

OLTREOCEANO

Rivista sulle migrazioni

La rivista, organo di diffusione di Oltreoceano - Centro Internazionale Letterature Migranti - CILM, accoglie studi di carattere letterario, linguistico e culturale sulle comunità migranti d'oltreoceano – friulane in particolare –, approfondendo i legami simbolici, linguistici e storici che uniscono realtà diverse e analizzando connessioni con altre lingue minoritarie e le loro poetiche migranti.

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**Dipartimento di Lingue e letterature, comunicazione, formazione e società
Università degli Studi di Udine
Via Mantica, 3 - 33100 UDINE
Tel. 0432 556750**

La collaborazione è subordinata all'invito della Direzione

**La pubblicazione degli articoli è soggetta a valutazione
positiva di *referees* anonimi individuati tra studiosi qualificati
nei rispettivi settori**

**Iscrizione al Tribunale di Udine
n. 31 del 04/07/2006**

11/2016

ISSN 1972-4527

OLTREOCEANO 11

**L'IDENTITÀ CANADESE
TRA MIGRAZIONI, MEMORIE
E GENERAZIONI**

**A CURA DI SILVANA SERAFIN, ALESSANDRA FERRARO
E DANIELA CIANI FORZA**

FORUM



Oltreoceano - Centro Internazionale Letterature Migranti - CILM

Via Mantica, 3 – 33100 Udine, Italia. Tel. +39 331 7209314

Sito web: <http://oltreoceano.uniud.it>

E-mail: oltreoceano@uniud.it; silvana.serafin@uniud.it

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Disegno di copertina
Marco Toffanin

Redazione e impaginazione
David Nieri, Viareggio (Lu)

Stampa
Press Up, Ladispoli (Rm)

© Dipartimento di Lingue e letterature, comunicazione, formazione e società
dell'Università degli Studi di Udine
Via Mantica, 3 – 33100 Udine

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Editrice Universitaria Udinese srl
Via Palladio, 8 – 33100 Udine
Tel. 0432 26001 / Fax 0432 296756
www.forumeditrice.it

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La presentazione di *Oltreoceano 10. Pier Paolo Pasolini nelle Americhe*, a cura di Alessandra Ferraro e Silvana Serafin, tenutasi presso l'Università di Udine il 29 ottobre 2015.



Il convegno 'Narrating Canada: Generations, Memories, Identities / Raconter le Canada: générations, mémoires, identités', tenutosi a Venezia l'11-12 novembre 2015.

CANADA: INCROCIO PLURICULTURALE

Silvana Serafin*

Abstract

Il presente articolo s'incentra sul concetto d'identità canadese, tuttora *in progress*, data la complessa rete di elementi culturali che danno luogo a movimenti d'integrazione e di repulsione, di fusione e di giustapposizione, sempre parziali e negoziabili. Tra il multiculturalismo proposto dal Governo Federale e il meticcio avanzato dal Québec, s'inserisce un progetto ispano-canadese che poggia sulla costruzione dell'archetipo di un mondo la cui natura epistemologica consiste nel considerare, per analogia, modello ciò che si discosta dalla realtà.

Canada: Multicultural Crossing

The present essay focusses on the Canadian identity, a concept which is still in progress, given the complexity of cultural issues promoting operations of integration as well as of repulsion, of fusion as well as of juxtaposition, which indeed are always partial and negotiable. In between the concept of multiculturalism as proposed by the Federal Government and that of hybridism as proposed by Québec, there stands a Hispanic-Canadian project. Its stand-point is the construction of a world, whose epistemological nature lies in the fact that all that diverges from reality is analogically referred to the archetype.

