), so that his story constantly and often inadvertently oscillates between written and oral narrative.

10. Cf. Caravaggio's telling the story of his capture to Hana and her subsequent mental reconstruction of it (Ondaatje, 1993, 34)

11. Cf. e.g. the chapter "Katharine" in which the narrative voice switches from Katherine's to Almásy's to Madox's point of view in

order to return to the English patient who therefore becomes the site into which all these voices fuse.

12. "These are the creatures who guide you into the after-life – as my early ghost accompanied you, those years before we met. All those parties in London and Oxford. I sat across from you as you did your schoolwork, holding a large pencil. I was there when you met Geoffrey Clifton at two a.m. in the Oxford Union Library. […] He is watching you but I am watching you too, though you miss my presence, ignore me. […] But the spirit of the jackal, who was the "opener of the ways", whose name was Wepwawet or Almásy, stood in the room with the two of you" (Ondaatje, 1993, 258).

13. "I have seen editions of *The Histories* with a sculpted portrait on the cover. Some statue found in a French museum. But I never imagine Herodotus this way. I see him more as one of those sparse men of the desert who travel from oasis to oasis, trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion, piecing together the mirage" (Ondaatje, 1993, 118).

14. "He had, he thought, said nothing of worth to them. But they let him go, so perhaps he was wrong. […] When he told Hana the story later that evening she said, "They stopped torturing you because the Allies were coming. The Germans were getting out of the city, blowing up bridges as they left."

"I don't know. Maybe I told them everything."" (Ondaatje, 1993, 59)

15. Cf.265. In this respect, it is especially Anthony Minghella's 1996 film adaptation which has been condemned by some critics as immoral. Cf. for example, Sallet, Elizabeth. "A Queasy Feeling about the English Patient", special to the *Washington Post*, Wednesday, December 4, 1996, n.p., www.newslibrary .com/deliverppdoc.asp?SMH=143517, or: Hurka, 1997.

16. It should, however, be pointed out that Caravaggio's ambiguous decision to forgive the English patient for his past crimes might leave us with a taste of discomfort. In the subsequent *Anil's Ghost* the self-conscious questioning of the "truth of fiction" becomes even more pervasive. While in *Running in the Family*, his first Sri-Lankan book, Ondaatje apologised in the acknowledgements "for the fictional air" by telling us that "in Sri Lanka a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts" (Ondaatje, 1993, 206), the romantic dimension of "a

well-told lie" is no longer acceptable in the face of the sad reality of the manipulative policies of an oppressive government. Unlike in *The English Patient*, where a character like Hana still finds comfort in reading, the books which Gamini reads are now shown to be powerless against "the truth of their times." (Ondaatje, 2000, 102).

**Works cited**

Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author". In *Image, Music, Text*. Glasgow: Fontana Collins, 1977, 142-148.

----------. "From Work to Text". In *Image, Music, Text*. Glasgow: Fontana Collins, 1977, 155-164.

----------. *Le degré zéro de l'écriture suivi de Nouveaux essais critiques*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972

Derrida, Jacques. « Sémiologie et Grammatologie ». In Kristeva, Julia; Rey-Debove, Josette; Umiker, Jean (eds.). *Essays in Semiotics/Essais de Sémiotique*. The Hague & Paris: Mouton & Co., 1971

Eco¸Umberto. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington/London: Indiana UP, 1979

Ellis, Susan. "Trade, Power, Money and War: Rethinking Masculinity in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*". *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 21.2 (1996): 22-36.

Foucault, Michel: "Was ist ein Autor?". In *Schriften zur Literatur*. München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung GmbH, 1974, 7-31.

Hurka, Thomas. "Philosophy, Morality, and *The English Patient*". *Queen's Quarterly* 104/1 (Spring, 1997): 47-55.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction*. London & New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc., 1988

Kristeva, Julia. "Word, Dialogue and Novel". In Moi, Toril (ed.). *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990, 34-61.

----------. *Le Texte du Roman: Approche sémiologique d'une structure discursive transformationnelle*. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1976

Leitch, Vincent B.. *Cultural Criticism, Literary Theory, Poststructuralism*. New York & Oxford: Columbia UP, 1992

Lernout, Geert. "Unfamiliar Voices in Ondaatje's First Two Novels". In Jeanne Delbaere (ed.). *Multiple Voices – Recent Canadian Fiction*. Sydney/Mundelsstrup/Coventry: Danagaroo Press, 1990. pp. 91-103.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1987

Ondaatje, Michael. *The English Patient*. London: Picador, 1993 (1992)

----------. *Anil's Ghost*. London: Bloomsbury, 2000

----------. *Running in the Family*. London: Picador, 1984 (1982)

Sallet, Elizabeth. "A Queasy Feeling about the English Patient", special to the *Washington Post*, Wednesday, December 4, 1996, n.p., <www.newslibrary.com/deliverppdoc.asp?SMH=143517> 23 April 2005.

Solecki, Sam. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje". In Sam Solecki (ed.). *Spider Blues – Essays on Michael Ondaatje*. Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1985, 321-332.

Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "Preface to *Comparative Cultural Studies and Michael Ondaatje's Writing*". <http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb04-3/totosy(preface)04-3.html> 16 May 2005.

Tötösy de Zepetnek, Steven. "*The English Patient*: Truth is Stranger than Fiction". *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 53 (1994): 141-153.

Wachtel, Eleanor. "An Interview with Michael Ondaatje". *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 53 (1994):.250-261.

Waller, Margaret. "An Interview with Julia Kristeva". In O'Donnel, Patrick; Davis, Robert (eds.). *Intertextuality in Contemporary American Fiction*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, 280-293.

Worton, Michael and Judith Still. Introduction to *Intertextuality – Theories and Practices*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1990.

**Justyna Kucharska**
**University of Silesia, Poland**

# Diasporic Cinema as a Double-Palimpsest. *Bollywood/Hollywood* by Deepa Mehta

## Abstract

*The essay focuses on the analysis of Canadian diasporic cinema which is treated as a palimpsest – a text written on a previous, not completely erased, text so that the earlier one is visible while reading the subsequent. The essay deals with* Bollywood/Hollywood *– the representative of Canadian diasporic cinema. The analysis is based on Gerarde Genette's theory of "palimpsest reading". He suggests reading postmodern palimpsests according to the notion of transtextuality. Genette distinguishes five types of transtextual relations which describe all links occurring between texts in our culture.*

Bollywood/Hollywood *and other diasporic works are double-palimpsests because of the existence of diverse cultural backgrounds (in Mehta's case - American and Indian mainstream cinemas) on which the works are "written". The idea of dialogue present in palimpsest gains here a new dimension – apart from the standard relations between hyper- and hypotext there is also the dialogue between two complex hypotexts, between two modes of mainstream cinema.*

*The deciphering of Mehta's double- palimpsest is performed in the context of Bakhtinian theory of dialogism and Wolfgang Welsch's notion of transculturalism. Then double- palimpsests can be viewed as a depiction of a cultural clash which results in new qualities occurring in the process of negotiation.*

## Résumé

*L'article est centré sur l'analyse du cinéma diasporique canadien. Ce dernier est envisagé comme un palimpseste, c'est-à-dire comme la ré-écriture d'un texte premier où l'original n'est jamais complètement effacé, mais toujours à fleur de texte. L'article est consacré à* Bollywood/Hollywood, *un exemple éminent du cinéma*

*diasporique canadien, et en propose une lecture inspirée de Gérard Genette. Ce dernier propose de lire les palimpsestes post-modernes en utilisant l'angle d'une "transtextualité" qui peut prendre différentes formes.*

*A l'origine du film de Mehta,* Bollywood/Hollywood*, ainsi que d'autres productions culturelles diasporiques, il y a deux arrière-plans culturels (le cinéma populaire indien d'une part, Hollywood de l'autre): on se trouve alors en présence d'un double palimpseste. L'idée d'un dialogue, déjà présente dans la notion de palimpseste, acquiert ici une nouvelle dimension: en effet, à la relation entre hypertexte et hypotexte vient s'ajouter celle entre deux hypotextes complexes, à savoir deux formes de cinéma de masse.*

*L'analyse du double palimpseste de Mehta fait également appel à la théorie bakhtinienne du dialogisme et à la notion de transculturalisme (Wolfgang Welsch). Le double palimpseste se lit alors comme la représentation filmée d'un conflit entre les cultures qui résulte d'un processus de négociation.*

> Rocky: Bolly, holly, holly, bolly
> different trees same wood.
> (*Bollywood/Hollywood* by Deepa Mehta)

Transculturalism [1] generates palimpsest-like cultures. The idea of choosing elements from different cultures and incorporating them in one (trans-)cultural entity (that is not closed and is prone to changes) creates hybrids, collages which, simultaneously, constitute palimpsests "written" on those "borrowed" elements. The onomatology is the question of perspective. They all emphasize, however, the notion of dialogue occurring between the incorporated elements or, in a wider perspective, cultures involved.

Canada as a country with a multicultural policy, the country which is the symbol of cultural mosaic, is a transcultural area where coexisting differences are supposed to create a new type of heterogeneity negating the concept of a homogenous culture. Canada seems a perfect place for artists such as Deepa Mehta who came there to direct her films in a pluralistic space free from prejudices, unlike her native land – India. The controversies evoked by the film *Fire* among Indian audiences proves that the concept of culture as a closed unit known from Herder's definition prevails at least in a part

of Indian society. [2] Moreover, the traditional Indian audience's concept of national identity does not approve of criticism directed towards tradition (e.g. traditional perception of women and female roles in a society).

Mehta's films, palimpsests, are "written" on two cultural contexts – the Indian and the Western. However, analyzing her works as based on the two cultures is difficult because, according to Wolfgang Welsch, cultures have never been homogenous. Having taken this into consideration, describing Indian or Western cultures as closed units which provide a stable basis would be an act of violence – simplifying and using stereotypes. Therefore, in the case of *Bollywood/Hollywood* I confine my analysis to two modes of mainstream cinema – the South Asian and the North-American.

**Intertextuality and Palimpsest**

Two books by John Barth – *The Literature of Exhaustion* (1967) and *The Literature of Replenishment* (1982) distinguish between two apparently discrepant trends in postmodern thought. The first text announces the beginning of the culture of exhaustion. Artistic utterance is in crisis because there are no more possibilities to be innovatory, to find new means of expression. Everything has already been said and we are only able to repeat. As the solution to this problem Barth suggests returning to the past and pastiche-like exploitation of the old artistic forms and themes. The latter essay reformulates the notion of exhaustion into a positive term describing past and artistic tradition as the infinite source of meanings which are to gain new "life" by intertextually placing them in contemporary works of art. "Replenishment" is connected with the possibility of a broadened reading of a text because of its multi-layered structure – e.g. a picture, a sentence or a shot which have meaning of their own (literal or figurative), may also function as quotations, pastiches etc.; and then they are given new senses, however, only to those addressees[3] who are aware of the intertextual links.

Following Barth's idea of broadening perception through discovering the "traces" of other works in a given text (not only a literary one, but every artifact), I see contemporary works of art as palimpsests. Originally, palimpsests were ancient or medieval manuscripts written on a previous text which was not completely erased, so that the earlier text is visible while reading the subsequent. Palimpsest, in my understanding, is strictly connected with the

notion of intertextuality which was introduced to literary theory by Julia Kristeva.[4] She based her idea of the existence of indispensable relations between texts on Michail Bakhtin's thesis concerning polyphonic utterances – every utterance is dialogic in its nature because it is always a reaction to somebody's earlier statement and, at the same time, provokes the next declaration (Bakhtin, 1981). A text ceases to be monolithic, it always has to be contextualized and analyzed as an element of a dialogue. Kristeva sees every text as a part of a bigger whole (it may be culture) or as an entity consisting of a multiplicity of units: "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 1986, 37).

Intertextuality "produces" palimpsests and culture, in all of its forms, appears to be an erudite labyrinth. In this way, palimpsests with their play of meanings constitute one of the leading features of postmodernism and are connected with another important postmodern characteristic – eclecticism (which is visible in Kristeva's idea of a text as a "mosaic of quotations").

Diaspora – which in its definition includes cultural clash, two or more cultures co-existing in one place because of relocation of a nation and placing it in a new context – assumes a dialogue. Whether it is positive (tolerance and acceptance) or negative (cultural ostracism and nationalism) it makes the reciprocal influences among the participants of the dialogue unavoidable. In this way diasporic cultures become dialogical mosaics where a stable core of an "original" culture is surrounded by satellites of a new geographical, ethnic and cultural context. Diasporic dialogue results in a mosaic, yet a mosaic which, apart from a surface, includes also paradigmatic layers, so that it is constructed as a palimpsest. Multicultural mosaic is the surface of a palimpsest based on different cultures.

### Bollywood/Hollywood

Diasporic cinema is a palimpsest written on (at least) two cultures. The title of Mehta's film *Bollywood/Hollywood* emphasizes this duality – there are two cinematic traditions on which Mehta constructs her film. The slash between the words in the title is the mark of a dialogue, but also indicates the interchangeability of the cinematic traditions. One of the first captions in the opening credits: "Different tree same wood" – is the name of the studio in which the film was produced, but it functions as a synonym of the title as well.

It also introduces, at the very beginning, the ironic attitude towards commercial cinema, no matter which country it comes from. Bollywood and Hollywood are similar in their assumptions, both of them are addressed to a mass audience, they use specific tools to make profitable films and employ the same genres; the only element in which they differ is cultural background. Those cultural backgrounds constitute two hypotexts for Mehta's palimpsest.[5]

*Bollywood/Hollywood* is classified as a romantic comedy and, indeed, there are many elements of this genre in the film, in the plot as well as in the form. Rahul, the protagonist, is an Indian boy living with his family in Canada. His father dies when Rahul is a teenager and all responsibilities for family are handed over to the young boy. One of them is getting married to an Indian girl in order to preserve traditional values in the family. To Rahul's mother's and grandmother's despair he falls in love with a white woman, an actress. However, she dies in a levitation accident while shooting a film in Hollywood. (The idea of stylization on orient cultures in the West is mocked here by means of black humour – yoga is "practiced" in Hollywood with the help of stunt actors and special safety equipment, when they fail the girl falls and dies. Mehta seems to be critical of the multicultural "melting pot" notion in exaggerating its bad effects.) Rahul rejects all marriage proposals from Indian girls until the moment he is blackmailed by his mother – he has to find a fiancée before his pregnant sister gets married, if he stays single the marriage will not take place and his sister will be disgraced. The protagonist meets Sue, apparently an escort, in a pub and she agrees to act as his fiancée, of course for money. Then the romantic comedy develops in classical way and finally the "fake" couple fall in love with each other.

