Restorying Canada: Multiple Narratives in Progress

Restorying Canadá: múltiplas narrativas em andamento

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Abstract: This article examines, from two different perspectives, the relationship between historical and literary modes of restorying Canada: first exploring the process by which the country has shaped itself historically since 1867 to become one of the world's most successful multicultural societies; and second, examining literary and artistic narratives that have had a wide impact on our understanding of what it means to be Canadian, and added a unique layer to our sense of the country's potential. Basing the analysis on Will Kymlicka's notion of multiculturalism, and on Jane Urquhart's fictional text *A Number of Things: Stories of Canada Told Through Fifty Objects* (2016), as well as on Charlotte's Gray's historical essay *The Promise of Canada. 150 Years – People and Ideas that Have Shaped Our Country* (2016), we argue that the 150th anniversary of the Confederation is an ideal moment to re-examine stories, ideas and notions of identity/diversity, political decisions and transformations that shaped modern Canada. Thus, "restorying Canada" brings about bold challenges to conventions of how we remember, invites critique and inclusive alternative narratives.

Keywords: Canada; Confederation; multiculturalism; diversity; literature; art.

Resumo: Este artigo explora as relações entre representações históricas, literárias e artísticas do Canadá: de um lado, estudamos discursos sobre a evolução histórica do país desde 1867 - o que leva a uma das sociedades multiculturais mais abertas do planeta; de outro lado, analisamos discursos literários e artísticos que tiveram um grande impacto no modo como imaginamoso país e na polivalência das identidades canadenses. Baseando-se na análise da noção de multiculturalismo de Will Kymlicka, e no texto ficcional de Jane Urquhart, *A Number of Things: Stories of Canada Told Through Fifty Objects* (2016), bem como no ensaio histórico de Charlotte Gray, *The Promise of Canada. 150 Years – People and Ideas that Have Shaped Our Country* (2016), demostramos que o 150º aniversário da Confederação é um momento ideal para reexaminar os discursos, as ideias e as noções de identidade e de diversidade, bem como as decisões políticas e as transformações que moldaram o Canadá moderno. Assim, "*restorying* Canadá" traz ousados desafios às convenções de como lembramos, convida à critica e a narrativas inovadoras e inclusivas.

Palavras-chave: Canadá; Confederação; Multiculturalismo; Diversidade; Literatura; Arte.

Canada […] was the land that looked ideal in theory because […]

> it was not hemmed in by the weight of its past, as the Old World could be,
> nor burdened by the promise of an unlimited future,
> as its neighbour in the New World is.
> Pico Iyer, *Imagining Canada: An Outsider's Hope for a Global Future*[4]

Introduction

In progress. That is how Canada can define its trajectory from 1867 until today. Even since before Confederation, Canada has always chosen to avoid intense conflicts by changing slowly. Divergently, the United States opted for revolution in 1776; their rebellion aimed to break ties with Europe, thereby allowing the U. S. to replace England and its colonial empire as the *entrepôt* of the world and the most powerful nation of the 20th century. In the Americas, Canada thus became a model to follow for nations who could not win a war of independence. When seeking independence from Spain, for example, Cuba's thinkers were inspired by the Canadian way and its institutions: in 1869, Francisco Adolfo Sauvalle[5] translated the text dealing with the Confederation of Canada into Spanish. His goal was to show that Canada was slowly progressing towards an autonomy based on a bilingual parliamentary democracy while simultaneously keeping its privileged links with England: 'Podrá emplearse indistintamente el idioma francés o el inglés, en el Parlamento General y en sus procedimientos, así como en la Legislatura Local del Bajo Canadá y en los Tribunales federales y Provinciales del mismo'.

While the United States of America had made a deliberate choice to produce Republicans by pedagogical means previous to 1867, the ideal Canadian citizen had still not been precisely defined. On the Francophone side, the church wanted people whose life was organized around the traditional ultramontane worldview as exposed in numerous *Mandements* by the archbishop of Montreal, Monseigneur Bourget. On the Anglophone side, Canada was mostly seen as being peopled by British subjects; immigrants being allowed to carve out enclaves in cities and in the countryside. In 1936, Lord Tweedsmuir, the Governor General of Canada, acknowledged this view of Canada while speaking to Icelandic immigrants in Gimli, Manitoba. However, at that time he was only thinking in terms of a plural monoculturalism, which stands today as a tentative version for Canadian multiculturalism:

> You have become in the fullest sense good Canadians and have shared in all the enterprises and struggles of this new nation and at the same time I rejoice to think that you have never forgotten the traditions of your homeland. That is the way in which a strong people is made — by accepting willingly the duties and loyalties of your adopted country, but also by bringing your own native traditions as a contribution to the making of Canada (TWEEDSMUIR, 1941, p. 27).