La collettività nella formazione identitaria

Se l'identità è una conquista per ogni singolo paese, il Canada ha dovuto misurarsi con apporti culturali molteplici prima di trovare il punto d'incontro da cui sviluppare una propria specificità. Già José Martí nel 1891, a proposito della costruzione degli stati nazionali in America Latina, afferma che è necessario considerare come base iniziale l'«equilibrio de los elementos reales del país» (17), senza perseguire costruzioni fittizie. Ed è esattamente questo il tragitto percorso dalla nazione nord-americana che, nella riscoperta del valore mitopoietico della memoria e del contesto geografico – dove si sono succedute generazioni di migranti –, ha tracciato i contorni della propria essenza. Il passato è

* Università di Udine.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

servito come fonte d'ispirazione per mantenere la legittimità di arcaici patrimoni culturali, indispensabili a forgiare una nuova mentalità. Nell'evidente aporia si cela il senso profondo che è stato assegnato alla collettività. Non importa se a costituirla sono persone che hanno trovato i natali in altre terre: fondamentale è individuare un termine di paragone con l'esperienza di popolazioni diverse, in grado di esaltare gli ideali di rinnovamento della vita sociale del Canada. Ciò permette d'identificare l'essere canadese, sia che si esprima in inglese o in francese – le due lingue ufficiali – o in italiano, o in castigliano, o in qualsiasi altra lingua. Da qui la scelta di suddividere il presente numero della rivista in quattro sezioni, dedicate rispettivamente alle migrazioni, numericamente più consistenti, ovvero anglosassone, francese, italiana e latinoamericana. Quest'ultima – sia pure minoritaria rispetto alle precedenti, in quanto, secondo il censimento del 2011 costituisce l'1,2% della popolazione –, contribuisce a tenere alto il dibattito sull'identità nazionale, grazie al progetto ispano-canadese proposto da Alejandro Saravia.

Sia per il dominio di entrambe le lingue del Canada, sia per il dialogo intertestuale con le ulteriori letterature canadesi, lo scrittore di origine boliviana con parole di Cheadle – «aporta mucho a una perspectiva interamericana que no hace daño a lo canadiense sino todo lo contrario: su obra nos permite vislumbrar un Canadá que, pese al lastre de su historia colonial y más allá de su (auto) subyugación al imperialismo estadounidense, lleva dentro de sí las semillas de un Canadá americano, ni neocolonial ni neocolonizador» (126). Un concetto questo che s'inserisce nella controversia – iniziata a partire dagli anni Ottanta del XX secolo – tra il modello culturale nazionale avanzato dal governo canadese, refrattario ad allargarsi in culture altre sempre più delimitate nei propri ambiti originari, e il concetto di cultura trans-nazionale. Quest'ultimo, proposto dagli intellettuali di origine italiana attraverso la rivista *Vice Versa*, fondata a Montréal nel 1983 (Ferraro. *Écriture migrante...*: 43), si caratterizza per una poetica che, tenendo conto dell'esperienza maturata nel paese d'origine e in quello d'accoglienza, è insieme canadese e interamericana.

La complessa rete di elementi culturali

Ogni descrizione che ha come oggetto il Canada non può, pertanto, astenersi dall'analisi della complessa rete di elementi culturali che convivono nel medesimo spazio e che danno luogo a movimenti d'integrazione e di repulsione, di fusione e di giustapposizione, sempre parziali e negoziabili. Una pluralità di varianti possibili che assume una particolare trascendenza se arriva ad essere applicata al campo letterario. In tal modo la letteratura svolge un ruolo di

grande importanza per la società: attraverso un discorso simbolico, a volte utopico, essa presenta soluzioni positive per tutti e a chiunque viene offerta la possibilità di partecipare – con un’adesione individuale poggiante su una consapevole scelta di valori – all’affermazione dell’identità nazionale. Frutto della transnazionalità culturale sopra allusa, o per meglio dire della transculturazione – prendendo a prestito la definizione di Fernando Ortiz, ripresa successivamente da Ángel Rama nel suo studio sulla *Transculturación en América Latina* –, lo scrittore/trice migrante indica alla società canadese una cultura alternativa, in grado di abbattere nazionalismi e di superare ristretti ambiti locali. Per tale motivo Antonio D’Alfonso afferma che «il transnazionalismo è possibile solo là dove c’è anche il pluralismo, senza centralizzazione di lingua, etnicità, religione. La cultura senza territorio è centrifuga, si allarga e abbraccia il diverso» (26).