Similar to most postmodern movies, Mehta's film follows more than one genre. There are also elements of thriller, musical and science-fiction movies. Moreover, the intertextual connections with the two traditions of film production (American and Indian) and references to two cultural paradigms make *Bollywood/Hollywood* more complex and, therefore, a perfect object of an analysis of postmodern texts proposed by the French literary theorist, Gerard Genette.

### Gerard Genette's Typology
Mehta's film can be analyzed according to Gerard Genette's theory of "palimpsest reading" (Genette, 1992, 317-366). He suggests

reading postmodern palimpsests according to the notion of transtextuality. Gerard Genette in the essay 'Palimpsesty. Literatura drugiego stopnia' (1992) takes into consideration everything that links a text with other texts, and calls it transtextuality. It is a superior term that contains five subordinate kinds of relations. Intertextuality is understood as the relation of co-presence between one or more texts, it may be quotation, plagiarism or allusion. Paratextuality is the relation between the text and paratext, that can be the title, the subtitle, the introduction – all additional signals. Metatextuality is a comment that is included in a text about another text; this other text does not have to be even quoted or mentioned explicitly. Archetextuality is the most abstract category, it is the relation between a text and a genre. Hypertextuality is every relation that links text B (hypertext) with a previous text A (hypotext). Text B is implanted on text A in a way that is not a comment (Genette, 1992, 317). All of the concepts are most applicable to Mehta's and other diasporic directors' films because the idea of palimpsest dialogue is included in with them.

## Intertextuality

Intertextual relations are visible in Mehta's film in quotations from William Shakespeare's and Pablo Neruda's works. A fragment of Neruda's poem is an important factor influencing the development of the protagonists' love affair. Sue gives the impression to Rahul that she is of European origin because she knows the poem by heart. Here the question of heritage shared by different nations appears – different cultures become one huge heritage and adopting a cosmopolitan attitude lets us choose whatever we want from it. We are no longer confined to a single tradition, we may create our hypertext from almost infinite number of hypotexts. Moreover, the knowledge of a culture does not mean participation in it. The same is true with the grandmother quoting Shakespeare. Her figure is inconsistent because she finds the wisdom in literary works coming from culture she does not approve of. Moreover, she comments on the events using Shakespeare's words as if she is not able to perceive reality from the perspective of her own culture. For instance, when Rahul's first fiancée, the white woman, is introduced to her, the grandmother says expressing her dissatisfaction: "This is the winter of our discontent"; (Shakespeare, *The Tragedy...*, 185) And when she is asked to dance she states that "all the world is a stage". (Shakespeare, *As You...*, 638). There are situations, and diaspora

provides a multiplicity of them, when one has to adopt notions of another culture to deal with reality. The grandmother is multicultural in practice, although in theory she tries to stay nationalistic.

Quotations from and allusions to several Bollywood movies can also be categorized as intertextual relations. The mother describes Rahul as a Devdas-like hero. *Devdas* is one of the most famous Bollywood movies about love which transgresses Indian castes. Yet, because the lovers are from different castes their feeling can never be fulfilled. The mother's comparison situates *Bollywood/Hollywood* in the tradition of Indian cinema. At first, Mehta's film resembles the plot of *Devdas* (e.g. the lack of acceptance of Rahul's girlfriend), however, the happy ending of Rahul's love affair adds to it the Hollywood trait. *Devdas* change into *Pretty Woman*-like story. Two hypertexts blend and complement each other in such a way that they form another successful story.

The fragments from Indian films are constantly present on the screen in *Bollywood/Hollywood*. They are either on TV which is placed somewhere in the background in Rahul's house or they are projected on the walls of the pub the protagonists dance in. The clips are usually songs and dances taken from films such as *Thakyshak, Pardes* or *Khubsoorat*. Their role is to comment on the action or express protagonists' emotions. They also introduce an oriental atmosphere into the "cold" Western surrounding. *Bollywood/Hollywood's* soundtrack contains music from *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (*Sometimes Sun, Sometimes Rain*), too, and an extract from the background score from *Fire* – the earlier Mehta's film. The allusion to the first part of the famous trilogy explains the treatment of the romantic comedy as Mehta's reaction to the controversies which appeared after the release of *Fire*. It was criticized and banned in India because of the lesbian element. Now the director comes up with the comedy, in Bollywood style on the surface, which in fact, however, mocks the commercial Indian productions. It is the example of criticism of (superficial) criticism which pays attention only to scandalous "offences" to tradition.

### Paratextuality

There are numerous captions appearing in *Bollywood/Hollywood*. Those paratexts relate to the film as additional information which either explain the allusions or the themes of songs sung in Hindi, or function as humorous interludes. When the mother calls Rahul the

Devdas-like hero, the inscription on the screen states: "Devdas: very tragic Bollywood hero".[6] Mehta addresses her movie partly to the Western audience who are not expected to know the Indian cinema and they need explanation. However, such a laconic note is not enough because the viewers should learn the whole of Devda's story to properly place the film and the mother's statement in the context of Indian tradition and to broaden the reception.

"Mummy goes shopping" is a notice commenting on the scene where the mother, the grandmother and Rahul are sitting on the sofa and making interviews with Indian girls who applied for the position of a perfect wife for the protagonist. This caption presents a Western interpretation of the traditional Indian custom of arranged marriages. In the film, the classical way of choosing a bride turns into a job-interview. Paratextuality is here both critical and humorous.

## Metatextuality

*Bollywood/Hollywood* is a metatext although the comments are usually implicit within it. The title suggests the first object of commentary – commercial cinema. Because of the tragic accident in which Rahul's beloved dies, Hollywood is marked in a negative way – as unsuccessfully imitating the elements of oriental culture and incorporating them in New Age ideology, and as a dangerous place. On the contrary, Bollywood standards function as a point of reference for the characters: Sue loves Indian films and it makes her an ordinary Indian woman for Rahul. Rahul's younger brother while recording a family event says: "It's better than any Bollywood movie". His statement emphasizes the artificiality of reality served by the commercial cinema, it is also the proof of how films form our perception of the world – we tend to judge reality according to the virtual one, things can be either better or worse than it. The young boy rejects the cinematic version of life and tries to record his natural "setting", but still makes comparisons. A similar situation takes place in the shop where Sue is buying jewellery – she says that she feels like she is in a Bollywood movie, which is associated with feeling rich, omnipotent, glamorous and Indian. Yet, the India from the commercial films is fake. There are more castes than only Brahmins in India; there is pain, suffering and hunger, political and religious conflicts – and all of them are taboos in classical Bollywood. And in this way Mehta criticizes the artificial images of this country.

The economic situation of Sue's family is a sad comment on the multiculturalism in Canada. The effects of the "salad bowl" policy are ghetto-like districts for different ethnic minorities which are supposed to stay "untouched" in order to preserve their cultures and as the caption in the movie states: "All Indians live near the airport. So does Sue's family". It is difficult for immigrants to adapt to Western standards and as a result they live in the cheapest areas of cities and cannot afford most of the attractions of the "dream land".

**Archetextuality**

Apart from being a romantic comedy *Bollywood/Hollywood* includes also other genres. One of them is melodrama – Rahul's first love affair finishes in a melodramatic way when his lover dies in the accident. The characteristics of a classical melodrama, which were enumerated by Grażyna Stachówna (Stachówna, 2001, 37-48) are present in Mehta's film: a classical melodramatic plot is based on a simple pattern – a boy meets a girl, they fall in love with each other, a dramatic event happens which prevents their feeling from a proper development and the epilogue is usually unhappy, it is either separation or death of one or both of the lovers (the white girl dies) and the protagonists are young and pretty, as in *Bollywood/Hollywood*. The factor which causes the drama always comes from the outside and the protagonists are helpless (the tragic accident during a rehearsal). The unhappy ending is excused by the idea of "impossible love" which cannot be fulfilled (Rahul belongs to Brahmins and his beloved is an out-cast – for his family the relationship is impossible to exist). The last feature of melodramas presented by Stachówna is their tendency to be pretty, elegant and to embellish the world (Rahul is rich, therefore we see the lovers in luxurious cars and modern apartments, they look perfect and they surround themselves with colourful, beautiful objects).

The opening scene of Mehta's movie is shown in the manner of a thriller or a horror film – it is dark, raining, there is a storm with thunders and the dramatic music foretells horrible events. We see a lonely house through the heavy rain and it resembles scenes from well-known horrors such as *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1960) or *House of Wax* (1953). However, the scene inside the house belongs to a family drama, not to a horror, as there are no fantastic elements to evoke our fear. We see a dying father who is speaking to his eldest son and making him responsible for the family. In the course of the movie there are a few references to this moment, especially in the

scenes with the ghost of the father who appears to Rahul to teach him the lesson of life. Those scenes add fantastic elements to the movie.

One of the most important elements of the Bollywood genre is music. Songs, music and dances are indispensable in Indian movies:

> Music in Indian cinema is unique in its cultural implications because it spells out the Indianness of cinema even when the songs or the background score are influenced, inspired and now, even plagiarised from Western, African and Arabic hits. Music in Indian mainstream cinema defines a new synthesis of traditional and international genres of music. [...] Classical and folk Indian music are intimately tied to the Indian feudal, historical past. The essential function of folk music is to glue individuals into a group to perform ritualised functions. Folk music tends to be collectivist, tied as it is, to rural life where functions are collective and songs are sung mainly in groups.

> [...] Songs and dances in popular Indian cinema are used as natural expressions of everyday emotions and situations. While seeking to intensify the element of fantasy through music and spectacle, popular cinema also reinforces the impression that songs and dances are the natural and logical expression of emotion in a given situation within the filmic narrative. This coincides, to a large extent, to the Indian social reality where music forms an integral part of life itself, whether it be in celebration of a happy event like a birth in the family, or a wedding, or, when the occasion is one of grief such as a death within the home. Music contributes a vital ingredient in the cultural reconstruct of emotion. (Chatterji, 1999, 8-9**)**

Film music functions as a unifying factor, it expresses emotions and meanings across the language barrier and it helps to unify multilingual Indian cinema audiences. Songs, especially those accompanied by dances, "glue individuals into a group" – actors dance in groups of members of the same sex. *Bollywood/Hollywood* stays in consent with the tradition in this point, however, there is one

innovation because not only the Indian actors dance in this film. Therefore, the dancers do not wear traditional clothes and add Western elements to their performances. Those are the elements of Hollywood musicals in Mehta's movie. Another one is linking the song and dance sequences with the plot and the storyline, unlike in Bollywood where an episodic structure is a standard.

**Hypertextuality**

Genette defines hypertextuality as every relation connecting a text B (hypertext) with an earlier text A (hypotext) on which the text B is implanted. Hypertext is a text of the second degree, the one derived from a previous text. Imitation, a type of transformative operations also included in hypertextuality, is visible in the attitude to form and content of classical Bollywood and Hollywood (or Western) productions in Mehta's film – and it is proved in the transtextual relations mentioned above.

The feature which distinguishes diasporic cinema from the classical one is its double-hypotext nature. *Bollywood/Hollywood* and other diasporic works are double- palimpsests because of the existence of diverse cultural backgrounds (in Mehta's case - American and Indian mainstream cinemas) on which the works are "written" on. The idea of dialogue present in palimpsest gains here a new dimension – apart from the standard relations between hyper- and hypotext there is also the dialogue between two complex hypotexts, between two cultures.

Mehta's hypertext forms a hybrid collection of Western and Indian cultures. A typical family of a high caste lives in Toronto. Indian characters quote Shakespeare and Neruda. Pop music is interwoven with Bollywood songs and dances. Rahul faces the problem of "mixing blood" which is taboo for his family, but, on the other hand, his sister is pregnant before marriage, so the idea of an arranged couple collapses. Protagonists in one sequence wear saris and in the other, modern Western clothes. Sue touches the grandmother's feet which is the Indian sign of respect, she presses her palm together saying "Namaste" when she meets someone in Rahul's house, she sings a traditional song in Hindi, but Sue winks her eye in the end of it – Western contexts introduce the distance towards customs. Rocky, the Indian chauffeur, is a transsexual (another transgression of a taboo) and refers to the ancient Greece where an androgynous body was an ideal. Protagonists meet in a fast food bar where beef is served – and this kind of meat is impure and forbidden in Hinduism.

The mother forbids Rahul and Sue to kiss before marriage (this refers also to the ban put on kissing on the screen in Bollywood cinema), yet her daughter is already pregnant before the wedding. *Devdas* is mixed with *Pretty Woman* and they form a coherent whole. Mehta employs Bollywood fantastic elements, but she juxtaposes them with a meta-cinematic element in the last sequence of the film – there is a party where the characters dance with the film-crew, we can see the director, cameramen and the sound equipment. This "trick" refers to the cinema of the authors stemming from the European tradition and the New Wave in French cinema from the turn of the 1950s to the 60s. The auto-thematism reminds the viewers of the conventionality of the events presented on the screen and makes the cinema a hidden topic of the films.[7] And this is what Mehta really does – she makes a film about two mainstream cinemas, she thematizes cinematography.

The palimpsest reading fulfills Barth's idea of replenishment in postmodern texts. Diasporic films, the double-palimpsests, constitute multicultural mosaics as the effect of a dialogue which occurs on the level of hypotexts. In *Bollywood/Hollywood* Mehta tries to emphasize the significance of Bollywood cinema in the diaspora and shows how it mixes with Western cinematic traditions and cultural elements. She effectively places her work in the new cinema-stream:

> South Asian diasporic cinema is a developing cinema that negotiates the dominant discourses, politics, and economies of multiple locations. [...] South Asian diasporic cinema negotiates and traffics among the two largest global cinemas – those of Hollywood and Bollywood – as well as individual national cinemas including British, Canadian, alternative U.S., and alternative Indian. Thus, South Asian diasporic films function significantly as part of the shifting economic, political, and cultural relations between global capitalism and the postcolonial nation-state, raising questions regarding the negotiation of cultural politics of diasporas located within local, national, and transnational processes. (Desai, 2004, 35-36)

Because of its double-palimpsest nature, diasporic cinema contests relationships with both, Bollywood and Hollywood, and with national cinemas. And through this contestation it is dialogic in its

definition. Diasporic cinema constitutes a mirror of cultural relations between global capitalism (in Mehta's case Hollywood acts as a synecdoche of it) and the postcolonial nation-state (whose synecdoche is Bollywood). Transcultural processes require negotiations between different cultural contexts and *Bollywood/Hollywood* may be seen as the effect of such negotiations. The film is what Fred Casmir called the "Third Culture" – a "bridge" between two (or more) cultures which enables communicative permeability despite differences and without disturbing identities.[8] It is a state of new communicative competence that, in Mehta's movies, is represented in the effective joining and juxtaposing of two different modes of cinema.