Back in the 1950s and 1960s, Canada was a country "built against any common, geographic, historic, or cultural sense" (TEPPERMAN, 2016, p. 54), as former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau once put it. On the other hand, the land was geographically immense; being the second-largest state by land mass, Canada's population was rather small: less than 18 million in 1960, representing about a tenth of that of the United States at the time. This is also the period when John Diefenbaker famously remarked, "Canada must populate or perish"[6] , during the 1957 Canadian federal election campaign. Diefenbaker made these remarks en route to a surprise electoral victory over Louis St. Laurent's Liberals. Shortly after he took office, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration began to draft a comprehensive policy memorandum on the state of Canadian immigration, which was eventually submitted to Cabinet in 1959. The memorandum suggested that the government take the initiative by removing the stigma of racial discrimination from its immigration policy; by stressing quality migration to meet the growing need for skilled labour and by addressing the sponsorship question to create a more stable immigration system. But in the early 1960s, just when Canada's labour shortage was becoming more acute, Europe largely stopped exporting emigrants as the continent finally rebounded from the damages of World War II. Skilled workers became particularly hard to find. And so in 1962, Canada abandoned ethnicity as a formal basis for evaluating immigrants – becoming the first country in the world to do so. Remember that between 1946 and 1953, 96 percent of immigrants to Canada had come from Europe. Between 1968 and 1988, that proportion dropped to 38 percent. By 1977, those from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa had begun to represent more than half of all newcomers admitted to Canada each year (TEPPERMAN, 2016, p. 57). From then on, generous government support for multiculturalism, and policies that encouraged the

integration of newcomers, began to persuade native-born Canadians that broadening the nation's ethnic composure would make the country *more* Canadian, not less.

In a recent article in *The Walrus*, Jonathan Tepperman highlights the importance of multiculturalism and provides an interesting example showing how this notion has become progressively and inextricably connected with Canadian identity since the 1980s:

> […] when a polling firm asked Canadians in 1985 what made them proudest of their country, multiculturalism came in tenth. By 2006, it had climbed to second place. In a similar survey, Canadians listed multiculturalism ahead of hockey, bilingualism, and the Queen. Polls show that, all told, 85 percent of Canadians now see multiculturalism as important to their national identity (TEPPERMAN, 2016, p. 59-60).

Unequivocally, the meanings of "Canadian" and "national identity" are notions in progress. Before 1867, the European leaders of this land were already hesitating between independence and allegiance to the Crown. In Lower and Upper Canada in 1837-1839, revolts inspired by the Free Mason Republican thinkers of the United States tried to severe all colonial bonds. At the same time, in his *Letters on elementary and practical education* (1841), pedagogical theorist judge Mondelet was taking inspiration from the most famous American educational reformer of the 19th century, Horace Mann of Massachusetts. Mann's influence shaped the education system in the USA, Argentina, and in other countries. Through progressive pedagogy, Mondelet wanted to foster bilingual, republican citizens open to diversity and to the wealth of the continent. Some of his ideas were promoted by Egerton Ryerson in Ontario, but almost none endured in French Canada.

Hence, Canada's hitherto bipolar nature, discounting the presence of indigenous groups, has been characterized by constant reinvention and reform. Canadians have perceived advancement differently than the "Leaders of Progress" symbolized by the Manifest destiny thinkers and politicians in the United States of America, whose mission has been to bring democracy to the world. In the country that we now call Canada, the emphasis on slow evolution and progress in process has led to a society whose identity is defined by basic social rights, free nationalized health care, enlightened multicultural and immigration policies, strict gun control, gay rights, and a Constitution based on a respect for human rights. Furthermore, pluralism has become one of the elements that

helps Canadians feel proud of whom they are, and perhaps more importantly, of whom they are not. That explains why the most patriotic Canadians also tend to be the most pro-immigration – unlike the United States, where the opposite is often true. On January 28, 2017, President Trump enacted a new refugee policy banning Syrians and all travellers from several predominately Muslim nations from entering the United States (FANDOS, 2017, article on line), which lead to criticism and protests around the country and throughout the world. It then led to a judgment ruling that this decision is not conform to the Constitution. Ultimately in Canada, savvy immigration policies have turned what was once a closed, ethnically homogeneous state into a vibrant global powerhouse; one of the world's most open and successful multicultural societies.