Tuttavia, il discorso letterario non propone un unico modello che, d’altra parte, non sarebbe compreso dall’intera comunità poliedrica e contrapposta per usi e costumi, come ho già evidenziato facendo riferimento ai diversi sistemi politici attuati dal Governo Federale canadese e in Québec. Non a caso, durante la *Révolution tranquille* degli anni Sessanta, quest’ultimo si è riappropriato del nome indigeno. Mentre il primo si rifà al multiculturalismo affinché ogni comunità agisca in uno specifico ambito separato, il secondo, per l’evidente riferimento francese, è orientato verso l’assimilazione culturale e linguistica. In tal modo, osserva Alessandra Ferraro, si sono delineate due società: «In quella canadese anglofona ogni gruppo etnico, conservando le sue peculiarità, costituisce la tessera di un mosaico che, nel presentare una figura comune, mantiene, tuttavia, la parcellizzazione delle sue componenti. In quella quebecchese prevale, invece, la figura del meticcio, dell’incrocio tra culture, lingue e individui, che, come i fili di un arazzo, concorrono inestricabilmente a formare un’immagine in cui lo sguardo non percepisce più le singole componenti» (“Scrittori migranti...”: 42).

Tra di esse, tuttavia, s’inserisce un terzo tipo di cultura, dovuta alla presenza latino-americana, dove il sistema cognitivo crea l’archetipo di un mondo la cui natura epistemologica risiede nel fatto che ciò che si discosta dalla realtà viene riconosciuto per analogia al modello. Da qui, l’identità si delinea proprio nel suo ‘trans-ire’ tra culture diverse, nell’andare oltre le singole limitazioni, assumendo contorni poliedrici e sfaccettati. Essi costituiscono il filo conduttore dell’intera ‘letteratura migrante’, ovvero di quell’insieme di testi e di scritture accomunati da una connessione intertestuale e da una dialettica dinamica, grazie alla quale il conflitto e lo scarto differenziale si trasformano in stimolante terreno d’indagine.

Evoluzioni interpretative dell'identità canadese

A partire soprattutto dall'ultimo decennio del XX secolo, si sono verificate delle evoluzioni interpretative sul significato, spesso ambiguo e mutevole, dell'identità canadese, confluite in percorsi interessanti. Per esempio nel Canada nei primi anni Settanta, il mosaico è stato sanzionato come simbolo dell'orgoglioso riconoscimento nazionale del pluralismo etnico-culturale e della diversità. A questo proposito scrive Anna Pia De Luca: «Ancora oggi, dopo oltre mezzo secolo, questa immagine incarna egregiamente la tendenza, ormai globalizzata, delle culture ad incontrarsi, a fondersi e a svilupparsi, a volte in modi molto inaspettati» (45).

Dal mosaico di idee e di comportamenti, si è giunti all'arazzo (Ferraro) riportato nella precedente citazione e al caleidoscopio (Keefer, Serafin) che riduce la molteplicità delle basi identitarie – frazionate in una miriade di frammenti – all'unità transculturale, superando retaggi di potere, obsoleti riferimenti culturali, etico-comportamentali ed ambiti delocalizzati della conoscenza.

Pertanto, l'emigrato, in Canada, in quell'ambiente sfuggente a tal punto da non essere identificabile – ben nota è la domanda posta da Northrop Frye “Where is here?” (220) –, allontana l'idea di marginalità, espressa in tessere della memoria, in soliloquio o in un dialogo inscritto tra generazioni, ed aspira ad un *unicum* nazionale, pur salvaguardando le proprie radici culturali.

Ed ecco che l'originaria terra promessa, oltre ad essere il luogo dell'utopia – ovvero l'assenza di luogo, come insegna Thomas More –, si trasforma nel 'buon' luogo dell'eutopia, dove le iniziali spinte della necessità e del desiderio, che stanno alla base di ogni migrazione, sembrano trovare appagamento e soprattutto rimandare al concetto di un'identità ben definita.