**Endnotes**

1 . See: W. Welsch: Transkulturalität – Lebensformen nach der Auflösg der Kulturen. In: *Information Philosophie*, 2, 1992, 5-22

2. See: J.G.Herder, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*. New York: Bergman Publishers. 1966.

3. The term "addressee" comes from Roman Jacobson's model of verbal communication. According to Jacobson there are three main elements of an act of communication: the sender, the message and the addressee. See: R.Jacobson, *W poszukiwaniu istoty języka. Wybór pism,* M.R. Mayenowa, ed. (PIW, Warszawa 1989, Volume II).

4 . See: J.Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language,* Trans. by Margaret Waller, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

5. This is the element of Genette's theory which is explained below.

6 The captions come from the DVD version of *Bollywood/Hollywood*.

7 See: T.Lubelski, *Nowa fala. O pewnej przygodzie kina francuskiego*. Kraków: Universitas, 2000, 114-118.

8 See: A. Tyszka: *Rozmowa kultur*. In: *Komunikacja międzykulturowa. Zbliżenia i impresje*. A.Kapciak, L.Korporowicz and A.Tyszka, eds. Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1995, 20-22.

## Works cited

Bakhtin, Michail, "Discourse in the Novel" (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). In: M. Holquist (Ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays.* Austin: University of Texas 1981.

Barth, John, *The Literature of Exhaustion*. Boston: Atlantic Monthly 1967.

----------. *The Literature of Exhaustion and the Literature of Replenishment*. Northridge: Lord John Press 1982.

*Bollywood/Hollywood.* Dir. Deepa Mehta. Perf. Rahul Khanna, and Lisa Ray. Different Tree Same Wood Production, 2002.

Chatterji, Shoma A., 'The Culture-Specific Use Of Sound In India Cinema'. Paper presented at the International Symposium on Sound in Cinema in London April 15 – 18, 1999. 20 June 2005 <http://www.filmsound.org/india/>.

*Devdas.* Dir. Sanjay Leela Bhansali. Perf. Shah Rukh Khan, and Madhuri Dixit, Eros, 2002.

Desai, Jigna, *Beyond Bollywood. The Cultural Politics of South Asian Diasporic Film.* New York and London: Routledge, 2004.

*Fire*. Dir. Deepa Mehta. Perf. Shabana Azmi, and Nandita Das. Trial by Fire Films Inc., 1996.

Genette, Gerard: „Palimpsesty. Literatura drugiego stopnia". In: H.Markiewicz (ed.), *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą.* Volume IV. Kraków 1992.

Herder, Johann Gottfried, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man.* New York: Bergman Publishers 1966.

*House of Wax.* Dir. Andre De Toth. Perf. Vincent Price, Frank Lovejoy, and Phyllis Kirk. Warner Bros., 1953.

Jacobson, Roman, „W poszukiwaniu istoty języka". In: M.R. Mayenowa (ed.), *Wybór pism*. Volume II. Warszawa: PIW, 1989.

*Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* (*Sometimes Sun, Sometimes Rain).* Dir. Karan Johar. Perf. Amitabh Bachchan, Jaya Bhaduri, and Shah Rukh Khan. Yash Raj Films, 2001.

*Khubsoorat*. Dir. Hrishikesh Mukherjee. Prod. N.C.Sippy, and Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Perf. Rekha, Rakesh Roshan, and Ashok Kumar. DEI, 1980.

Kristeva, Julia *Revolution in Poetic Language,* trans. by Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

----------. *The Kristeva Reader.* Toril Moi, ed. and introd. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

Lubelski, Tadeusz, *Nowa fala. O pewnej przygodzie kina francuskiego*. Kraków: Universitas, 2000.

*Pardes*. Dir. Subhash Ghai. Perf. Shah Rukh Khan, and Mahima Chaudhary, 1997.

*Pretty Woman*. Dir. Garry Marshall. Perf. Richard Gere and Julia Roberts. Touchstone Pictures, 1990.

Shakespeare, William, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*. In: William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works. Compact Edition.* Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (eds). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

----------. *As You Like It*. In: William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works. Compact Edition.* Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (eds). Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Stachówna, Grażyna, *Niedole miłowania. Ideologia i perswazja w melodramatach filmowych*. Kraków: Rabid, 2001.

*Thakshak*. Dir. Govind Nihalani. Prod. Govind Nihalani, Perf. Ajay Devgan and Tabu. Famous Lab & Studio Mr. Shetty, 1999.

*The Fall of the House of Usher*. Dir. Roger Corman. Prod. Alta Vista Productions, Perf. Vincent Price and Mark Damon. MGM, 1960.

Tyszka, Andrzej, „Rozmowa kultur". In: A.Kapciak, L.Korporowicz and A.Tyszka (eds.), *Komunikacja międzykulturowa. Zbliżenia i impresje*. Warszawa: Instytut Kultury 1995, 20-22.

Welsch, Wolfgang, „Transkulturalität – Lebensformen nach der Auflösung der Kulturen". In: *Information Philosophie,* 2, 1992, 5-20.

# *Reading beyond identity*

**Niina Holm**
**Turku University, Finland**

## Performative Gender Identity in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

**Abstract**

*The problematization of the concept of identity is a theme that returns throughout Margaret Atwood's fiction. Furthermore, it can be argued that in her work Atwood calls the notions of unity, essence and authenticity into question to an extreme degree (Rao, 1993, xvi-xvii). In her seventh novel,* Cat's Eye *(1988), Atwood focuses again on the questions of gender and identity. In this article, I examine the construction of gender identity of the novel's protagonist, Elaine Risley. I suggest that Elaine's gender identity is discursively constructed, multiple, situated and performative. I base my reading on poststructural feminist studies, especially Judith Butler's work.*

**Résumé**

*La problématique de la notion de l'identité est un theme qui domine la fiction de Margaret Atwood. On prétend que dans son oeuvre, Atwood questionne les concepts d'unité, d'essence et d'authenticité d'une facon extreme (Rao, 1993, xvi -xvii). Dans son septième roman,* Cat's Eye *(1988), elle se concentre de nouveau aux questions de genre sexuel et d'identité. Dans cet article, je vais examiner la construction de l'identité de genre du protagoniste Elaine Risley. Je vais constater que cette identité est discursivement construite, multiple, située et performative. Ma lecture fonde sur la poststructuralisme féministe, spécialement sur le travail de Judith Butler.*

It is Elaine Risley's return to her former hometown that makes her want to narrate her life's story in a new light. Furthermore, it can be

argued that the point of Elaine's narrative is the moment when she sees a poster of her retrospective exhibition while walking down a street in Toronto. The picture of her face in the poster has been smudged and now she has a moustache.

> RISLEY IN RETROSPECT, it says; just the last name, like a boy. The name is mine and so is the face, more or less. It's the photo I sent the gallery. Except that now I have a moustache. […] Then suddenly, I feel wonder. I have achieved, finally, a face that a moustache can be drawn on, a face that attracts moustaches. A public face, a face worth defacing. (Atwood, 1990, 19-20)

According to Coral Ann Howells, "Elaine's confrontation with her own face defaced […] opens up multiple possibilities for "mutual reflexive substitution", displacements and doublings" (Howells, 2005, 113). Furthermore, it can be argued that the moustache on Elaine's face parodically questions the naturality and coherence of her gender identity.

*Cat's Eye* is a story about a girl growing up in Canada after the Second World War. Moreover, the novel is an account of the cultural changes and developments in Canada from the 1940s to the 1980s. The protagonist of the novel is a middle-aged artist who visits her former hometown, Toronto, in order to open a retrospective exhibition of her art. During her visit, she narrates and reconstructs her identity, and the story of her life. At the same time, she is looking for her long-lost friend, Cordelia.

By highlighting its literary context, *Cat's Eye* stresses its constructedness. For example, there are interesting intertextual allusions to Virginia Woolf's work in the novel. Although there is a sixty-year gap between Woolf's parodic fictional biography Orlando and Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, the two books are similar in many ways. Both Orlando and Elaine Risley go through different phases and many changes in their life stories. Yet Elaine is far from Woolf's androgynical, sex-changing protagonist. Furthermore, where in Atwood's book there is no unchangeable self under or before the changing surface, Orlando finds her true self at the end of the novel.

> And it was at this moment, when she ceased to call "Orlando" and was deep in thoughts of something else,

that the Orlando whom she had called came of its own accord; as was proved by the change that now came over her […]. The whole of her darkened and settled, as when some foil whose addition makes the round and solidity of a surface is added to it, and the shallow becomes deep and the near distant; and all is contained as water is contained by the sides of a well. So she was now darkened, stilled, and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. (Woolf, 2000, 205)

The narrative tools that Atwood uses in *Cat's Eye* stress the problematical construction of female identity in fiction. Howells writes about *Cat's Eye*'s "doubled narrative" with its "discursive" memoir version and its "figural" version presented through Elaine's paintings (Howells, 2005, 111). Consequently, there are interesting connections between picture and text, and between materiality and language in the novel. In Judith Butler's theory of performativity "[…] language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependency, but never fully collapsed into one another" (Butler, 1993, 69).

During the opening party of her exhibition Elaine looks at her paintings and says to herself: "I'm what's left over" (Atwood, 1990, 409). In *Cat's Eye*, both painting and writing are seen as discursive acts that construct the subject or the "I". Yet it is suggested that the construction of a subject is never finished. In my reading of *Cat's Eye*, I highlight the meaning of the outside and the context, the things that are "left over".

*Cat's Eye* is consciously autobiographical to a certain degree without being an autobiography. For example, the novel includes intertextual allusions to Atwood's other novels. Arnold E. Davidson suggests that *Cat's Eye* is a meta-autobiographical novel. According to Davidson, a meta-autobiographical novel "[…] is about narrating an account of life, and that accounting also involves the author" (Davidson, 1997, 14). Consequently, it can be argued that in *Cat's Eye* Atwood retrospectively glances back at her earlier novels. Despite the similarities, *Cat's Eye* also differs from Atwood's other works. According to Howells, Elaine in *Cat's Eye* has succeeded in finding her own voice unlike Atwood's previous protagonists (Howells, 2005, 190). Davidson suggests that in *Cat's Eye* Atwood

"[…] conversely reads the political back to the personal" (Davidson, 1997, 16).

Atwood has always been considered a political writer. Her novels focus on feminist and postcolonial issues. Yet there are many differing opinions about the political nature of *Cat's Eye*[1]. According to Davidson, some critics also labelled *Cat's Eye* as an antifeminist novel (Davidson, 1997, 21-31). In my reading, which is based on poststructural feminist studies, I suggest that *Cat's Eye* is a feminist novel. Moreover, I stress that Elaine's narrated and multiple gender identity is dependent on the social and cultural developments in Canada. Elaine's story reconstructs the subject positions that have been possible for her in the changing discursive situations.

### Poststructural feminist studies

In *Cat's Eye*, identities are considered as fictional and in a state of process. For example, the protagonist and narrator of the novel, Elaine Risley, is aware that her story is not the 'truth' about her life and that the "I" of the story is discursive. She does not remember everything, not even her former selves. "What was I like, what did I want? It is hard to remember." (Atwood, 1990, 27). Also, she is ready to admit the embellishment of her story: "If I were to meet Cordelia again, what would I tell her about myself? The truth, or whatever would make me look good? Probably the latter. I still have that need." (Atwood, 1990, 6).

Poststructural feminists understand gender identities as historically and socially constructed, fictional and multiple. However, they are also politically meaningful. According to Tuija Pulkkinen, a real identity is fiction and a fictional identity is real (Pulkkinen, 1998, 186). In her prominent books *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004) Judith Butler considers gender identities as discursive and performative. She suggests that gender identities are doing, not being.

> [A]cts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained

> through corporeal signs and other discursive means.
> That the gendered body is performative suggests that it
> has no ontological status apart from the various acts
> which constitute its reality. (Butler, 1990, 136)

Consequently, when identities are seen as constructed they can also be de- and reconstructed. The concept of fictional identity is politically useful since what has been narrated can also be narrated differently.

Butler's work has been criticized both by Anglo-American and continental feminists. According to Pulkkinen, Butler's writings have been criticized by those feminists who stress practice and by those who find concepts of "materiality", "body" and "experience" important. (Pulkkinen, 2000, 46-47). *In Bodies That Matter*, Butler emphasizes that bodies, too, are discursive constructions. Moreover, it is important to pay attention to the processes of becoming gendered, bodily subjects since they are constructed through abandonments (Butler, 1993).

In her latest book, *Undoing Gender*, Butler argues that "critique of gender norms must be situated within the context of lives as they are lived and must be guided by the question of what maximizes the possibilities for a livable life […]" (Butler, 2004, 8). Although the tension between the concept of gender as performative and some versions of sexual difference remains, Butler considers the structuring reality of sexual difference as a necessary background to the possibility of thinking, of language, of being body in the world (Butler, 2004, 10, 176).

## Childhood's power plays

Elaine's story returns to the end of the Second World War, to the time when she was eight years old. She has lived a traveller's life with her family in the northern parts of Canada because of her father's work as a biologist. As she does throughout her story, Elaine deconstructs here the myths and stereotypes associated with genders. Although it seems that Elaine, her parents, and her brother, Stephen, live outside social expectations and limitations, there are aspects in Elaine's story that contradict this. While her brother draws pictures of war, little Elaine draws pretty and clean drawings of girls that resemble the pictures she has seen in her schoolbooks (Atwood, 1990, 28-29). Moreover, it can be argued that in the novel, the

different characteristics of genders which seem to be natural are in fact products of representations.

Elaine's childhood's story questions other kinds of myths as well. Although Elaine states that she has been happy (Atwood, 1990, 21), her story does not represent her childhood as a time of paradisal innocence. Furthermore, nature and culture connect in her story in many ways. Although the Risley family live in a rural area, they move from place to place by car (Atwood, 1990, 21). Moreover, the war is present even in the wilderness: Elaine and Stephen play war, and Stephen sings war songs (Atwood, 1990, 24-25). Also, the myth of a carefree childhood is deconstructed. Elaine remembers how she missed certain things: balloons, pipe-cleaners, silver papers out of cigarette packages — and girl friends.

> I want some friends, friends who will be girls. Girl friends. I know that these exist, having read about them in books, but I've never had any girl friends because I've never been in one place long enough. (Atwood, 1990, 28)

Elaine's life goes through a significant change when her family moves to Toronto after the war. However, Elaine is not the only one whose life is changing. The whole culture of Canada is going through a transformation (see Prentice et al, 1990, 440-454; Morton, 1983, 215-217; Bumsted, 1992, 275, 343-344). In fact, Elaine's story connects with the transformations and breaks of Canadian culture.