Does this imply that "Canadians put their faith in luck and improvisation" (FULFORD, 1982, p. 8)? This could still be argued in 1982. Not any more, states writer Nancy Huston: «Mais je suis persuadée que tout n'est pas relatif – ou du moins seulement relativement relatif» (1999, p. 90)[7]. This "relative relativism" is linked to Canada's position as a well-balanced country avoiding entanglements in the multiple global power struggles, wars and genocides, which leave millions of people dreaming of inventing a new life in a peaceful country. Canada incorporates a respect for tradition, a thirst for innovation and an emphasis on respecting alterity. Pluralism, multiculturalism, and interculturalism in Quebec represent the core of a fluid identity, as Michael Ignatieff underlines: "Pluralism does not mean relativism, it means humility" (IGNATIEFF, 2000, p. 52). Thus, in Canada, planning is strongly encouraged but is combined with an awareness that compromise is necessary since others have other plans, other narratives, other views of themselves and the world. Sharing core democratic values and an appreciation for equality do not imply rejecting differences. On the contrary! This acceptance of diversity is emphasized by Will Kymlicka in *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity.*

Fragments: a multicultural narrative patchwork

Master narratives linked to the Nation-State have long been the basis for arguments excluding people who are different. This is well emphasized by the Quebec writer Louky Bersianik in an avant-garde book entitled *Le pique-nique sur l'Acropole*

(1979). Bersianik's polyphonic narrative is at once an essay, a novel, and a collection of fragments. The work is a systematic intertext, weaving contemporary perspectives on the uneven condition of women compared with men who share the paternalistic views reflected in Plato's master narrative on women. Thus, Bersianik leads us to reflect on the differences and interactions between genre and gender. At the same time, the book criticizes a coherent narrativity – like the one based on Plato's cave allegory – raising the issue of a causal structure which privileges a character who, in the logic of this narrative, is able to defeat what is considered to be evil or inferior.

In fact, causality has for a long time been used to seduce readers into looking for a person or a group to be excluded, according to Patrick Imbert (2016B, p. 43-57). This same causality is likewise linked to the idea that any coherent narrative – as pointed out by René Girard (1987) – aims to control the disruptive influence of Appropriation Mimesis, thereby avoiding nasty fights for power that can often lead to the destruction of society by provoking everyone to compete against everyone. A coherent narrative contributes to the restraint of Appropriation Mimesis, leading people to cooperate and allowing them to determine the fomenter of social disruption. Acknowledging that a particular group or person instigates disruption, and therefore has to be excluded or eliminated, induces the community to reconnect and build a new social homogeneity. This rejection is the reason for Bersianik's criticism of the structured narrative; she deconstructs it by writing a book based on fragments and intermediality (text and images). While she quotes extracts from Plato at the end of *Le pique-nique sur l'Acropole* and thus provides background on the effect of a still relevant master narrative, Bersianik purposefully rejects the idea of building a structured counter-narrative. Such a narrative would only lead to the invention of a new type of exclusionary text, targeting men instead of women. It would simply conflate *genre* (such as that of the novel or the short story) with gender as agent of exclusion. For Bersianik, a fragment is an open text which reminds us of all kinds of exclusions, while simultaneously rejecting the traditional power inherent in causal narratives that separate and create hierarchies among groups and individuals.

In a way, Bersianik's writing symbolically resonates with a multicultural society inclusive of different groups and people. This inclusiveness was the dream of Lester

B. Pearson, the 14th Prime Minister of Canada, who, being horrified by the suffering of soldiers during World War I (Pearson was a helper lifting wounded soldiers in stretchers from the carnage of war), came to facilitate the creation of the United Nations' first peacekeeping force. This kind of chain of events and experiences leading to a positive outcome is highlighted in a recent book by Jane Urquhart: *A Number of Things: Stories of Canada Told Through Fifty Objects* (2016) – a collection of short narratives and fragments that lead us to reflect on what it means to be Canadian today.

In a short, evocative chapter, Urquhart underscores essential elements that make Canadians proud of who they are. Following Tommy Douglas' groundbreaking idea of free Medicare in Saskatchewan (the first in Canada), Lester B. Pearson's government adopted the universal Medicare system, as well as the Canada Pension Plan and the maple leaf flag. In a nutshell, what Urquhart tells us in her fragments is that nation building mixes well with the recognition of social values, and care for the less fortunate, the elderly, and for those with different cultural backgrounds. An efficient social network is meant to sustain ideas and perceptions of a national identity that acknowledges Difference. Why? Because commitment to shared social and economic inclusiveness has the power to accommodate important disparities rooted in divergent experiences, stemming from immigration and also from the narratives of the three main groups who are considered founders of Canada: Indigenous peoples, Francophones and Anglophones.

Does this commitment mean that the experiences of people that come to Canada from all over the world, and have nothing in common, can be shared? Often it does not. However, as the Lester B. Pearson example illustrates, all historical experiences are not nationalistic or ethnically bound. They also involve a common human feeling and empathy for the infinite suffering caused by war and by its narrative justifications. This humanist perspective allows us to understand the huge success of Lucy Maud Montgomery's book *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), the story of an abandoned little girl that, as Urquhart underlines (p. 48), sold over fifty million copies in twenty different languages. By revisiting classical Canadian stories and symbolic objects meaningful to the Canadian common imagination, Jane Urquhart thereby delivers intriguing and innovative narratives of the multi-faceted identity of Canada today.