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CANADA DI LINGUA INGLESE



NARRATING CANADA: GENERATIONS, MEMORIES, IDENTITIES

Daniela Ciani Forza*

Abstract

The following is a short introduction to the themes raised during the Colloquium “Narrating Canada: Generations, Memories, Identities / Raconter le Canada: générations, mémoires, identités”, which was held at the University of Ca’ Foscari Venice (11-12 November, 2015). The presence of scholars from both the Francophone and Anglophone communities of Canada, as well as from different fields of the humanities (literature, visual arts, music, theatre) promoted a challenging interdisciplinary debate, focusing on the construction of individual and national identities. The essays that follow in this section concern the Anglophone contribution to the themes in question, with particular emphasis on the impact the representations of intergenerational relations, travel/migration, ageing and memory, late-life quality and institutional care, late-life creativity have had on Canadian cultural life.

Raccontare il Canada: generazioni, memorie, identità

Il breve saggio discute e mette in relazione fra loro gli studi di ambito anglofono, presentati durante il Convegno “Narrating Canada: Generations, Memories, Identities / Raconter le Canada: générations, mémoires, identités” (Venezia 11-12 novembre, 2015), che vide la collaborazione scientifica di studiosi appartenenti al mondo sia anglofono che francofono. Gli studi che seguono in questa sezione si soffermano sull’interdisciplinarietà fra i temi trattati – specificatamente quelli relativi ai rapporti intergenerazionali, a viaggi/migrazione, invecchiamento e memorie, qualità della vita e istituzioni, creatività così come essi hanno segnato e segnano l’affermazione dell’identità individuale e nazionale del Canada.

Foreword

The question of defining individual or national identity has long been approached by scholars of different disciplines. The relation between past heritage and present conditions of life undermine existential certainties and inter-cultural impacts with forceful consequences on social and political issues

* Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia.

Oltreoceano. L’identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

– challenging such basic matters as self-reliance, sense of belonging and, last but not least, encounters and clashes between civilizations.

The framework we have chosen for our investigation into the Anglo-Canadian representation of contemporary Canada's intrinsic traits is that of the relationship between ageing and personal stories – personal stories and contextual history. Since, as Herbert Blumer suggests, human beings attach meanings to things according to their own experience, such meanings cannot but depend on human interactions – that is to say that they emerge from the social processes in which the individual is included. Local history and traditions certainly mould people's vision of their own longevity, and intergenerational relations flow at lesser degrees of disruption. Socio-economic stability (no matter how often grounded on inequitable stratifications – a most important question that is, but not directly pertinent to our topic here) allows for shared assumptions on the role of those who are ageing and their significance within the given social structure.

In the polysemic vision of today's concept of identity, in its constant challenge between a perception of unfading youth and an apprehension of future potential instability, what seems to be lacking is the acceptance of a natural passage leading from the exuberance of youth to an acquiescence in ageing – the awareness of 'adulthood', as the age tracing a continuity between the previous and the latter stages (youth and old-age) of personal as well as collective life¹.

Canadian response to ageing

In following the contents of the essays hereby presented, we have come to realize that most of the protagonists of the literature under discussion confront ageing as something that one must inevitably come to terms with – something which indeed marks a separation from the liveliness and promises of youth. Diseases such as Alzheimer, segregation in nursing homes and the wish to escape into an improbable recapturing of past emotions or melancholy representations of new-(old) selves, are the recurring traits in several of Margaret Atwood's short-stories, in Thom Fitzgerald's road movie *Cloudburst*, not to mention Leonard Cohen's last collection *Book of Longing*, which is totally dedicated to the artist's anguish over the decadence old age implies. An implicit lack of continuity is what interrupts communication, agitating the minds of the elderly the moment they realize the dream of eternal youth is abandoning them.

¹ On the relationship between generations, in anthropological as well as cultural terms, see Zagrebelsky.