It is stereotypically thought that children, especially girls, are powerless. However, in *Cat's Eye*, girls are represented as powerful and capable of violence. In Toronto, Elaine befriends three girls, Carol, Grace and Cordelia, who represent the three different subject positions that were possible for girls in the end of the 1940's and in the early 1950's. Therefore, Elaine's own position as an outsider or an other is defined in relation to that of each of her friends. Butler argues in her theory that a coherent gender identity is an illusion, the product of reiteration and imitation (Butler, 1990, 136). The adult Elaine notes how playing with girls was not natural for her but something she had to learn to do. "Playing with girls is different and at first I feel strange as I do it, self-conscious, as if I'm doing an imitation of a girl. But soon I get more used to it." (Atwood, 1990, 52). It does not feel comfortable for Elaine to play with girls since she has grown up with her brother.

> So I am left to the girls, real girls at last, in the flesh.
> But I'm not used to girls, or familiar with their
> customs. I feel awkward around them, I don't know
> what to say. I know the outspoken rules of boys, but
> with girls I sense that I'm always on the verge of some
> unforeseen, calamitous blunder. (Atwood, 1990, 47)

It is not only the other girls but also grown women that Elaine
confronts with unease. Molly Hite argues that the anxiety attendant
on achieving the full feminine identity comes from the requirement
that the adult woman internalize a permanent belief in her need for
improvement. Hite notes how Grace's mother Mrs. Smeath relegates
herself the task of attending to the spiritual improvement of Elaine,
but with apparent satisfaction finally judges her unredeemable, a
"heathen". (Hite, 1995, 198-99; Atwood, 1990, 179-180).

To Elaine's friends the Risley family seem exotic and different.
After Carol's first visit to Elaine's home, she tells about it at school
with exaggeration. To the middle-aged Elaine, Carol's motives seem
clear.

> She doesn't repeat these items with scorn, but as exotic
> specialties. I am, after all, her lining- up partner, and
> she wants me to be marvelled at. More accurate: she
> wants herself to be marvelled at, for revealing such
> wonders. It's as if she's reporting on the antics of
> some primitive tribe: true, but incredible. (Atwood,
> 1990, 49)

Consequently, Elaine starts to identify herself with the other "exotic"
ones. Moreover, as an adult she paints a painting called Three Muses
of her Jewish neighbour Mrs. Finestein, her Scottish teacher Miss
Stuart and Mr. Banerji, her father's Indian colleague (Atwood, 1990,
406-407). It can be argued that Elaine's identification with them
creates a bond of loyalty and solidarity between Elaine and the other
"outsiders".

**Sites of transformation**

The next turning point in Elaine's story follows when, one winter's
night, her friends leave her alone under the bridge they pass every
day on their way to school. Her friends have tormented her
constantly before, but now Elaine reaches the point where she feels
totally powerless. Paradoxically, this is one of the moments in

Elaine's story that can also be viewed as a site of transformation. As Butler writes in *Bodies That Matter*:

> The task is to refigure this necessary "outside" as a future horizon, one which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome. But of equal importance is the preservation of the outside, the site where discourse meets its limits […] illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of the normative regime precisely through the inability of that regime to represent that which might pose as a fundamental threat to its continuity. (Butler, 1993, 53)

It can be argued that the bridge in the novel symbolizes the discourse, and that the stream under the bridge functions as a symbol for the "outside" of the discourse. Cordelia, the leader of the girls, has said that the stream is made of dead people.

> [B]ecause the stream flows out of the cemetery it's made of dissolved dead people. She says that if you drink it or step into it or even get too close to it, the dead people will come out of the stream, all covered up with mist, and take you with them. She says the only reason this hasn't happened to us is that we're on the bridge and the bridge is wooden. Bridges are safe, over dead-people streams like this one. (Atwood, 1990, 75)

After the incident at the bridge, Elaine starts to alienate herself from her friends. However, as soon as Elaine forgets her hurtful memories she and Cordelia become friends again. Nevertheless, their relationship has changed, and Elaine is now the one who is leading.

Both Cordelia and Elaine are artistic, but young Elaine wants to make her art different from Cordelia's. Cordelia has been interested in acting since she was a little girl (Atwood, 1990, 73-74), and now, as a teenager, she gets two roles in William Shakespeare's Macbeth. But something always went wrong in Cordelia's childhood plays, and this time is no exception. However, Elaine does not even try to comfort her embarrassed friend.

"Cordelia's melodramas are beyond her", middle-aged Elaine states (Atwood, 1990, 74). The ideas of art that young Elaine learns are modern in the sense that they highlight the autonomy of the art and

the artist. Moreover, young Elaine's career as an artist becomes possible in a discourse that stresses control and originality. In contrast to Cordelia's acting, which is associated with pretence, Elaine values authenticity. These modern ideas of art that young Elaine repeats are the ones that middle-aged Elaine deconstructs in her story. According to Helena Sederholm, performative art can re- and deconstruct the culturally shared norms (Sederholm, 2002, 97-98). It can be argued that in the novel, art is represented as performative and productive.

Cordelia's character in the novel can be read as an intertextual allusion to Shakespeare's play King Lear. King Lear is an aging man who totters between insanity and "inner blindness". He exiles his youngest daughter Cordelia to France because he believes she has been disloyal to him. However, Cordelia is the most loyal of Lear's three daughters, but she does not believe that words are adequate to describe her love for her father. As she says: "Then poor Cordelia, / And yet not so, since I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (*King Lear*, I.i, 75). At the end of the play, Cordelia returns from exile and dies with her father.

Also in *Cat's Eye*, Cordelia is loyal to authorities, and at the end of the novel she disappears or dies socially. However, it would not be adequate to interpret Cordelia's and Elaine's characters as opposites. As I have highlighted before, Elaine's story is not complete, and nor is it entirely without gaps or breaks. There are also parts of her that are missing. Furthermore, it can be argued that the lives of Elaine and Cordelia are interrelated because they have grown up together. As an adult, Elaine paints a painting called *Half a Face* about her relationship with Cordelia.

> Cordelia is afraid of me, in this picture.
> I am afraid of Cordelia.
> I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being
> Cordelia. Because in some way we
> changed places, and I've forgotten when. (Atwood,
> 1990, 227)

Unlike Cordelia, Elaine becomes an artist. Soon after she has graduated from an art school she marries her classmate, Jon. They have a daughter. Although it is now the 1960s, "the decade of freedom," the marriage of Elaine and Jon is very conservative. According to Desmond Morton, in Canada the liberation of the

1960s mainly affected British Columbia, big cities, and the middle class. Furthermore, most Canadians continued to live their lives the same way as before. (Morton, 1983, 247-248).

Butler uses the concept of heterosexual matrix "to designate that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized" (Butler, 1990, 151). She writes in *Gender Trouble*:

> I am drawing from Monique Wittig's notion of the "heterosexual contract" and, to a lesser extent, on Adrienne Rich's notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" to characterize a hegemonic discursive/ epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender […] that is oppositional and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler, 1990, 151)

Without questioning the heterosexual matrix or hegemony, Elaine understands the man and the woman as opposites, complementing each other. "I have this sense that, like one pair of bookends, he is incomplete by himself" (Atwood, 1990, 324), Elaine states when she describes her marriage to Jon. The marriage breaks up shortly, and Elaine moves with her daughter to Vancouver. There she meets another man, Ben, to whom she is still married while narrating her story. Although it seems that she has left Toronto for good, the city and the painful events of her life she wants to forget keep haunting her.

**Performative gender identity**

It can be argued that by returning to Toronto and telling her story, Elaine faces her dead ones, or her ghosts. Elaine narrates her story at the time of All Soul's Eve, when the spirits of the dead are believed to become alive again in disguise. Elaine criticises the way the Canadians celebrate the holiday.

> In Mexico they do this festival the right way, with no disguise. Bright candy sculls, family picnics on the graves, a plate set for each individual guest, a candle for the soul. We've rejected that easy flow between dimensions: we want the dead unmentionable, we refuse to name them, we refuse to feed them. Our dead

as a result are thinner, greyer, harder to hear, and hungrier. (Atwood, 1990, 387)

Later, while telling about the death of her brother Stephen, Elaine is ready to admit that she has denied the impermanence of life. "I didn't want to identify the body, or see it at all. If you don't see the body, it's easier to believe nobody's dead." (Atwood, 1990, 391-392). It can be argued that the division between the living and the dead can be made not only physically, but also socially. By telling her story, and through her art, Elaine "negotiates" with the dead: her father and mother, her brother Stephen, Cordelia, and her own earlier selves. In a way Elaine can now see in the dark, through time and even death (Davidson, 1997, 32). Moreover, Elaine's ability to see in the dark deconstructs the hierarchical division not only between life and death, but also between the intelligible subjects and the others.

Before her mother's death, Elaine the cat's eye marble she hid as a child. The marble is in a red purse she used when she went to church with the Smeath family. The purse makes Elaine remember the text in the church window: "THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS WITHIN YOU" (Atwood, 1990, 397). It can be argued that the marble in the novel functions as a symbol of the self. Elaine notes that looking in the marble, she can see her entire life (Atwood, 1990, 398). Yet the cat's eye marble is only present in Elaine's story, in her fiction. It can be argued that here, as in the whole novel, Atwood questions the notions of an authentic, single self and a coherent gender identity.

During the opening party of her retrospective exhibition Elaine looks at her paintings in a different way than before. The paintings of Mrs. Smeath that she has painted for revenge seem to look back at her. She is now willing to admit that she has been merciless herself.

> Now I can see myself, through the painted eyes of Mrs. Smeath: a frazzle-headed raggamuffin from heaven knows where, a gypsy practically, with a heathen father and a feckless mother who traipsed around in slacks and gathered weeds. I was unbaptized, a nest for demons: how could she know what germs of blasphemy and unfaith were breeding in me? And yet she took me in. Some of this must be true. I have not done it justice, or rather mercy. Instead I went for vengeance. An eye for an eye leads only to more blindness. (Atwood, 1990, 405)

The word "eye" in the last sentence of the quote can be understood to mean the word "I" (see Hite, 1995), in which case the sentence could be read: "an I for an I...". The Hammurabic justice creates a violent battle between the coherent and incoherent subjects, which Elaine tries to end with her story. Moreover, Elaine's narrative highlights the construction of a gendered subject as an endless, multiple process. As she states in the beginning of her story: "There's never only one, of anyone" (Atwood, 1990, 6).

The ambivalent ending of the novel suggests that although Elaine's narrative has now reached its limits, the story has not come to its end. She is now on a plane, flying to Vancouver, but the plane does not reach its destination.

> Now it's full night, clear, moonless and filled with stars, which are not eternal as was once thought, which are not where we think they are. If they were sounds, they would be echoes, of something that happened millions of years ago: a word made of numbers. Echoes of light, shining out of the midst of nothing. It's old light, and there's not much of it. But it's enough to see by. (Atwood, 1990, 421)

As the final paragraph of the novel shows, identities are like stars: not eternal but situated and historical. Furthermore, the novel's open ending hints that the performative identity is both limited and unlimited, possible and impossible, fictive and real. In performative identity these oppositions do not relate hierarchically but connect in an endless motion.

**Endnotes**

[1] Barbara Hill Rigney notes in her article "Alias Atwood: Narrative Games and Gender Politics" that in Atwood's later fiction, female characters do harm to other women. She asks in the article: "How, then, given such negative portrayals of women, can we construct a feminist ethic for Atwood, how infer a woman-centered poetic?" (Rigney, 2000, 161). Jill LeBihan has argued that Atwood differentiates her art from her politics (LeBihan, 1991, 94). Sisko Jääskeläinen suggests in her master's thesis that *Cat's Eye* is a post or an antifeminist novel (Jääskeläinen, 1996, 130-13 1). However,

there are also critics with opposite views: J. Brooks Bouson (1993) and Judith McCombs (1991) argue that *Cat's Eye* is a feminist novel.

## Works cited

Atwood, Margaret. *Cat's Eye*. London: Virago, 1990 (1988).

Bouson, J. Brooks. "The Power Politics of Women's Relationships in *Cat's Eye*". In *Brutal Choreographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993, 159-184.

Bumsted, J.M. *The Peoples of Canada: A Post-Confederation History*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

---------- *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

---------- *Undoing Gender*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Davidson, Arnold E. *Seeing in the Dark: Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye*. Toronto: ECW Press, 1997.

Hite, Molly. "An I for an Eye: The Disciplinary Society in *Cat's Eye*". In Lorraine M. York (ed). *Various Atwoods: Essays on the later poems, short fiction and novels*. Concord: Anansi, 1995, 191-206.

Howells, Coral Ann. *Margaret Atwood*. 2nd edition. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press, 2005.

Jääskeläinen, Sisko. *Valta Margaret Atwoodin teoksessa* Cat's Eye. Master's thesis. Department of Literature. University of Jyväskylä, 1996.

LeBihan, Jill. "The Handmaid's Tale, *Cat's Eye* and Interlunar: Margaret Atwood's Feminist (?) Futures (?)". In Coral Ann Howells and Lynette Hunter (eds.). *Narrative Strategies in Canadian Literature*. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991, 93-107.

McCombs, Judith. "Contrary Re-Memberings. The Creative Self and Feminism in *Cat's Eye*". *Canadian Literature*. Vol 129 (1991): 9-23.

Morton, Desmond. *A Short History of Canada*. Exp. ed. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1983.

Pulkkinen, Tuija. "Judith Butler — sukupuolen suorittamisen teoreetikko". In Anneli Anttonen, Kirsti Lempiäinen and Marianne Liljeström (eds.). *Feministejä — aikamme ajattelijoita*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 2000, 43-60.

Pulkkinen, Tuija. *Postmoderni politiikan filosofia*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 1998.

Prentice, Alison et al. "The "Ben Gun Girl" and the Housewife Heroine". In R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (eds.). *Readings in Canadian History. Post-Confederation*. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1990, 440-462.

Rao, Eleonora. *Strategies for Identity. The Fiction of Margaret Atwood*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993.

Rigney, Barbara Hill. "Alias Atwood: Narrative Games and Gender Politics". In Reingard M. Nischik (ed). *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. Rochester and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2000, 157-165.

Sederholm, Helena. "Performatiivinen taide ja naisidentiteetin rakentaminen". In Pauline von Bonsdorff and Anita Seppä (eds.). *Kauneuden sukupuoli. Näkökulmia feministiseen estetiikkaan*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2002, 76-106.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. London: Penguin Books, 1994 (1608).

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando. A Biography*. London: Vintage, 2000 (1928).