These narratives and their archival bases can even lead to something unpredictable, unforeseen, unexpected – unpredictability being one of the main cultural traits that runs through the Americas[8]. Jane Urquhart explores "the unexpected" too. She searches the origins of her family in and near Belleville, Ontario, and all over the predominantly Protestant vicinity. Thus, she finds a synagogue and presents us with various Jewish community activities. Suddenly, she concludes: "A few years ago, when my daughter had her DNA tested, she discovered that she is 7 percent Middle Eastern and most probably Jewish" (p. 122). This is in keeping with the name of her grandmother Gertrude Weiss; since facts and narratives are intertwined, and the past always figures in the present. Old narratives resurface through scientific research, stirring our desire to reconnect and live a life grounded on multiple cultural origins, just like George Benjamin, who was of Jewish descent and "a powerful member of the local Orange Lodge in the 1830s". (p. 120). After all, this social network and the commitment to accommodate Difference go hand in hand with a Canada constantly able to reinvent its commitment to diversity and to cultural and social innovations – an important feature of the knowledge-based society. This, briefly, is the message of Jane Urquhart's collection of narratives.

Fragments. Objects. Fifty of them. Multiple stories. All woven into one book. Skates. Baskets. A cherry tree commemorating the Japanese Canadians sent to camps during World War II whose properties were confiscated (p. 90). After the war, these Japanese Canadians had nothing to return to. Some of them rebuilt their lives not far from where they had been interned. No revolt. Even if, in 1981, Joy Kagawa published *Obasan* to disseminate this forgotten and voluntarily concealed history. Remembrance and reconciliation! A situation similar to what Wab Kinew, a First Nations author, develops in his memoir *The Reason You Walk* (2015) when he speaks of the destruction of his world; the world of indigenous children in Reform Schools. Resentment, for sure; but then, healing and peace. Multiculturalism has only been in place since the 1980s in Canada. It was the first country to create a multicultural Constitution. Writing in fragment form to deconstruct master narratives is a literary *genre* tightly linked to the contemporary mobility of our world and our imaginaries. This new type of writing is attuned with multiculturalism and with multiple identities as we experience them through encounters

with people, places, and artistic practices. A progressive approach, it also symbolically promises that the future will be less discriminatory than the recent colonial past.

Through the objects and the fragmented stories that narrate Canadian multiple identities, Jane Urquhart likewise reveals that resistance and revolt have been necessary in order to build a better world. This sentiment is undimmed in the poignant quotation of Louis Riel, the Métis chief hanged for opposing the spoliation of the Métis by the Canadian government: "I am more convinced every day that without a single exception I did right. And I have always believed that, as I have acted honestly, the time will come when the people of Canada will see and acknowledge it" (p. 58). Today, we could say that Riel's political message, linked to a religious messianic one, has finally been heard. On April 14, 2016, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that Ottawa needs to protect the rights of the Métis nation. However, for this to happen, Louis Riel had to take up arms and give his life 150 years ago. "Somebody had to be at the origin of a competing narrative" (p. 115), writes Jane Urquhart with style and grace.

Fragments creatively displace exclusive narratives and recycle their power for positive human purposes. They are an important cultural element in a society where, in 2030, three Canadians in ten could be members of a visible minority group. Moreover, more than 36 percent of the population under the age of 15 will soon be part of a visible minority group. In fact, by 2030, between 25 percent and 28 percent of Canadians could be foreign born. These proportions are even more significant when one considers that "approximately 55 percent of persons living in CMAs in 2031 would be either immigrants or the Canadian born children of immigrants"[9]. Hence, we need to become accustomed to the fact that a country like Canada has many competing stories and narratives that are in a slow but constant process of evolution. This is the case for many groups. Let's just remember that Louis Riel was considered a traitor until the 1960s and that he is now perceived as the founder of the province of Manitoba.

Among the Canadian narratives, multiculturalism thrives, as it is based on constant negotiation and dialogue among individuals and various groups while respecting Human Rights. Today, both in literary narratives and in historical accounts, we recognize that various peoples have contributed to the development of Canada's wealth for thousands of

years. Jane Urquhart underscores that Indigenous peoples already used the tarlike liquid of the region of Athabasca in 1789 when John McMurray was looking for a passage to the West. Furthermore, Mazinaw Rock on the Canadian Shield was a place of spirituality 4000 years ago. It became an inspiration for theosophist painters and members of the Group of Seven in the 20th century, carrying symbols from the poetry of Walt Whitman, the author of *Leaves of Grass*, and his dream of democracy and respect for natural beauty. They were "all drawn together by the undeniable power and mystical spirit of this place" (p. 205), writes Urquhart.