The persistence of memories and the interplay of flashbacks and flash-forwards connecting past and present in a context which allows confrontations not only between generations, but between New and Old Worlds as well, is itself a sign marking the thirst for narrations/a narration comprehending the intense impact of history on an age that is focused on the future – involving human beings, their expectations, illusions and quests. The texts on Alistair MacLeod and on Michael Ondaatje, thematically and methodologically so far apart, speak up for the urgent need in our times, and in our manifold societies, to establish the incommensurable link between ‘old’ and ‘new’ truths – to overcome the dichotomy between mere existence and the flow of life, achieving consciousness of the complexity that lies beyond any notion of identity. The interplay of time references – suggestively adopting tenses mingling different chronological allusions – renders the clash between different ‘stories’ all the more effectively –, aiming at a reconciliation that from intergenerational and intercultural relations will eventually lead to ideal forms of interaction.

The multidisciplinary contributions to the themes under discussion are but another facet of the contributors’ endeavor to represent Canadian culture coming to terms with its perspectives of earnest change and its need for established reference-points. An example is the promotion that animated movies have received by the Film Board of Canada; in remaining aloof from mere physical representations they provide suggestive instances of conflicts, involving individual as well as public harassment. One of the significant cases discussed is that of the short-film *How People Got Fire*, the story being that of an elderly Native woman gaining her grand-daughter’s confidence through the narration of a traditional legend – thus driving the child’s initial boredom with Grandma to a fascination with her ability to enliven old knowledge and thus resist the loss of cultural heritage – looking forward, perhaps, to a life conceived as ‘ageless’ – belonging to a space and a time intersecting with one another, acknowledging differences.

«I am a word/ In a foreign language»

The quote, taken from “Disembarking at Québec”², is here meant to mark our conclusion, suggesting that our aim, just like that of Margaret Atwood’s poetic character in “Diary 1”, has been to overcome limitations of rationalizing codes, moving towards a superseding of age-barriers – as *per se* metaphors of ostra-

² I owe the quotation to Biancamaria Rizzardi’s own citation from Margaret Atwood as it appears in this collection (52).

cism that impede a development of existential communication, creative vigour and cultural exchanges – choosing to proceed from multi-disciplinary approaches, different theoretical positions and ideological attitudes: words speaking up from within foreignness, overcoming restraints.

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AGING, MEMORY AND IDENTITY: ALICE MUNRO'S "THE BEAR CAME OVER THE MOUNTAIN" AND "IN SIGHT OF THE LAKE"

Gianfranca Balestra*

Abstract

Aging and its effects on both body and mind figure in many of Alice Munro's stories, but in a way her characters age with her, and loss of memory and problems of identity disintegration become more crucial in the late period. This essay explores the representation of old age in Alice Munro's fiction, focusing on "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" and "In Sight of the Lake", two compelling stories that portray painful forms of dementia and Alzheimer's disease. The analysis addresses both thematic and stylistic issues, discussing the connections between selfhood and memory and highlighting the technical and structural devices masterly employed by the writer to communicate the feeling of disorientation and identity fragmentation.

Senilità, memoria e identità in "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" e "In Sight of the Lake" (In vista del lago) di Alice Munro

Il processo di invecchiamento e i suoi effetti su corpo e mente sono presenti in molti racconti di Alice Munro, ma si potrebbe dire che i suoi personaggi invecchiano con lei e perdita della memoria e disintegrazione dell'identità diventano argomenti più pressanti nell'ultimo periodo. Questo saggio esplora la rappresentazione della vecchiaia nella narrativa di Munro, con particolare riferimento a "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" e "In Sight of the Lake" ("In vista del lago"), due testi con personaggi afflitti da demenza senile e Alzheimer. L'analisi si propone di indagare l'argomento sia dal punto di vista tematico che da quello stilistico, evidenziando i dispositivi tecnici e strutturali magistralmente usati dalla scrittrice per comunicare disorientamento e frammentazione.

Writing old age

In this essay I intend to explore the relationship of aging, memory and identity in Alice Munro's late fiction, focusing on "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", and "In Sight of the Lake"¹, which can be considered most compelling stories of

* Università di Siena.