**Donna McCormack**
**University of Leeds, United Kingdom**

# A Queer Postcolonial Space: Forging Ethical Practices Out of Violence in Shani Mootoo's Literary Works

## Abstract

*This article explores the potentiality of literature to produce ethical ways of belonging. Through an exploration of the safe space that emerges in Shani Mootoo's novel* Cereus Blooms at Night, *this article suggests that a notion of self-reflexive responsibility is one possible way to forge non-violent bodily and spatial boundaries. This ethical way of existing and reading comes into being through the imaginary queer postcolonial space of the novel. The direct relation between ethics and hope for the subject positions in* Cereus Blooms at Night *suggests there is hope for the reader to begin to produce ethical encounters with texts, bodies and spaces.*

## Résumé

*Cet article s'interroge sur le rôle potentiel de la littérature dans l'élaboration de modes d'appartenance éthiques. A travers une analyse de l'espace intime qui se crée dans le roman de Shani Mootoo,* Cereus Blooms at Night, *cet article suggère qu'une notion de responsabilité auto-réflexive peut constituer, d'une maniere non-violente, des frontières corporelles et spatiales. Ce mode éthique d'existence et de lecture surgit de l'espace imaginaire – à la fois queer et postcolonial – du roman. Le rapport direct entre éthique et espoir, pour les personnages de* Cereus Blooms at Night, *permet d'envisager chez le lecteur/la lectrice une rencontre éthique entre texte, corps et espace.*

In this article I explore the ways in which literature informs and expands the theoretical terrain of postcoloniality. I also explore the potential of the intersections of postcolonialism and queer theory to forge non-violent spaces of belonging. In bringing together these

often separate theoretical fields I suggest that it is vital to recognise the interrelatedness of spatial and bodily boundaries of acceptability and belonging. I argue throughout the whole of this article that what we 'do' to texts is directly related to our wider social existence. In other words, when we read a body we categorise, define and, thereby, decide whether that body is undesirable, a threat, a danger or an outsider or, conversely, readable, similar and a part of our community. That is, as we see in Shani Mootoo's literary works, reading not only reflects that which is but it creates that which will be. I therefore suggest that reaching towards an *ethics of reading* is at the core of thinking about and forging safe spaces of belonging.

In the first section I explore the ways in which community boundaries are drawn along imaginary identitarian lines in Shani Mootoo's short story "Out on Main Street", from her short story collection of the same title. That a sense of community is imagined does not make it less real but rather means, as Sara Ahmed states, that "nations are produced and constructed as places and communities in which 'a people' might belong" (Ahmed, 2000, 98). It is in this sense that I employ the term imaginary, as that which is constantly *being produced*. By allowing us to see this process of production at work, Mootoo demonstrates that community boundaries drawn along identitarian lines often lead to fractured violent forms of existence. Importantly, Mootoo in her first novel goes on to show that community ties can be drawn along other lines and, thus, through less violent means. I am not suggesting we abandon identity as that which defines us or by which we wish to define ourselves. What I want to show is that imagining communities along identitarian lines is often the cause of violence rather than a uniting force. Where violence could potentially be avoided, this article suggests, is in the notion of the community as that which is yet to come into being. To quote Ahmed again:

> Collectivities are formed through the *very work that we need to do* in order to get closer to others, without simply repeating the appropriation of 'them' as labour, or as a sign of difference. […] The 'we' of such a collective politics is what must be worked for, rather than being the foundation of our collective work. In the very 'painstaking labour' of getting closer, of speaking *to* each other, and of working *for* each other, we also get closer to 'other others'. In such acts of

> alignment (rather than merger), we can reshape the
> very bodily form of the community, as a community
> that is yet to come. (Ahmed, 2000, 180; emphasis in
> original)

In other words, it is not always what may appear as our common
bonds that could bring us together but rather a belief in the potential
for social transformation to bring about different, less violent, ways
of belonging. Such a form of coming together is what I have chosen
to call here a queer postcolonial space. It copies an original but in not
quite the same way, so we could say it copies queerly. Theories of
performativity articulate the ways in which nation building,
constructing boundaries of belonging, comes into being through
*certain* bodies and not simply by reflecting *any* body. Where a body
fails to live up to a sexed ideal of the nation there is a potentiality for
political critique of the processes of power which reiterate the
constraints of this ideal and, thus, of that which is a viable form of
existence. Implicit in much of Homi Bhabha's work on mimicry is
the idea that the failure to live up to the original is not simply a
failure in the negative sense but also a space where colonial authority
is able to be challenged, where it becomes undone:

> What they [instances of colonial imitation] all share is
> a discursive process by which the excess of slippage
> produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the
> same, *but not quite*) does not merely 'rupture' the
> discourse, but becomes transformed into an
> uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a
> 'partial' presence. By 'partial' I mean both
> 'incomplete' and 'virtual'. It is as if the very
> emergence of the 'colonial' is dependent for its
> representation upon some strategic limitation or
> prohibition *within* the authoritative discourse itself.
> The success of colonial appropriation depends on a
> proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its
> strategic failure, so that mimicry is at once
> resemblance and menace. (Bhabha, 2004, 123;
> emphasis in original)

The potential for agency in the disjunction between the copy and the
original, between the social norm and the embodied experience, is
much more explicit in Judith Butler's work on gender and desire:

> [T]he "I" that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. This is not easy, because the "I" becomes, to a certain extent unknowable, threatened with unviability, with becoming undone altogether, when it no longer incorporates the norm in such a way that makes this "I" fully recognizable. There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human. I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable. This is the juncture from which critique emerges, where critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living […]. (Butler, 2004, 4)

In this sense, the term "queer postcolonial", in Mootoo's literary works, is a space where a critical distance emerges out of colonial, familial and taxonomical violence in order to transform the violent constraints of heteronormative colonial structures. Queer, in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, is the potentiality to produce a political critique of systems that refuse to allow *certain* bodies a viable form of existence. "Queer postcolonial" is, thus, used in this imaginary way. It is neither to reflect that which exists nor to suggest that it is the only desirable space towards which we can work; but rather it is this juncture in Mootoo's literary works where it becomes possible to imagine non-violent, postcolonial communities.

In "Out on Main Street", the narrator and her partner, Janet, both of Indian descent, want to avoid their previous experience of being looked upon as "cultural bastards" in an Indian restaurant where they are seen as "Indian-in-skin-colour-only" (Mootoo, 1993, 51).[1] Being from Trinidad, the narrator, according to the waiters, continually makes mistakes in naming the sweets she and Janet want. The narrator and her partner are placed on the outside of this community insofar as their Indianness is not real enough. Here we begin to see how boundaries of belonging fluctuate according to an *imagined* sense of Indianness. When two white drunken men enter this Indian restaurant and start abusing the waiters, many of the women, who are

also to be read as of Indian origin, are united in their disgust of these men:

> Everybody was feeling sorry for Chum-chum [the waiter] and Brothers. One a dem come up to de table across from us to take a order from a woman with a giraffe-long neck who say, "Brother, we mustn't accept how these people think they can treat us. You men really put up with too many insults and abuse over here. I really felt for you." (Mootoo, 1993, 54)

This process of reading white bodies as racist serves to consolidate the boundaries of belonging along Indian lines. Cultural and ethnic similarities are strengthened and differences of place of origin, sex and sexuality collapsed as it becomes essential to avoid racial violence. This fleeting moment of belonging is interrupted when issues of gender power come into play:

> One brother gone over to Giraffebai [the woman with the giraffe-long neck] to see if she want anything more. He call she "dear" and put his hand on she back. Giraffebai straighten she back in surprise and reply in a not-too-friendly way. When he gone to write up de bill she see me looking at she and she say to me, "Whoever does he think he is! Calling me dear and touching me like that. Why do these men always think they have permission to touch whatever and wherever they want!" (Mootoo, 1993, 55)

By confiding in the narrator Giraffebai forms a sense of belonging through exterior markers of ethnicity and gender. Her emotional investment in forming a sense of belonging and, thereby, empathy is a means of excluding that which is undesired, as well as a means of creating a common bond. However, her attachments come into being through *imagined* cultural, sexual, gender and ethnic histories. Boundaries of belonging come into being here in relation to what is felt and understood as 'wrongness' and what is imagined as 'common' to them both. It is through a desire to exclude oneself from certain people and certain behaviours that boundaries are drawn up and, in this sense, boundaries are constantly shifting in relation to imaginary identitarian histories. This is further emphasised when Giraffebai later rejects the narrator on seeing her being greeted by her visibly out lesbian friends:

> Well, all cover get blown. If it was even remotely
> possible dat I wasn't noticeable before, now Janet and
> I were over-exposed. […] We say goodbye, not soon
> enough, and as we were leaving I turn to acknowledge
> Giraffebai, but instead a any recognition of our
> buddiness against de fresh brothers, I get a face dat
> look like it was in de presence of a very foul smell.
> (Mootoo, 1993, 57)

The narrator's sexuality excludes her from this Indian female
bonding against the sexism of the men in the community. Despite
their mutual desire for social change along gendered lines, the
emotion of disgust expressed through the powerful language of "a
very foul smell" renders the narrator's body dirty and, thus, places
her even further on the outside of this Indian communal space. That
is, she is excluded on the grounds of not being of the right sexuality
and of not being Indian enough. In this sense, this postcolonial
community is not an ideal mosaic striving for more just ways of
belonging, in spite of there being a shared desire to end oppression.
Through the external, boundaries are drawn up. The body is
understood as a referent through which boundaries of belonging
should be formed. Reading is thus represented as a social and
political act. The body is read by those in this short story as the site
of identity, whereas what is revealed to the reader is that the body
can never be read in any straightforward way. The body both reveals
and hides its gender, sexual and ethnic histories. Jay Prosser states:

> What's painful about photography and gender
> reassignment surgery both is that, in spite of how close
> they are to reproducing the referent, to making it
> present (and I emphasize they are our best means of
> approximation), they ultimately fail. Reading
> transsexuality and photography as referential […], I
> missed this loss. Now in an unbidden encounter I turn
> to see the lost referent as real. (Prosser, 2005, 171-2)

Although Prosser is focusing specifically on transsexuality and
photography, I would extend his argument and suggest that
embodied experiences defy the idea of the body as playful signifier
*and* as straightforward referent. In this sense, the body cannot be the
sole locus through which community boundaries are drawn or
through which change is reached towards; rather there needs to be a

focus on the injustices committed to the body in drawing boundaries of belonging through imagined identitarian histories. To believe that communities are formed through what we have in common in identity terms suggests, here, that the future is a series of fractured fighting communities where change becomes difficult to achieve. In this sense, these short stories seem to be reaching towards an idea that oppression could be lessened if we engage not so much with what we are but more with what it is we want to change. In other words, if we focus on the social injustices and violences that we want to prevent from reoccurring then perhaps we could begin to imagine and construct less violent communities.

In the second part of this article I focus on the possibility of working towards a non-violent community. More specifically, this section focuses on the safe space that emerges within Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*. It is through this sense of community, or what I have chosen to call a queer postcolonial space, that we begin to see one possible way not only of existing ethically but also reading both texts and bodies ethically. Reading the bodies and spaces in *Cereus Blooms at Night* is extremely difficult. That is, these factors remain unknown, insofar as we can never definitively know, one, where the narrative takes place and, two, the exact bodily categories of the subject positions. I would suggest in this space of unknowability there emerges one way of reflecting on the possibility of encountering a text ethically, of producing less violent, exclusionary readings. I want to state clearly that I am not suggesting the border or the third space is *the* preferable space of existence or that these "in-between" notions are exemplary ways in which we can undermine or transgress colonial and familial oppression. On the contrary, what I want to keep in mind, like the subject positions in the novel, is that living in relation to categories is difficult, pleasurable, frightening, violent and, importantly, worthwhile. I believe that working with what is available to us in language indicates where the most urgent shifts need to take place in order to bring about more "livable" spaces. In this sense, I see it as essential to stay with the categories available to us not because I believe they must stay or are static. But rather I see it as imperative to explore whether taxonomical injustices and violences, which take place both in the novel and beyond, can be rendered more politically and socially just and less epistemologically and physically violent.

The novel takes place in the imaginary town of Paradise on the fictive island of Lantanacamara. The colonial missionaries are from the fictive country of the Shivering Northern Wetlands. Although these spaces are suggestive of the Caribbean and England respectively they still allude to a space beyond real geopolitical history. In contrast, the novel employs the realist name of Canada to describe the space to which both Mala's sister and mother escape. Evidently, the readings available of this novel that confirm the island as the Caribbean, the colonial missionaries' home as England and the novel as taking place in an "in-between" space are vital to our unravelling of colonial history and violence. However, within the novel there is a strong concern with and an overarching theme of unknowability. In staying with this unknowability I want to suggest that *Cereus Blooms at Night* attempts to bring about a critical reflection on the reading process itself. This, I would suggest, is where we could locate some of the elements that point towards encountering a text ethically. The amusing name of the Shivering Northern Wetlands connotes not only England but also a certain dullness and unsightliness about the Wetlanders' home and a feebleness and ineptness of character, which is appropriate to their behaviour on the island. Moreover, the use of the place name Paradise suggests a reworking of both the traditional originary myth and the European colonisers' projected image of tropical islands as utopic spaces to be appropriated. In this sense, the novel itself works towards ethical practices of storytelling. Its use of fictive place names attempts to undo the symbolic (gendered) violence constantly reiterated through stories such as that of *Adam and Eve*. What we see instead is Paradise as a space fraught with sexual, physical, taxonomical and colonial violence. It is through this violence that Paradise is transformed into a queer postcolonial space for four of the subject positions, Tyler, Mala, Otoh and Ambrose, in the novel.

In line with the unknowability of space is our confusion, and that of many critics, on the gender and sexual categories we might use for the narrator, Tyler, and his lover, Otoh. Tyler describes in length his desire for men, or what we may want to call his attraction to masculinity. Many have therefore described him as homosexual or gay. Otoh, on the other hand, appears initially to cause slightly more confusion. Otoh who was born female has lived his whole life as a man. He is a man and of this, in the novel, there is no doubt:

> So flawless was the transformation that even the nurse
> and doctor who attended the birth, on seeing him later,
> marvelled at their carelessness in having declared him
> a girl. (Mootoo, 1998, 118)

He is completely accepted by all in this very small community as a man and most critics respect this by using the pronoun 'he'. When Otoh and Tyler eventually become lovers, Tyler finds the courage to finally come out as a woman and express, what Gayatri Gopinath calls, his "queer femininity" (Gopinath, 2005, 185). Tyler describes this as a "matter of life and death" (Mootoo, 1998, 267). It becomes almost impossible, as many critics have found, to say exactly whether Tyler is gay, is a woman, whether this affair changes his sexual identity and whether we can now, in light of this affair, know for certain either his gender identity or his sexual orientation. Indeed, Tyler himself states: "this was the first experience I had that actually occurred outside the realm of my fertile imagination…" (Mootoo, 1998, 113). Critics take various approaches to solving this dilemma. Coral Ann Howells, for example, begins her article by identifying Tyler as a gay male (Howells, 2003, 149), describing him as telling "the story of another marginalized group - homosexuals [-] on this Caribbean island" (Howells, 2003, 160). However, she concludes her article by describing Otoh and Tyler's relationship as a "transgendered love affair" (Howells, 2003, 160). Slipping between male homosexuality and transgenderism might appear here as a means of distinguishing Tyler's past encounters from his current one with Otoh. However, such category slippages avoid the very tensions, differences and interconnections that such identities and desires express in this novel and beyond. Transgender, in this example, becomes an umbrella term for our unknowingness and does not delve into the complexity of transgender and gay or homosexual embodiment and desire. Furthermore, many critics suggest that Tyler and Otoh represent the fluidity of sexuality and gender and, thus, a challenge to binary colonial and sexual categories. Whilst I agree that this is one possible reading, I want to suggest that *Cereus Blooms at Night* attempts to stay with the pain *and* the pleasure brought about by living in relation to and through taxonomies. This, I would argue, is an attempt to transform these sometimes constraining, "unlivable" taxonomies into less violent embodied experiences. This critical distance raises more questions than answers: Why is Tyler and Otoh's relationship not simply straight?