Spirituality, innovation, beauty, social and individual creativity. This is what Jane Urquhart reads in the competing narratives of Canada. These elements also resonate with Tomson Highway's visions of the multi-faceted Canada in *Comparing Mythologies*. Connections with the beautiful and immense land are essential to and representative of the Canadian imaginary both in Highway's and Urquhart's narratives. This open land is equally representative of the Americas, from the North to the South Pole. Obviously, not everything is beautiful, as is emphasized by Yvon Rivard in *Le siècle de Jeanne*. Rivard, a Montreal writer reflecting on the Americas, sees the beauty of the continent and its potential, but also its fulfilled and unfulfilled promises: «Le Nouveau Monde, c'est aussi cela, bien sûr des corps, des vitrines, des marchandises, un monde de nouveaux riches qui ne se souviennent plus de leur pauvreté, un monde de pauvres qui ne rêvent que d'être riches» (2005, p. 291)[10]. In this case, what is left are people trying to cope with their daily lives solely by accumulating material objects which are apparently devoid of symbolic or spiritual meaning. The goal is simply to create a more comfortable environment where spirituality and a sense of self are absent, as are symbols and culture. When this void emerges, the difference between a favella, a poor neighbourhood in the South, and a middle class suburb in Canada lies simply on the level of material well-being. But Jane Urquhart somehow reassures us through literature and art that there is much more to life than comfort and material accumulation.

Urquhart's fragments challenge us to search and invent new meanings in objects and stories. The writer delivers multiple perspectives on objects, experiences and narratives. Take for instance the tiger trophy hanging in the Fairmont Empress Hotel in

Victoria, B.C. Urquhart explores its colonial symbolism of domination over nature and over Indigenous peoples. This same symbol is displaced with humour by Yann Martel in *Life of Pi.* Martel analyzes the cultural relationship between a teenager and a tiger, both lost on a raft in the ocean. The situation leads the teen to consider a present where differences can be accommodated (IMBERT, 2014, p. 571-587). In fact, Urquhart and Martel both lead us to infer that all Canadians bring cultural and economic wealth to an already wealthy country. This is perhaps why a writer like Ying Chen writes that: «Mon véritable pays est là où je deviens ce que je veux êtr» (2004, p. 12). Thus, belonging is a choice, not a fate. Canada and the Americas constantly convey this important message to the world. Through these dynamics, old resentments locking people into terrible wars, and fundamentalist views on life, are likely to be transformed into powerful self-reflexive tools allowing rebirth and creativity within a new context. Fragments, and fragmentary life experiences, creatively displace exclusive narratives and recycle their power for positive human purposes.

Restorying Canada: the 150th anniversary of the Confederation

Successive generations of Canadians have expressed their visions of what it means to be Canadian; mostly in words, but also in images. For Canadian artists, images are complex challenges. During the first century after Confederation, the Canadian imagination was searching for models. How could European-trained artists capture panoramas that contained no man-made features? In its introduction, the catalogue of the 2015 Art Gallery of Ontario exhibition *Picturing the Americas: Landscape Painting from Tierra del Fuego to the Artic* describes artists' goals:

> Created between the early 1800s and the early 1900s, just as nations in the Americas gained and asserted their independence, the paintings represent efforts by explorers and by artists – both European and locally born – to capture and define the essence of a place on canvas, always rooted in the natural beauty of the land (BROWNLEE et. al., 2015, p. 13).

Artists, as well as writers were attempting to create "the essence of a place". But at the time, only Indigenous artists were confident in the deeply rooted traditions of their

diverse cultures, producing extraordinary artifacts that spoke to the land to which they were so tightly connected. But their works were not readily appreciated by newcomers and were valued only as trophies or museum specimens. This appraisal has changed. Opening Canada's Sesquicentennial series of events in Toronto in January 2017, Kent Monkman's major exhibition, *Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience*, was organized by the Art Museum at the University of Toronto. A Canadian artist of Cree ancestry, Monkman's new, large scale project takes the viewer on a journey through Canada's history that starts in the present and projects us back to a hundred and fifty years before Confederation. With entry points in the harsh urban environment of Winnipeg's north end, and from within contemporary life on the reserve, the exhibition takes us all the way back to the period of New France and the fur trade (Everett-Green EVERETT-GREEN, 2017, article on line).

Certainly, since 1867, Canadian artists have been melding the aesthetic traditions of the northern land with approaches and techniques from every part of the globe. Some of the best sources for exploring the Canadian art world are the ebooks produced by the Art Canada Institute: http://www.aci-iac.ca. On the main page of the website are online books about the life and works of such diverse artists as: Shuvinai Ashoona, William Kurelek, Louis Nicolas, Paraskeva Clark, Jock Macdonald and Greg Curnoe. In her recent book, *The Promise of Canada. 150 Years – People and Ideas that Have Shaped Our Country*, Charlotte Gray says: "There is no single image that captures our country, just as there is no single narrative in our multi-layered history. Every vision, every story is part of the promise of Canada" (2016, p. XII). Gray's book revolves around the simple yet complex question: "What do Canadians from coast to coast have in common?" While offering various answers, Gray humorously remembers Peter C. Newman's quip: "This is the only country on earth whose citizens dream of being Clark Kent instead of Superman" (p. XIV). This twist obviously implies that Canada defies traditional definitions of identity, and consequently, of history. There is no master narrative for Canadian history – yet Canada exerts a sense of endless promise because over the years the country has managed to reconcile parallel identities, deep-rooted hostilities, overlapping loyalties. It is not wrong to say that Canada has adjusted its self-image in every generation since the

proclamation of the British North American Act in 1867, meaning that every narrative by writers or artists has somehow remained opened and in progress.