¹ "The Bear Came over the Mountain" was first published in the *New Yorker* (Dec. 27, 1999-Jan. 3, 2000), and later included in *Hateship, Friendship, Loveship, Marriage* in 2001.

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old age and its often painful changes, in a stylistic tour de force. Aging and its effects on both body and mind figure in many of Munro's stories, where she draws attention to age consciousness and constructs different representations of middle age and old age, not necessarily as traumatic moments of change. However, when dealing with senescence, new issues and questions of identity are addressed: how much does chronological age alter individual identity, is there a recognizable continuity of self in spite of loss of memory and severe forms of debilitation like dementia and Alzheimer's disease?

Scholars have pointed out how Munro's characters age with her, from the Bildungsroman of the early period – that could be called a “portrait of the artist as a young woman” – to mature and middle aged women, to aging protagonists. Older women, however, appear also in early short stories, but usually seen by a younger woman. When old age, disease, and death figure, they act as a mirror, a vision of the future, a *memento mori*. Among earlier texts that introduce this theme and anticipate its in-depth treatment in “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” and “In Sight of the Lake”, are “Spelling”, “Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd”, and “Lichen”².

In “Spelling” Rose returns to her hometown to assist her stepmother Flo, who is afflicted by dementia and needs assisted care. Before placing her in the County Home for the Aged, Rose visits the facility, which is organized on different floors according to different levels of autonomy and consciousness. On the last floor she meets with the totally disabled: «Bodies were fed and wiped, taken up and tied in chairs, untied and put to bed. Taking in oxygen, giving out carbon dioxide, they continued to participate in the life of the world» (187). This painful description of humans reduced to breathing bodies leads to the encounter with an old blind woman making loud shaky noises, whose only persisting ability resides in spelling words, and Rose wonders if they carried «their usual meaning or any meaning at all» (188). This horrifying scene introduces the dimension of language in the assessment of mental failing, and the complicated mechanism that allows humans to establish the connection between objects and language. However, words, even just spelled words, might be able to establish a contact with people, and thus acquire a redeeming value. The text foregrounds the disquieting alterity that aging can involve (Collier 52), but as DeFalco argues, this scene can also be read as significant for its insistence on the «incom-

“In Sight of the Lake” first appeared in the British magazine *Granta*, 118 (2012) and was then included in the collection *Dear Life* (2012).

² “Spelling” was included in *The Beggar Maid / Who Do You Think You Are* (1977), “Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd” in *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), and “Lichen” in *The Progress of Love* (1986).

prehensible, yet undeniable, personhood» of this old woman (*Uncanny Subjects*: 84). This tour of the Home causes Rose to have a dream where people are locked in cages, with Flo in one of them «handsomely seated on a thronelike chair, spelling out words in a clear authoritative voice [...] and looking pleased with herself, for showing powers she had kept secret till now» (188). This dream fragment reveals the perception of old people homes as prison, but also the possibility for the individual to maintain and express her personality. One peculiar feature of stories about old age is the attention given to nursing homes, institutional spaces that foreground the segregating and depersonalizing aspects of residential care, but also engage with the persistence of humanity and questions of identity³. As always in Munro, ambiguity and complexity are at the core of her fiction: even when loss of memory and dementia seem to annihilate personal identity, this comes back in a modified version, showing a certain continuity of subjectivity. As critics have pointed out, Flo's obstinate and demanding behavior when suffering from dementia can be recognized as an exaggerated version of the stubborn younger woman she used to be (De Falco. *Uncanny Subjects*, and Jamieson. "Surprising Developments").

"Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" takes place in a nursing home, which is described in its institutional organization and architecture. The protagonists are two women who have known each other for eighty years, since kindergarten, have some physical ailments but are mentally capable. They have memories, maintain their personalities, can develop new friendships and take care of each other. Intersection of questions of age, class and gender are particularly significant in this story⁴. Even in a story like "What is Remembered"⁵, which is about the love affair of a young married woman, although recounted through the distorted memories of the aged protagonist, a central episode takes place in a home for the elderly, with the visit to an old aunt who seems to have lost any inhibitions and recounts her past sexual adventures, which become a sort of premise to the sexual encounter that's going to follow.