Can only a female-born woman and a male-born man have a straight relationship? If Tyler is gay and Otoh a man, as many critics establish early on, why is their relationship not homosexual or gay? Why has gender transitioning become the distinguishing feature of their sexual relationship and not sexuality? Or from a different angle, why is Tyler, who expresses his femininity from the outset of the novel, not categorised as transgender? Is it that categorising their sexual relationship is too difficult and that to render the text readable we must focus on gender? Or is it that categorising their sexuality would complicate the categories of heterosexuality and woman and man so much that we need to reach to loose, undefined terms? Is it too difficult for us, as readers, to admit there is something queer, something straight and something beyond what we *know*?

It is not that I see sexuality as more important than gender or vice versa but rather I want to ask: *Why should reading be easy*? Is it too difficult for us to admit that sometimes we do not know how to define the bodies we read or the spaces in which they exist? And if so, what does *not knowing* mean in this context? In asking these questions I am not suggesting we ignore all possible answers. What I do want to stress is that these questions, emerging from the novel, bring about a self-reflexive relationship between the reader and the text. This critical space demands of readers that they reflect on the importance of categorisation and the political implications of each act of taxonomical imposition. *Cereus Blooms at Night* demands a reflection on our own investments in the reading process and on their relation to the violence brought about through exclusionary readings of bodies, as seen in "Out on Main Street". Whilst there may be no definitive answers to these questions, what comes about is a reflection on our own personal and political investments. What I want to suggest is that *this space of not knowing* is a means to creating and imagining non-violent ways of belonging. In other words, in asking these questions I am suggesting that in the space of *not knowing* we can see that what we do not yet *know* already exists. This *not knowing* is central to the ethics of a queer postcolonial space.

This space emerges out of four of the subject positions' needs within the novel to create a safe space of belonging in the aftermath of colonial, familial and taxonomical violence. Briefly I want to describe how this space comes to be imagined in the novel and then conclude by highlighting some of the practices, I have chosen to call

ethical, at the core of this community. This space emerges through the narration, by Tyler, of Mala's life story. Tyler, the carer of the now old Mala, learns of the sexual, familial and physical abuse to which she has been subject. The narrative is neither straightforward nor chronological. Rather we are presented with intermingled glimpses of past and present events that move in and out of fairy tale like and realist narratives. By narrating Mala's distressing story of colonial and familial violence, interspersed with his own experiences of violence, Tyler articulates their need to reach out towards a viable form of existence. In other words, through the act of narration, one that is always incomplete, they begin to *imagine* a safe space where they can exist beyond the violence they have experienced. After a series of horrific events, Otoh's father, Ambrose, is able to begin visiting his first love, Mala, at the nursing home where she now lives. Mala and Ambrose's intimate relationship was ended violently by her father. Ambrose has not been able to forgive himself for wondering whether Mala was "agreeable to intimacies with her father" (Mootoo, 1998, 246) and for fleeing the scene of violence where Mala was brutally raped for the last time by her father before she murdered him. As a result, Ambrose slept his adult life away. Through Mala's narrative these four subject positions begin to forge a communal space where they can exist safely, *beside* their experiences of violence. In this sense it is not so much what they have in common in identity terms that brings them together but rather a sense of social transformation that they wish to see take place. Tyler describes this commonality as a "shared common reception from the world" (Mootoo, 1998, 21) and a "shared queerness" (Mootoo, 1998, 52). These four subject positions want to see an end to all forms of violence, symbolic and material. In this sense, their community does not exist as a definitive entity with definitive features; it is constantly changing through the stories they each have to tell. It continues to transform itself. Their community is based on a self-reflexivity that allows them to avoid the perpetuation of violence. They do not have a particular utopian image in mind and therefore they keep working in the present at the avoidance of the reiteration of violence. It is in this sense that they are responsible. They are responsible to the particular, to each other, responding to the others' needs and yet their sense of responsibility extends beyond the individual towards a general sense of how a community could exist safely. Importantly, each of these four subject positions sees hope in the potential for social transformation, as symbolised

through the long-awaited blossoming of the cereus plant which emerges out of an insignificant and "ugly" nothingness (Mootoo, 1998, 78).[2] It is these elements, self-reflexive responsibility and hope, in this novel, that are essential to the formation of a queer postcolonial space, a non-violent space of belonging. Self-reflexive responsibility that responds to the particular but also recognises the general and infinite nature of responsibility, as well as hope are also, I would argue, central to an ethics of reading both bodies and texts.

**Endnotes**

1. I agree with the many critics, such as Gayatri Gopinath, who describe Mootoo's oeuvre as part of South Asian diasporic cultural production. However, my choice of the term "Indian" here attempts to stay with the author's choice of terminology and, thereby, reflect the issues and problematics of this short story.

2. The novel ends with Tyler hoping that Mala's sister, Asha, will soon be in touch and he states this hope in the following way: "You are, to her, the promise of a cereus-scented breeze on a Paradise night" (Mootoo, 1998, 270). Hope and the cereus plant are clearly interconnected here.

**Works cited**

Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: The Embodied Other in Postcoloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000.

----------. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

Alexander, Jacqui. "Redrafting Morality: The Postcolonial State and the Sexual Offences Bill of Trinidad and Tobago". In Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (eds.). *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 133–52.

----------. "Not Just (Any) *Body* Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad, Tobago and the Bahamas". *Feminist Review* 48 (1994): 5–23.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Books, 1983.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.

----------. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004.

----------. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Gopinath, Gayatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

Howells, Coral Ann. *Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction: Refiguring Identities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Mootoo, Shani. *Out on Main Street*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993.

----------. *Cereus Blooms at Night*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1998.

Phillips Casteel, Sara. "New World Pastoral: The Caribbean Garden and Emplacement in Gisèle Pineau and Shani Mootoo". *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 5.1 (2003): 12–28.

Prosser, Jay. "Skin memories". In Sara Ahmed & Jackie Stacey (eds.). *Thinking Through the Skin*. London: Routledge, 2001, 52–68.

----------. *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Smyth, Heather. "Sexual Citizenship and Caribbean-Canadian Fiction: Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*". *ARIEL* 30.2 (April 1999): 141–60.

Stoler, Ann Laura. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

----------. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

**Emma E Smith**
**University of Leeds, UK**

# "Can you listen before you hear?": Responsible Reading and the Politics of Second-Person Narration in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*

### Abstract

*Contesting existing paradigms of reading which conceive reader-text relations in terms of friendship, Doris Sommer's study of "ethnically marked" writing warns about "the slap of refused intimacy from uncooperative books" which detains readers "at the boundary between contact and conquest". Reading the workings of second-person narration in Hiromi Goto's novel* Chorus of Mushrooms *(1994), this paper proposes that such a slap is never more sharply felt than when addressed directly at* you. *Framed as a story told by the narrator, Murasaki, to her lover-narratee,* Chorus of Mushrooms *places the play of reader-text relations at the forefront of what Goto calls its "Colour Full" textual politics. The use of the second person pulls the reader across the intra-/extratextual divide into the intimacy of identification with the "you". But as the lover-narratee is taught to "listen before you hear" – that is, to respect the cultural specificity of Murasaki's anti-mimetic, non-linear tale – the reader too is being educated in responsible reading, and this entails a shift from the position of friend to that of stranger, or even intruder, in the text. What Goto achieves through the "you" address is a powerful push and pull of narrative, which, by constantly unsettling the (white, non-Japanese-speaking) reader's relation to the text, demands a respectful reading process that is open-minded, relational and situated.*

### Résumé

*Dans son étude des stratégies de résistance textuelles en évidence dans la littérature « marquée sur le plan éthnique », Doris Sommer conteste les paradigmes de lecture qui conçoivent la relation texte–lecteur/trice comme une amitié ; elle nous avertit de « la gifle*

*d'intimité refusée donnée par des livres peu coopératifs », ce qui retient le/la lecteur/trice « à la frontière entre le contact et la conquête ». En étudiant le fonctionnement de la narration à la deuxième personne dans le roman* Chorus of Mushrooms *de Hiromi Goto (1994), cet article propose qu'une telle gifle n'est jamais aussi fortement ressentie que lorsqu'elle est adressée directement au toi. Présenté comme un récit raconté par la narratrice, Murasaki, à son amant-narrataire,* Chorus of Mushrooms *met le jeu de relations texte–lecteur/trice au premier plan d'une politique textuelle que Goto désigne comme « Colour Full » [pleine de couleur/colorée]. L'emploi de la deuxième personne attire le/la lecteur/trice, à travers la division intra-/extratextuelle, vers l'intimité d'identification avec le « tu ». Et, à mesure que Murasaki apprend à son amant-narrataire l'art « d'écouter avant d'entendre » – c'est à dire, de respecter la spécificité culturelle de son récit non-linéaire et anti-mimétique – le/la lecteur/trice, lui/elle aussi, apprend que la lecture doit être une pratique reponsable et éthique. Ceci entraîne un changement de position : au lieu d'ami(e), le/la lecteur/trice devient étranger(e), même intrus(e), dans le texte. Par le biais de l'adresse à la deuxième personne, Goto met en effet en place un jeu de narration efficace, ce qui, en poussant et en tirant, perturbe constamment la relation entre le/la lecteur/trice (blanc(he), anglophone) et le texte, et exige ainsi des modes de lecture relationnels, ouverts, et respectueux.*

In some of the most influential theories of reading from the 1970s and '80s – notably Wayne Booth's work on ethics in fiction, and Barthes' notion of the pleasure of the text – the relation between reader and text has been modelled on a friendship, or even an "erotic" exchange. But to approach a text as friend or lover can be to presume an unproblematically intimate engagement, which risks forcing connections across the boundaries of difference; glossing over those moments where the text may in fact seem more like stranger than friend.

In her study of so-called "minority" writing from the Americas, *Proceed With Caution*, Doris Sommer issues the following warning against appropriation:

> Be careful of some books. They can sting readers who
> feel entitled to know everything as they approach a
> text, practically any text, with the conspiratorial

intimacy of a potential partner. Readers bent on understanding may neglect another kind of engagement, one that would make respect a reading requirement. (Sommer, 1999, ix)

In such books, Sommer identifies a range of expressly *un*friendly devices, which she calls "stop signs": those secrets, gaps or untranslated words which interrupt the reading experience and ask the reader, particularly one who occupies a position of relative social privilege, to interrogate the ethical terms of her/his presupposed "friendship" with the text. Where literary criticism has traditionally sought to make those rewarding leaps in understanding which difficult or different texts often challenge us with, respectful reading is a response to the many texts whose gaps are deliberately too wide to leap. It involves not a series of negotiations to bridge distances, but a cautious operation that recognizes how distance, and the never-fully-knowing it entails, can itself play a strategic and constitutive role in how we read textual "stop signs". This is not to replace intimacy with a return to an earlier notion of "objective" critical distance; instead, reading remains an engaged and participatory process, but one now centred on respect.

Though working in a very different context to Doris Sommer, Isobel Armstrong's critique of the friendship model in *The Radical Aesthetic* is also important for revised ethical reading practices. Armstrong observes that feeling, or affect, has traditionally been considered "feminine" and therefore inappropriate for so-called "masculine" intellectual labour. She argues that, in fact, far from evoking the reader's sense of intimacy with a text, their presumed "friendship" is often only a screen disguising a readerly desire for rational, intellectual mastery over it: "the text is seen as *other*: it is object to a Kantian subject who stands […] in a position of power. This is distance reading, not close reading" (Armstrong, 2000, 87). For reading to become closer requires that we radically "rethink the power of affect, feeling and emotion in a *cognitive* space":

> A more expanded notion of what thinking is would enable one to accept that a "narcissistic" moment of identification may be an essential response to texts and a prerequisite of critical reading. To belong to the structure of another experience, stronger than seduction, more like paranoia, may be an essential

> *phase* in the reading process, because it escapes from
> the master/slave model of reading which is the
> dominant model in our culture. (Armstrong, 2000,
> 102)

By allowing ourselves this moment, however brief, of closeness to a
text, we pull away from a relationship of mastery. But moving
towards responsible reading is also about negotiating ethical modes
of engagement which do not unproblematically presume common
ground. In getting "close" to a text, we should, as Sommer warns,
"proceed with caution"; and this involves a situated politics of
reading which interrogates the often unequal relations of power and
privilege that mediate between reader and text or "implied" writer.

Hiromi Goto articulates precisely what this politics of reading entails
in her notion of "colour full" writing – writing which, she says,
"demands that we hold ourselves accountable about how we choose
to see" (Goto, 1998, 268). "When I write from a specific cultural
background," she goes on to explain, "I write from a specific site.
The reader must contextualize her own location in relation to and in
tandem with this site". Ostensibly, as she observes in her essay
"Translating the Self", "it can be said that I write about Japanese
Canadian issues with a racial and feminist slant" (Goto, 1996, 112).
But, as Goto recognizes, not only does such a statement risk
"othering" her work by "[perpetuating] non-Caucasian cultural
difference", it also takes a reductive approach to self-location by
privileging the axes of gendered and racial identity. It is vital to
recognize that situated reading should not involve locating the self
within fixed, exclusionary or essentializing categories; rather, it must
proceed from a conception of "the complicated knowledges of
nuanced identities, the micro-subjectivities that cannot be
essentialized or overgeneralized" (Kaplan, 1994, 150). But a tension
arises here between the need to understand intersubjective relations
in fluid and plural ways, which do not generalize along the lines of
difference, and the daily reality for Goto as "a woman of colour, a
feminist, an (in)visibly visible immigrant in a colonized country"
(Goto, 1996, 111). And as a Japanese Canadian writer, writing her
first and decidedly "colour full" novel, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the
context of literary production brings another set of material power
relations into play: "I wanted to highlight that difference exists, all
cannot be understood […]. This is based on my assumption that most
of my readers are English-speaking and do not understand Japanese.