Canada's history stretches way back in time: there have been people living in the northern half of North America for millennia, surviving and building communities. And there have been people calling themselves Canadians (or, more precisely Canadiens and Canadiennes) since the French settled New France in the 17th century and adopted the Algonquin name "Canada" for the region that is now Quebec. However today, when we talk about "Canada", we are usually referring to the country created in 1867 by the British North American Act. The act embodied a pact that emerged three years earlier after twenty-three white men in top hats met in Prince Edward Island. The Charlottetown meeting led to Confederation, the founding event of the "Dominion of Canada". The BNA act ignored the country's Indigenous inhabitants. The project proceeded so slowly that it took thirty-eight years after Confederation for the other six mainland provinces to join. And Newfoundland, later called Newfoundland and Labrador, waited another half century. Today, Indigenous peoples are still challenging governments and policies to recognize their rights. In spite of all, Canada has remained united and the Canadian imaginary and sensibility have grown sturdier even as population has become more and more diverse, especially with the implementation of multiculturalism. Defining the Canadian identity is a work in progress, because as the country evolves, so does our collective sense of self. Perhaps only artists, poets and writers can capture the momentum and "fix" what it means to be Canadian in an aesthetic form.

Of all the artists that have made the wilderness a powerful element in the Canadian identity, the Western Canada painter Emily Carr (1871-1945) endures as one of the most important. She acknowledged that the landscape was alive and peopled before Europeans arrived, not empty and vast as most settlers liked to pretend. She was the first Canadian to attempt to capture the Canadian spirit from a modernist perspective. Her splendid canvases of forests, skies, and First Nations carvings are haunting and occasionally erotic paintings of mystery rather than hegemonic records of conquest and discovery. Her images and perceptions of nature inhabit the national memory. In a way, she can be compared to Georgia O'Keeffe in her New Mexico retreat. Even if women have been too

often excluded from standard histories because the work of nation building was such a masculine endeavour, Emily Carr did have a wide impact and added a unique layer to our sense of this country's potential.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the idea of Canada's "wilderness" as an appropriate subject for Canadian artists took hold among Eastern Canadian artists. Lawren Harris, a painter from the Group of Seven, saw landscape, particularly uninhabited terrain, as the subject that could be quintessentially Canadian. In fact, in the 1920s, all the artist members of the Group of Seven were building a new mythology for a new country. At the time, nobody asked why these artists ignored the old mythology of the original inhabitants, now displaced. The members of the Group remained loyal to the patriotic goal of affirming Canada's uniqueness through depictions of its rugged landscape – a landscape dramatically different from the well-tilled fields of Europe. Yet, their best known paintings convey no evidence of an Indigenous presence and little trace of the urbanization and industrialization that were profoundly reshaping Canada in the 1920s and 1930s. Emily Carr, on the contrary – in spite of her conventional upbringing in the conservative Victoria, B.C. – showed a great respect for Indigenous traditions and cultures, especially when compared with the brutal racism of government policy and popular culture that depicted Indigenous peoples as less than human[11]. Furthermore, art critics recognized that Carr had dug much deeper into Canada's vast wilderness than the Group of Seven had done. In 1939, Eric Newton, art critic of the Manchester *Guardian*, wrote:

> Where the Eastern Canadians have been content to stylize the outward pageantry of the landscape, she [Carr] has symbolized its inner meaning, and in doing so has, as it were, humanized it. Her trees are more than trees: they are green giants and slightly malevolent giants at that (NEWTON, 1939, p. 345) .

Emily Carr died in Victoria in 1945, aged seventy-four, after producing her best-known and most powerful work in the last fifteen years of her life. As her biographer Doris Shadbolt put it, Carr has proved that, "art of great strength and conspicuous individuality could be produced in a remote corner of the country if the artist had the necessary qualities and a little bit of luck" (SHADBOLT, 1990, p. 216). It was even more remarkable that in

this case the artist was a woman who grew up without either colleagues or an audience in a proudly colonial city on the far edge of the Dominion of Canada.

In the art scene after 1945, the Canadian national "topos" was viewed with a certain ennui as artists estranged themselves from depictions of landscape. It took a completely different group of artists to launch surrealism and abstraction in Canada – the Quebec intellectuals and artists including Paul-Émile Borduas and Jean-Paul Riopelle, who in 1948 published *Refus global*. Yet despite these changing tastes, Emily Carr's reputation has quietly grown nationally and internationally. A current exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, entitled *Mystical Landscapes: Masterpieces from Monet, Van Gogh and more* displays paintings by Carr, and another exhibition entitled *Radiant Visions: From Monet to Carr*, will show at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris in spring 2017.