In "Lichen" chronological age is emphasized by the presence of a male character who refuses to age, dyes his hair and couples with younger women. His ex wife, instead, accepts the aging of her body and seems to find satisfaction in her

³ Sara Jamieson explores the representation of old age homes in Munro's fiction and locates it in a gerontological debate concerning the nature and meaning of residential care for older people, questioning the assumptions underlying the pervasive perception of the old age home as total institution of social control. ("Reading the Spaces of Age"). See also Amelia DeFalco's "Uncanny Witnessing" and Patricia Life's "Shaking off Shackles".

⁴ See Francescato's essay in this volume.

⁵ Published in the *New Yorker* in February 2001 and included in *Hateship, Courtship, Love-ship, Marriage* the same year.

midlife. The inevitable passing of time is marked by the visit to her father in a nursing home and metaphorically by the fading of the photo of a young naked woman the ex husband carries in his wallet and likes to show off because he is having an affair with her. The Polaroid snapshot appears as a version of “L’origine du monde” by Courbet, but the woman’s realistic black public hair is perceived as lichen by his ex wife and later turns gray in the sun. Everything decays and humans cannot avoid aging and death, but this story shows the inner resources of middle-aged women and their capability to adapt to change.

Undoubtedly, however, it is in Munro’s later collections that old age becomes central, and memory plays an important role when a story is focused on an older person who tries to reconstruct an episode from the past, or a whole life. Tricks of memory may happen to a perfectly conscious person, with lapses and subconscious negations, but in some of the late stories age becomes senility, afflicted by illness, deterioration of body and mind, loss of memory, forms of dementia, Alzheimer’s disease. This brings new perspectives to the narration, and demands new techniques and structural devices. Munro’s short stories are always complex structures that may cover a long period of time and be marked by significant temporal gaps with memory playing a crucial role. Her late stories become longer, they occupy a larger span of time, with gaps and various anachronies, making the text more episodic and fragmentary⁶. As Ailsa Cox maintains, in Munro’s late style there is «a sharpened awareness that time is irreversible and a growing sense of discontinuity between youth and old age» (277).

Memory loss and identity: “The Bear Came Over the Mountain”

Critics have recognized the importance of memory in Munro’s work, not just as a recurring theme, but as a structural element that shapes her fiction. Memory becomes part of a complex construction of narrative identity that flows through all of her work, in a sort of literary and biographical trajectory, so that memory could be discussed within a single short story as well as part of her entire narrative corpus⁷. “The Bear Came Over the Mountain” is probably the most relevant for a discussion on memory, identity and aging, and has received a great deal of critical attention. This tale shows the effects of what is recognizable as Alzheimer’s disease on a seventy year old woman. Loss of memory is the primary change associated

⁶ Munro herself points out these changes in the Introduction to the Vintage Edition of her *Selected Stories* (1997): «In later years my short stories haven’t been so short. They’ve grown longer, and in a way more disjointed and demanding and peculiar» (“Introduction”: xiv).

⁷ See, among others, Francesconi’s essay “Memory and Desire”.

with the illness, one of the symptoms that is generally considered to lead to loss of identity. Cancelling short term memories and sometimes bringing back forgotten ones from the past, the final effect is of disorientation and identity fragmentation. The symptoms are described realistically in the first part of the story, when memory deficits start to manifest themselves in everyday life so that the protagonist Fiona places little yellow notes all over the house, to mark various objects. There is a progressive loss of semantic memory and retrograde memory, space and time disorientation as well as difficulty in recognizing people. The disease leads to her being put in a nursing home and to a crisis in a fifty year marriage. The woman at times seems not to recognize her husband, and becomes emotionally involved with another patient.