This is the audience the book is mainly speaking to, my assumptions while translating my self" (Goto, 1996, 112). That is to say, *Chorus* performs deliberate and specific tensions in its racial and gender politics. Consequently, while my "site" as (critical) reader, like Goto's as writer, is in practice far more complex than this, my engagement with her novel is most overtly problematized along racial, geographical and linguistic axes, where I am located as white, British, non-diasporic, non-Japanese-speaking. Far from presuming an easy friendship, my reading will, as it must, track the dynamics of where and how such tensions arise. Yet, what is fascinating about this novel is that while its untranslated sentences and other such "stop signs" seem determinedly alienating to its white anglophone audience, Goto resists the fixity of cultural difference by also offering moments of intimacy which invite me in.

Mark Libin has already faced this question of his own positioning as white male critic in relation to Goto's fiction, exploring how the narration both "befriends" and excludes him. He writes:

> Goto's writing forces me, the white reader, to take a risk, to attempt an impossible proximity, to jar against the boundary – between whiteness and the racialized, between inside and outside, between pleasure and discomfort, between self and Other – always taking into account the "puerile desire" inherent in my attempt. (Libin, 2001, 117)

But whereas Libin concentrates mainly on the thematic ways in which *Chorus of Mushrooms* and its narrator are "racialized", my reading of the novel, as well as focusing on more than just racial positioning, explores the role of *formal* devices in the shaping of narrative as an ethical exchange. As Steve McCullough has observed, "Ideas of textual responsiveness and readerly answerability […] find narrative parallels in the diegetic construction of *Chorus* itself, which presents a personal encounter demanding response as essential to the production of textual meaning" (McCullough, 2003, 156). And I would argue that the strategy through which the novel most explicitly and effectively plays out its dynamic of invitation and alienation – its push and pull of narrative – is second-person narration: the narrative "you".

Though it resists any simple linear "summary", the story of *Chorus of Mushrooms* involves Muriel/Murasaki Tonkatsu,[1] a Japanese

Canadian woman who has grown up on an Albertan mushroom farm with immigrant parents desperate to assimilate, and an Obāchan, Naoe, determined to hold on to her Japanese heritage and pass it down to her granddaughter. Only when Naoe slips away for a life on the road with her newfound cowboy-lover, do Murasaki and her parents finally begin to explore their Japanese heritage. Structurally hybrid – interweaving multiple forms and voices; mixing revisionary versions of Japanese legends with past, present and temporally impossible stories – *Chorus* is a novel about the many different forms which diasporic "Japanese Canadian" identity can take, and, relatedly, about the material importance of storytelling itself. Opening with a story being told in the intimate space of a bed, *Chorus of Mushrooms* goes on to place the act of storytelling at the heart of its major textual relationships, in which the importance of the listener is continually emphasized:

> Murasaki: Obāchan, this story. Is this a story you heard when you were little?
>
> Naoe: Child, this is not the story I learned, but it's the story I tell. It is the nature of words to change with the telling. They are changing in your mind even as I speak. (Goto, 1997, 32)

Even here *Chorus* seems to project out towards the real reader an active role in the narrative process, a role which carries considerable responsibility. But what McCullough calls our "readerly answerability" is most overtly signalled by the fact that, while most of the novel is narrated by grandmother and granddaughter, the whole is framed as a story being told in the present by Murasaki to her lover, addressed as "you". In foregrounding this narratee and repeatedly insisting upon the importance of being able to "listen before you hear", the novel's narrative and pronominal structures are infused with a specific ethics of reading. With her "colour full" writing, Goto challenges her readers to read with integrity and in context, both hers and our own. My reading of *Chorus* will be attentive to this, and to Doris Sommer's related warning about the limited access which some "ethnically marked" texts offer: "the slap of refused intimacy from uncooperative books" which detains readers "at the boundary between contact and conquest" (Sommer, 1999, ix). For when is a slap more sharply felt than if addressed directly at *you*?

Proceeding from an understanding of the second person as the pronoun of relationship,[2] whose power "is based on recognizing the personhood of the other and hence the possibility for interaction" (Kacandes, 1994, 330), my analysis considers how the "you" form enacts an intersubjective relation between self and other which complicates reductive binaries of opposition and difference. As the strategy which most overtly involves active readerly participation in the textual exchange, by inviting the reader to read her/himself into the position of the narratee called "you", the second-person form demands a readerly practice which is more engaged, potentially more intimate, than other modes. It reorients processes of writing and reading around textual and extratextual relationships; in other words, it invokes the kind of *closer* close reading that Isobel Armstrong has argued for. Writing "you", then, begins to articulate in narrative form Lorraine Code's theory of "second personhood", which replaces the individualistic, Kantian concept of "autonomous man" with a model that conceives subjectivity as relational and socially produced.[3] She writes:

> "Second persons" engage with one another and care about the quality of that engagement – whether in fondness or in fury. […] Imposing meaning on someone else's existence from a position removed from it, or ignorant of and indifferent to its specificities, is at the furthest remove from second-person knowing. (Code, 1995, 125–6)

Thinking about the synchronous relationship between this philosophical theory of the second person and its narratological counterpart is meaningful not only for an understanding of the dialogic dynamics with which many contemporary women's narratives disrupt the monologic author/ity of traditional modes of discourse, but also because it gestures towards a respectful mode of reading in which we do "care about the quality of that engagement".

Monika Fludernik, one of the most prominent theorists of second-person narration, explains its function in these terms:

> Whereas the typical story-telling mode allows the reader to sit back and enjoy a narrative of another's tribulations, hence instituting a basic existential and differential gap between the story and its reception, second-person texts (even if only initially) breach this

> convention of distance, seemingly involving the real
> reader within the textual world. (Fludernik, 1994, 458)

But in that it relies upon the reader identifying, at least momentarily, with the "you" the narrator is speaking to, the functioning of the second person poses similar ethical difficulties to those provoked by the notion of the text as friend. We must ask: on what terms can we read ourselves in, and where might we find ourselves alienated? Because, although it invites us to identify, the "you" can just as easily be exclusionary, by shifting to refer to a specific character/narratee with whom we can no longer assume identity. By rejecting easy identification, by deferring and unsettling the reader's relation to the text, the "you" address can act as one of Doris Sommer's "stop signs", a "colour full" strategy enabling "(ambiguously) non-hegemonic" (DuPlessis, 1985, 149) writers to demand that readers approach their texts with careful self-awareness – to educate us, that is, in responsible reading.

There is of course a danger inherent in the assertion that reading is always or only a question of identification, that our enjoyment and understanding of a text is contingent upon our being able to identify with writer/narrator/character along a gendered/racial/cultural or any other axis of identity. Besides the fact that it is impossible to fix oneself within the bounds of any set of identity categories (identity being always more nuanced, more plural and processual, than this allows), this is, as Rita Felski warns, "to shrink the many functions and facets of reading down to the single fact of self-recognition" (Felski, 2003, 42). That said, where the second-person pronoun appears, it is *strategically designed* to draw the reader into identification with an addressee, with the result that the relative subject positioning of the character-narratee(s) and the real reader is foregrounded and becomes an important factor in understanding textual politics. James Phelan concludes:

> The greater the characterization of the "you," the more
> like a standard protagonist the "you" becomes, and,
> consequently, the more actual readers can employ their
> standard strategies for reading narrative. However,
> […] most writers who employ [second-person
> narration] take advantage of the opportunity to move
> readers between the positions of observer and
> addressee and, indeed, to blur the boundaries between

these positions. In short, it is not easy to say who you
are. (Phelan, 1994, 350)

While I entirely agree with Phelan's foregrounding of the reader's
role in most second-person texts, I would argue that even where
there is no such "blurring", where the "you" *is* clearly characterized,
the pronoun still carries an inherent "appellative force" (Kacandes)
that resists, or at the very least complicates, so-called "standard"
reading strategies. I would suggest that Isobel Armstrong's
"'narcissistic' moment of identification" always, though to varying
degrees, occurs at the point of reception, and that this is why
narrative in the second person is such an effective means of drawing
attention to reading as an ethical encounter. Affection, desire, guilt,
anger, loss can all motivate the use of the second person because, as
the pronoun of relationship, it creates tension between narrative
selves, and casts the reader into a role where to remain neatly outside
the text, relieved of the ethical negotiations it asks of "you",
becomes impossible. In his reading of Keri Hulme's *The Bone
People*, Philip Armstrong asks: "How can narratives of the
postcolonial be read in a way that does not partake of the sacrificial
and the carnivorous, and therefore of the colonizing; in a way that
shows 'respect for the other' at the very moment of identification?"
(Armstrong, 2001, 23) Hulme's novel, he argues, responds by
"[imposing] upon the reader an obligation to avoid easy or too-
familiar moments of identification and incorporation; and to look
instead for the indigestible kernel within the corpus of the text, for
those moments which prove hardest for a reader to swallow". And,
although its "stop signs" work very differently, Hiromi Goto's novel
enacts just such a reading experience: through the push and pull of
identification effected by the shifting reference of the "you", *Chorus
of Mushrooms* refuses easy familiarity across the borders of
difference, and brings respectful reading into play.

The way in which reader-narratee identification proceeds in *Chorus*
is a notable departure from what Monika Fludernik describes as the
usual way in which second-person texts work (Fludernik, 1994, 453).
Usually narration begins with a generalized "you" – that is, "a 'you'
with which the reader in the role of '(any)one' can identify" – but
soon shifts to refer to a specific narratee, thus distancing the reader.
Particularly interesting, though, are the exceptions to this rule: "texts
in which the generalized reading ('you' equals 'one') […] persists
despite the narrowing of reference, and it does so because in these

texts the desired effect is precisely to make the reader feel personally responsible, personally caught in the discourse and exposed to its political thrust". It is this sense of personal responsibility, of reading as ethical encounter, that Goto achieves in her use of the second-person form.[4] In the opening sentences of *Chorus*, which begin the "frame"[5] narrative in which Murasaki speaks to her lover, Goto's text departs from the usual "narrowing" pattern, beginning:

> We lie in bed, listen to the click of blinds, watch a thin thread of dusty cobweb weave back and forth […]. The blankets and sheet are a heap at the foot of the bed, and we are warm only where skin is touching skin. My shoulder, my arm, the swell of my hip. The curve of my thigh. Lean lightly into you. (Goto, 1997, 1)

As Mark Libin observes, "the ambiguity of the pronoun ['we'] acts as a lover's tease, thus decentring the reader in a manner that Barthes would define as 'blissful,' evocative of *jouissance*. The discrepancy between erotic invitation and caution against appropriation presents an encoded and performed tension" (Libin, 2001, 101). Indeed, apart from this first instant of recognition suggested by the first person plural, Goto locates the narratee and narrator in bed (where the reader is not), immediately establishing an intimate scene of "skin touching skin" which determinedly distances the reader. Intimacy or friendship with the text is here expressly denied.

It is when the "you" first speaks, asking "will you tell me a story?", that its reference widens back out to invite readerly identification, and this occurs because the lover's request is the same one every reader implicitly makes upon opening a novel. Once this line between narratee and reader has been blurred, the following negotiations between teller and listener acquire another dimension; they project out beyond the bounds of the text so as to establish the parameters of the responsible reading it requires of us:

> "Will you tell me a story about your Obāchan?"
> "Yes," I close my eyes and breathe deeply. Slowly.
> "Will you tell me a true story?" you ask, with unconscious longing.
> "A lot of people ask that. Have you ever noticed? […] It's like people want to hear a story, and then,

after they're done with it, they can stick the story back
to where it came from. You know?"

"Not really," you say, and slide a little lower, so
that your head is nestled beneath my chin. Your face in
my neck. "But will you still tell me?"

"Sure, but bear with my language, won't you? My
Japanese isn't as good as my English, and you might
not get everything I say. But that doesn't mean the
story's not there to understand. Wakatte kureru
kashira? Can you listen before you hear?"

"Trust me," you say.

I pause. Take a deep breath, then spiral into sound.

"Here's a true story."

***Mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi…*** (Goto, 1997, 1–2;
emphasis in the original)

Here begins the education in listening-before-you-hear which we,
along with the lover-narratee, are to receive. But by delaying this
moment when the "you" broadens out to invite the reader in, Goto
has unsettled from the very start any easy identification. Just as the
politics of location require me continually to interrogate my subject
positioning within the complex matrices of identity and privilege, so
Goto's narrative opens with a process of re-reading and rethinking
("I was outside the text, but am now asked to read myself inside")
which will structure the whole reading experience. For example,
within the above passage, the narrator announces she will be
speaking Japanese, thus creating slippage between a non-Japanese-
speaking reader and the narratee, as well as introducing one layer of
translation between the story we are reading and the story as it is
being told (who, we may ask, is translating?). Indeed, throughout the
novel, the "you" established in the "frame" story is at once fixed, in
denoting the lover, and fluid and contingent in terms of readerly
identification; it shifts between the apparently generalized "you",
which projects out to the reader, and very specific accounts of the
"you"-lover with whom the narrator buys a futon, has coffee, visits
her parents. Shifting between invitation and alienation, between
friendship and unfamiliarity, *Chorus*'s push and pull of narrative
echoes the complexity and contingency of transcultural relations.

In fact, the lover-narratee, if read as identical to the lover who
Murasaki describes in one of her embedded stories as a "fresh-off-
the-boat" Japanese man with a talent for flower-arranging (Goto,

1997, 54), occupies a very different subject position to my own as white British female reader, among other things. So how is it that I feel drawn at all, albeit not constantly, into the lover's position, as "you"? Firstly, although the lover is inside the text while I am outside, we are both positioned as listeners to the stories being narrated by Murasaki and Naoe. In this way, the process of sharing stories, telling and listening, is suggested as a potential paradigm for connectivity between individuals. But the deliberate indeterminacy of the "you" also has a considerable impact here. Because as well as crossing the boundary between the character-narratee inside the text and the real reader on the outside, the "you", as opposed to "she" or "he", enables delayed or deferred gender identification and is therefore a provocative means for writers to destabilize readers' heteronormative assumptions.[6] Indeed, until page fifty-four, the lover is confined to the "frame" story, entirely unidentified, but even once Murasaki's lover appears in her "embedded" story, and the narratee-lover breaks in to react – "Hey […] are you talking about me?" (Goto, 1997, 55) – the "frame" sections persist in their ambiguity precisely because of the use of the "you" pronoun. As Guy Beauregard observes, "The lover is unnamed and ungendered, and thus has an extremely flexible and fluid identity, through which Goto can refuse to 'fix' the erotics of story-telling into homo/heterosexual or allo/autoerotic paradigms" (Beauregard, 1995-6, 54). Although I would argue that even in the "frame" the lover's gender seems to lean towards the masculine (possibly suggestive are the lover's rough palms (Goto, 1997, 1) and large boots (27), though perhaps most telling is the fact that Murasaki's conservative mother approves of their relationship, which makes a lesbian reading unlikely (55)); nevertheless, I would not contest that the "you" opens up a certain fluidity of gendered location which any reader is able to read her/himself into.