In the mid-20th century, Marshall McLuhan – one of the best-known Canadian intellectuals of the time – observed: "Canada is the only country in the world that knows how to live without an identity" (MCLUHAN, 2017, article on line). Nevertheless, artists such as Emily Carr, Lawren Harris, Paul-Émile Borduas, Jean-Paul Riopelle, and writers like Margaret Atwood, Alice Monroe, Yann Martel, Leonard Cohen, Mordecai Richler, Gabrielle Roy, Margaret Laurence, have been very important in shaping multiple perceptions of the Canadian identity and a sense of "home": "Home… Not a place but a trajectory" (ROOKE, 1997, p. 6). Once more, what matters is not a fixed notion of "place", but the "trajectory", the Work in Progress and the Mobility that characterize the times in which we live and the ways in which humans understand themselves and others. In 2005, the Quebecois literary critic Pierre Ouellet stated that the new condition of our imaginary was the *esprit migrateur*[12], denoting mobility. These changes are no longer simply geographical and cultural, they are «aussi et peut-être surtout de nature ontologique et symbolique» (OUELLET, 2005, p. 12)[13]. Hence, it is possible to infer that the same trends characterize CanLit in English today. "Survival" (1972) as a strong theme described by Margaret Atwood in 1972 is replaced by new elements of the Canadian identity in the 21st century, among which is the topic of "the encounter" (IMBERT, 2016A); of individuals, peoples, cultures, imaginaries…

Today's literary culture thus reflects an evolving country. As Canadian writers and readers relinquish colonial mentality and as the population evolves from bicultural to multicultural, many possibilities become open to us. Indigenous writers, including Joseph Boyden, Thomas King, Wab Kinew and Natasha Kanapé Fontaine are major prizewinners. Many of today's literary figures were born elsewhere and set their fictions in their childhood homes: Vietnam for Kim Thúy or Lebanon for Rawi Hage, for example. Yann Martel, author of *Life of Pi*, has described Canada as "the greatest hotel on earth" (LOO, 2011, article on line). Pico Iyer simultaneously made a similar comparison In Imagining Canada[14]. Iyer as well as Martel meant it as a compliment: that this country "welcomes people from everywhere" (LOO, 2011, article on line) and has no problem if immigrant writers prefer to reside in Canada while their imaginations stroll across landscapes they left behind. Since the 1980s, Canadian authors have also been picking up international prizes and world recognition: Margaret Atwood won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1987 and the Booker Prize (now called the Man Booker) in 2000; Jane Urquhart became the first Canadian winner of France's prestigious *Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger* in 1992; Michael Ondaatje won the Booker Prize in 1992 and Yann Martel won it ten years later; Carol Shields won the Pulitzer Prize in 1995; Alice Monroe won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013 (GRAY, 2016, p. 169-203). In sum, Canadian culture is being celebrated outside Canada.

The finest Canadian ambassadors are its writers and artists, like French Canadian playwright Robert Lepage, musician Céline Dion, or an entertainment company like the Montreal *Cirque du Soleil*. They not only enhance confidence in the Canadian collective imagination but genuinely contribute to the continuous and positive restorying of Canada.

Conclusion

> The re-invention of the Americas, however,
> abandons such binary relations between centre and periphery,
> between European and aboriginal […]
> in favour of transversal or horizontal relations...[15].

As emphasized by Linda Hutcheon in her Introduction to Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden*. *Essays on the Canadian Imagination,* Canada has gone from "a pre-

national to a post-national phase without ever having become a nation" (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. XVII). This view was quite common among English Canadian intellectuals and writers in the 1960s and 1970s, and even later. They were underscoring that Canada was marked by its colonial past. However, today, this view has been superseded by the conception that Canada is an innovative country – scientifically, financially and culturally – and is a leader in implementing dynamic social relationships. Canada is the first country to have a multicultural Constitution linked to Human Rights. The contemporary vision we have of Canada is that of a pluralistic and multicultural society continuously in progress, able to retain, use and mix the influence of other cultures and globalization within its particular cultural backgrounds: French, English and Indigenous. Novels like *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje or *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel are fine examples that illustrate these contexts.

Going back to Northrop Frye's comment on the Canadian nation, Pico Iyer, in *Imagining Canada*, underscores a different conception. Iyer reminds us that Frye made students dream of studying English literature in England because it was in England that "[he] had mapped out a whole design of the universal consciousness" (2001, p. 16). Today, this universal consciousness has been recycled in a new view of Canada as a special place open to accommodate complex perspectives:

> This was the land that looked ideal in theory partly because, for all its anxieties about its First Nations past and its Quebecois present, it was not hemmed in by the weight of its past, as the Old World could be, nor burdened by the promise of an unlimited future, as its neighbour in the New World often is (IYER, 2001, p. 19).

Pico Iyer is convinced that Canada has reached a sound equilibrium by constantly changing its dynamics and by refining itself in the global context. This evolution has marked multicultural policy, theory and empirical experiments. A lot has changed since Neil Bissoondath published *Selling Illusion. The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, in 1994. A lot has changed even in the period between the two important books written by Will Kymlicka: *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (1995) and *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International politics of Diversity* (2007). Relative to the first book, Kymlicka adopts a more fluid approach in the second,

integrating the idea of encounters based on the fact that cultures are no longer perceived as static entities but as constant processes of exchange and reorganization. Multiculturalism is now clearly seen as a way to help newcomers change, and also as a way to help people born or already living in Canada to thrive through evolution. Identities too are considered fluid; engaged in constant dialogues. “Keep it moving” (p. 392), writes Yvon Rivard in *Le siècle de Jeanne*.

Today, Canada – like many countries in the Americas – defines itself as a nation in progress. The country encourages and attracts creative people able to produce new ideas, stories and significations, and to renew former ones. These people are more likely to be semiotically seduced by a dynamic of *interpretance* as exemplified by Peirce[16] than by a semiotic inclination towards dualistic paradigms displaying static and Platonic perspectives linked to culturally defined pseudouniversals. In the last century and a half, Canada has grown into its nationhood. Yet Canadian nationalism rarely erupts, and most of us resist overt displays of aggressive national pride. Shortly after his election in 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in an interview with *The New York Times*, suggested that Canada is “the first postnational state” (LAWSON, 2015, article on line). He offered a catalogue of shared values: “openness, respect, compassion, willingness to work hard, to be there for each other, to search for equality and justice” (LAWSON, 2015, article on line). Trudeau insisted: “There is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada” (IBIDEM). With unifying emotional links, the fluidity of this novel idea can bring fellow citizens together. Within this country’s multi-ethnic diversity, such links are most evident at a sub-national level through shared loyalty to a particular region, for example, or to a common future; or to a common ancestry, particularly in Quebec. Most importantly, artists and writers like Carr, Harris, Roy, Atwood, Martel, Monroe, Richler, Lepage and many others, have knitted the country together into a collective imaginary which conveys a sense of belonging and works around tensions between a fragmentary linear national narrative and the multicultural reality thriving in the midst of a changing world.

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[3] The two authors divided the research, writing and review tasks.

[4] Iyer, *Imagining Canada: An Outsider's Hope for a Global Future*, p. 19.

[5] Francisco Adolfo Sauvalle, *Constitución del Canada: Notas relativas a la confederación de las provincias británicas de la América del Norte*, Habana, Imp. La Antilla, 1869, p.14. Our translation: 'They can use French or English interchangeably in Parliament and for procedure, as well as in the Legislature of Lower Canada and in the Federal and Provincial Courts'.

[6] The Last Liberals. Why Canada Is Still at Ease with Openness, *The Economist*, October 29, 2016. <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21709291-why-canada-still-ease-openness-last-liberals>, browsed on January 29, 2017.

[7] "But I am convinced that all is not relative – or at least, only relatively relative" (our translation).

[8] Patrick Imbert, *Comparer le Canada et les Amériques: des racines aux réseaux transculturels,* Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2014. See paragraphs 3.5, 3.6, 3.7.

[9] CMA stands for Census Metropolitan Area. Canada Project 2030. <http://www.canada2030.ca>, browsed on January 15, 2017.

[10] 'The New World is also made of bodies, shop windows, goods; a world of nouveaux riches who do not remember being poor, a world of poor people, who only dream of becoming rich'. (Our translation.)

[11] See Charlotte Gray, «Looking Inward, Looking Outward: Emily Carr and Canada's Vast Canvas", *The Promise of Canada*, op. cit., p. 39-71.

[12] Pierre Ouellet, *L'esprit migrateur,* Montréal, VLB Éditeur, 2005.

[13] Our translation: 'also and maybe particularly of a symbolic and ontological nature'.

[14] Pico Iyer, *Imagining Canada: An Outsider's Hope for a global Future*, Toronto, The Hart House Lecture, 2001: "For her grateful immigrants fleeing Nazi Europe and first arriving in Canada, it seems like a luxury hotel, an oasis of ease and abundance; and a hotel, I think, is not such a terrible way of thinking about society…" p. 24. For the use of the comparison of the concept of State with hotels in the Americas, see: Patrick Imbert, *Comparer le Canada et les Amériques: des racines aux réseaux transculturels,* Québec, Presses de l'université Laval, 2014, p. 224-236.

[15] Barbara Godard, "Relational Logics: Of Linguistic and Other Transactions in the Americas", in Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida (ed.), *Perspectivas Transnacionais,* Belo Horizonte, ABECAN/UFMG, 2005, p. 243.

[16] C.S. Peirce. *Semiotics and Significs*, ed. Charles Hardwick, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1977.