Importantly, though, as we have seen, the politics of self-location are immeasurably more complex than this: whether and how we might identify depends upon the codes through which we are reading not only the gender and sexuality of the narratee, but also myriad other axes of identity. Given the "colour full" politics of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, it is racial, cultural and linguistic positioning which has a particularly powerful impact on the workings of self-recognition. Since we know from the beginning that the narratee-lover speaks Japanese, and later that he (or possibly she) is familiar with Japanese

cultural forms such as the cooking of *sekihan*, identification for the white non-Japanese-speaking reader is by no means straightforward: I am located in relation to the text as both alien and friend. The indeterminacy at *Chorus*'s core, then, means that Goto's reader is confronted by unsettled relations of centre and margin, self and other. Beneath our possible assumptions about otherness, the ground is continually shifting.

One of the strongest forces that does draw me, as reader, across the extratextual divide into the position of narratee is Murasaki's attempt to educate her lover in the art of listening-before-you-hear. As the novel goes on, her willingness progressively turns into frustration at her lover's insistence on "true" and logical stories:

> "You switch around in time a lot," you say, a bowl of coffee resting in your palms. "I get all mixed up. I don't know in what order things really happened." You lift the coffee to your lips and slurp at hot liquid. Nibble a dry Italian biscuit and look expectantly up at me.
>
> I tip my chai to my lips, and lick sweet aromatic milk that lingers. I want to just ignore you. You with your dry biscuits and expectations. But it would be rude and you have listened with care and intelligence. You have participated in the story. (Goto, 1997, 132)

Although my literary training means that my own reading is not perturbed by "switching around in time" in this way, this exchange nonetheless presences me as "you" because, as a reader educated in the Western tradition, reading along alternative patterns – which means resisting the urge to naturalize, to gloss over the "illogical" – is still necessarily a self-conscious act, carrying the risk of appropriation. Not only is there a tone of aggression towards the narratee here (in the phrase, "You with your dry biscuits and expectations"), which situates me as an intruder in this story, but further distance is established between narrator and narratee/reader by way of the opposition between "our" dry Italian biscuits and coffee and her sweet aromatic milk and chai. Where she is located in the rich and delicious realm of Japanese flavours, we are consuming the dry products of European culture (those "indigestible kernels" Philip Armstrong describes); we are othered again in relation to a

centre-position (claimed, but also frequently *de*-centred), which is distinctly Japanese Canadian.

Towards the end of the novel, however, the subject of the "you" in the "frame" sections changes temporarily, becoming simultaneously generalized and specifically self-referential:

> You decide to leave, go on a journey, and people will say this and that. They want to tag you with something so that questions are neatly answered. A reason for everything around them. She's troubled, she's searching for something. Or she's running away. […] The journey begins inside my head. (Goto, 1997, 192)

Here, the narrator refers to herself first as "you", then "she", before returning to the "I", playing with the potential ambiguity of shifting pronominal relations. The lover-narratee disappears from this and the following italic section (although the closing "frame" section reverts to the intimacy of the second person for the narrator's final "thank you" to her lover/ listener/ reader). But as a reader, the initial "you" means that the above passage is another instance of when I am overtly invited to identify, this time not with the narratee but with the narrator herself, who is asking for empathy, for her story to be read with the "fondness" which second-person relations can enact. No "stop sign" here, this is a move of distinct intersubjective intimacy through which I become self rather than other. (Though this is, of course, only a momentary position subject to change.)

In that it opens up a diegetic space for the responsiveness and answerability that McCullough describes, the second-person mode reconceives storytelling as intersubjective and reader-oriented, as a means by which we "engage with one another and care about the quality of that engagement – whether in fondness or in fury" (Code); it asks, that is, that we read *as* second persons. This is what *Chorus of Mushrooms* gestures towards when Naoe says:

> Murasaki-chan, we have only come part way in the telling and the listening. We must both be able to tell. We must both be able to listen. If the positions become static, there can never be stories. Stories grow out of stories grow out of stories. Listening becomes telling, telling listening. (Goto, 1997, 172)

By drawing us into her text through the prominence of the "you", Goto situates her reader in a position of interpretive power; indeed, "You know you can change the story" are the novel's last words. But with that power (temporary and conditional though it may be) comes the responsibility not to gloss over difference, not to translate what we don't understand, nor simply to forget the stories we have read once we have closed the book. Otherwise, we risk perpetuating what Himani Bannerji has called the "tone of translatedness" (Bannerji, 1995, 165), that is, the process by which diasporic writers find their writing (and their own selves) filtered through a distorting process of cultural translation. Repeatedly, then, Goto's text unsettles easy identification and urges us to "listen before you hear": to respect the cultural specificity of Murasaki's anti-mimetic, non-linear tale. And in this way, just as in the novel there are intimate moments when mothers clean their daughters' ears, I too have had my ears cleaned, intellectually speaking. There is potential danger in the act, but if carried out gently and with respect, we might (though this is by no means guaranteed) come out hearing things and making connections we never could before.

How to interpret without appropriating when reading from a privileged, academic space; how to reconcile the aims of intellectual activity (to engage with and understand texts) with the inevitable failures and gaps in knowledge that Goto's textual "stop signs" force me to acknowledge: these, however, are paradoxes that a situated, respectful politics of reading such as I have tried to negotiate here can only begin to respond to. Reading, particularly critical reading, remains a cautious and difficult operation, run through by conflict between the desire to understand and the necessarily contingent and partial nature of that understanding.

**Endnotes**

1. I refer to Muriel/Murasaki simply as Murasaki from here on as this is the name she claims for herself: "My name is Murasaki. My mother calls me Muriel, but I out-grew that name when I came to realize that I came from a specific cultural background that wasn't Occidental" (Goto, 1997, 189).

2. This well known term comes from Emile Benveniste's work on pronouns in his seminal book, *Problems in General Linguistics* (*Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 1966).

3. Code is drawing upon Annette Baier's *Postures of the Mind* which introduces the term "second persons" to explain how the self's development into an agentive, unique individual can only proceed out of its primary and continuing dependence on others (Code, 1991, 82).

4. Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* is a frequently cited example of the "political thrust" of the generalized "you" address.

5. I place "frame" within inverted commas as a gesture towards the complexity of this novel's structure, which there is not space to explain fully here, but which, put simply, means that the "embedded" sections exceed the boundaries of and blur into these sections which purport to frame them.

6. Perhaps the most notable example of this technique is Jeanette Winterson's novel, *Written on the Body*, which entirely avoids gendering its narrator.

## Works cited

Armstrong, Isobel. *The Radical Aesthetic*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Armstrong, Philip. "Good-Eating: Ethics and Biculturalism in Reading *The Bone People*". *Ariel* 32.2 (April 2001): 7–28.

Bannerji, Himani. "The Sound Barrier: Translating Ourselves in Language and Experience". In *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism and Anti-Racism*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1995, 159–79.

Beauregard, Guy. "Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* and the Politics of Writing Diaspora". *West Coast Line* 29.3 (1995/6): 47–62.

Code, Lorraine. *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

----------. *Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations*. London: Routledge, 1995.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau, and Members of Workshop 9. "For the Etruscans: Sexual Difference and Artistic Production – the Debate over a Female Aesthetic". In Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (eds). *The Future of Difference*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985, 128–56.

Felski, Rita. *Literature after Feminism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Fludernik, Monika. "Second-Person Narrative as a Test Case for Narratology: The Limits of Realism". *Style* 28.3 (Fall 1994): 445–79.

Goto, Hiromi. *Chorus of Mushrooms*. 1994; London: Women's Press, 1997.

----------. "Translating the Self: Moving Between Cultures". *West Coast Line* 30.2 (1996): 111–13.

----------. "Alien Texts, Alien Seductions: The Context of Colour Full Writing". In Christl Verduyn (ed.). *Literary Pluralities*. Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998, 263–9.

Kacandes, Irene. "Narrative Apostrophe: Reading, Rhetoric, Resistance in Michel Butor's *La modification* and Julio Cortazar's 'Graffiti'". *Style* 28.3 (Fall 1994): 329–49.

Kaplan, Caren. "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice". In Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (eds). *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, 137–52.

Libin, Mark. "'Some of my best friends…': Befriending the Racialized Fiction of Hiromi Goto". *Essays on Canadian Writing* 73 (Spring 2001): 93–121.

McCullough, Steve. "'Trust Me': Responding to the Threat of Writing in *Chorus of Mushrooms*". *English Studies in Canada* 29.1/2 (March/June 2003): 149–70.

Phelan, James. "Self-Help for Narratee and Narrative Audience: How 'I' – and 'You'? – Read 'How'". *Style* 28.3 (Fall 1994): 350–65.

Sommer, Doris. *Proceed With Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

## Notes on Contributors

**Elena Clemente** studied English Philology at Universidad Autonoma of Madrid, where she also did her postgraduate studies. In 2005 Elena received a scholarship from the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS) and from the Spanish Association of Canadian Studies (AEEC), which allowed her to carry out research at the University of Toronto. She has just finished her dissertation on Nalo Hopkinson and Margaret Atwood, and intends to include in her thesis the work of Elizabeth Vonarburg.

**Chloé Collin** holds an M.A. in French Administration and European Law from the Université de Nancy 2. She is currently the school manager of a junior high school in the suburbs of Nancy. Chloé spends her free time preparing an M.A. in Canadian Literature and travelling in the Arctic regions. She intends to pursue a doctorate in the field of landscape representation.

**Natalie Diebschlag** holds a Magister Artium degree in English Literature, English Linguistics and History from Aachen University. She got a scholarship by the German Academic Exchange Service for the duration of one academic year at the University of Warwick. Natalie is currently teaching English, French and German as a Foreign Language in Aachen and is about to start her doctoral study on Michael Ondaatje.

**Patrick Farges** was raised in France and Germany. After studying German and Economics in Paris, Berlin, Toronto and Berkeley, he is currently completing his PhD in German Studies (University of Paris 8 / Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales) on the acculturation of German-speaking exiles in Canada after 1933.

**Niina Holm** studies Comparative Literature and Women's Studies in Turku University, Finland. Her article is based on her MA Thesis. In her doctoral thesis she will examine the construction of gender identity in three novels by Margaret Atwood: *Surfacing* (1972), *Cat's Eye* (1988) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000).

**Delphine Jeanroy** is a student of English-speaking literatures and cultures at the University of Nancy 2. Currently, she is finishing her MA in Canadian Studies and simultaneously with that preparing for the Agrégation d'anglais, a high-level competitive exam to become an English teacher. Ultimately, she would like to keep on researching and obtain a doctorate in Canadian Studies.

**Justyna Kucharska** is a PhD student in Cultural Communication at the University of Silesia. She holds MA degrees in Cultural Studies and British and American Culture and Literature from the University of Silesia. She studied as an Erasmus Student at Rovira y Virgili University in Tarragona, Spain (2004). Her research interests include audiovisual communication, film studies and transculturality.

**Fanny Macé** graduated in Postcolonial Studies in 2004 (Sorbonne) and has been teaching English as a foreign language since. Presently, she is preparing for the English CAPES and Agrégation – highly competitive exams in order to teach English in French high schools. Next year, she is going to start a joint PhD in Multicultural Studies at the Sorbonne and the University of Calgary.

**Krzysztof Majer** has an MA from the University of Lodz, Poland (MA dissertation, *The Antagonist in John Barth's "Sot-Weed Factor" and "Giles Goat-Boy"*, 2003). Currently, he is working on his PhD thesis, *Messianic Figures in the Fiction of Mordecai Richler*, and teaching American literature. His interests include North American postmodernism, Jewish literature, myth criticism and hypertext.

**Donna McCormack** is currently undertaking a PhD in the School of English at the University of Leeds. The title of her thesis is *Violence, Sex and Bodies: Towards a Postcolonial Ethics of Reading Embodiment*. She has forthcoming publications in the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* and the *Journal of the History of Sexuality*.

**Cristina Petraş** est Assistante au Département de français de l'Université « Al. I. Cuza » de Iaşi, où elle assure des travaux dirigés de sémantique et de pragmatique. Doctorante de l'Université « Al.I. Cuza » de Iaşi et de l'Université d'Avignon (thèse en co-tutelle). Ses préoccupations portent sur le contact de langues au Canada, plus particulièrement en Nouvelle-Ecosse et les phénomènes pragmatiques engendrés par le contact de langues.

**Alex Ramon** is in the process of completing his PhD thesis on the fiction of Carol Shields at the University of Reading, supervised by Professor Coral Ann Howells. He teaches in the English Department at Reading and is planning to edit a collection of Shields's non-fiction writing.

**Sabine Schlüter** has teaching degrees in English, Danish and French and an M.A. degree in English and Scandinavian Studies from Kiel

University. She has worked and studied in England, France, Denmark and Canada and has written her PhD thesis on the grotesque in the plays by George F. Walker.

**Emma Smith** is a doctoral student at the University of Leeds. Her research explores the relationship between politics and poetics in non-canonical women's writing, focusing on writers from Canada, Britain and the Caribbean diaspora. Her major theoretical interests lie in contemporary narratologies, postmodern feminisms, theories of selfhood, and the critical intersections between them.

**Anna Szczepaniak** is a graduate student at the University of Silesia, Institute of British and American Literature and Culture. Her M.A. thesis is on religion and mythology in feminist dystopias. She is also a student of political science at the University of Silesia and her M.A. thesis will be on Canada–EU relations. In 2004 she obtained a B.A. in English from Świętokrzyska Academy (Poland) with a thesis on using the Internet in teaching English as a foreign language. Anna's academic interests include Canadian history, political biographies, and science fiction.

**Yvonne Völkl** est née en Autriche en 1981 et a étudié le français à l'Université de Graz. Dans le cadre de ses études, elle a participé à plusieurs échanges – à l'Université de Paris III - Sorbonne Nouvelle et à l'Université de Montréal. Désormais, elle collabore au développement du centre d'études canadiennes à l'Université de Graz.

**Jan Wechmann** studied North American studies, modern history and business administration at Freie Universität Berlin, Universität Potsdam and University College London and is about to complete his Master's degree in late 2005. His research interests include the political utilization of sport and the history of sporting exchanges during the Cold War.