The short story is narrated in the third person and is not focalized on the woman suffering from Alzheimer's, but on her husband Grant, who recalls crucial moments in their marriage, revealing his frequent betrayals in the Sixties and Seventies with students and younger women, without ever wanting to separate from his wife. This re-memorizing on his part is an attempt, common among caretakers and family members, to retrieve personal history and to make sense of the past when faced with erosion in the mind of the individual with the disease. In the perfect structure of "The Bear Came Over the Mountain", the husband's memories work as a sort of counterpoint to his wife's loss of memory, bringing to the surface a relationship full of ambiguity, lies, silences and the inability, on his part, to penetrate her mysterious identity. Her personality has always been elusive to him and this constituted part of her charm, so that Alzheimer's in a way seems only to have increased her attraction. Or maybe his inability to penetrate his wife's complex personality depends on his lack of sensibility, his concentration on his job and sexual adventures. On the other hand, the woman's new love story at the time of Alzheimer's is a sort of counterpoint – or maybe retaliation – to his past betrayals, and in fact he is jealous of this rather absurd, adolescent-like relationship between patients. But other questions arise. In particular: what kind of love is possible for a person whose identity seems to have been affected by the disease? One possible answer is offered by Francesconi: «Fiona experiences desire precisely for the loss of memory. Oblivion creates the conditions for the development of new modes and forms of configuring meaning, memory and desire» ("Memory and Desire": 349). More relevantly: what identity remains when memories are erased? This question is related to the significance of memory in western culture and to ideas concerning the formation and persistence of subjectivity. Concepts of self have come under scrutiny by science, psychology and philosophy, with different approaches and ideas on what constitutes identity, from Jerome Bruner's theory of the narrative construction of identity to Galen Strawson's debunking of narra-

tivism, that is the idea of constituting one's identity through narration. Some researchers challenge the notion that loss of memory and language necessarily signals loss of human selfhood. Linda Simon, for example, discusses the common perception of loss of memory as a threat to the survival of the self in Alzheimer's sufferers, and points out, on the contrary, the persistence and sometimes intensification of personality traits and eccentricities that existed before.

Since the story is told from the point of view of the husband and he cannot know what is going on in his wife's mind, the reader doesn't know either. It is difficult to understand how the brain of a patient affected by Alzheimer's works, even from the neurological point of view, let alone how she/he feels. Symptoms are recognizable, but variations in memory disturbances are frequent, episodes of amnesia are followed by apparent recovery of past fragments, so that it may be difficult to completely accept a diagnosis of progressive degenerative disease. At times the husband in this story recognizes his wife's personality, her irony and sense of humor and suspects her of joking, like she used to before the disease. Grant oscillates between different perceptions of dementia as a serious pathology that destroys memory and language skills, and a continuity in personality that transpires in spite of loss of memory. When he looks at the patients in the institution, he still perceives their humanity:

even the ones who did not participate in any activities but sat around watching the doors or looking out the windows – were living a busy life in their heads (not to mention the life of their bodies, the portentous shifts in their bowels, the stabs and twinge everywhere along the line), and that was a life that in most cases could not very well be described or alluded to in front of visitors (298).

The questioning attitude in the narrative voice and in the focalizer contributes to the unstable perception of the disease, so that Ventura can speak of a «playful, distanced, and ironic approach to the ravages of aging» (2), and Francesconi of «progressive loss of memory as a non dramatic condition» (“Memory and Desire”: 344). In the same line of interpretation, Patricia Life considers selective forgetting and remembering as an opportunity to live to a greater advantage, facilitated by being in a new environment.

Fragments of dreams and memories: “In Sight of the Lake”

With this text Alice Munro seemed to have reached the utmost limit in her anatomy of memory and loss of memory. But she took the next almost impossible step of telling the story not from the point of view of a witness, but from the point of view of a woman suffering from a form of dementia, possibly Alzheimer's. She

took up the challenge in the short story "In Sight of the Lake", with an extraordinary display of creative narrative strategies and psychological insights. The difficulty resides in the nature of the illness itself: «The subjective experience of dementia, particularly in its late stages, remains largely unknown since the condition destroys precisely those tools necessary to produce a coherent life story» (DeFalco. "Uncanny Witnessing": 223). There have been few other successful attempts, such as *Barney's Version*, the celebrated novel by Mordecai Richler, where the protagonist starts writing his autobiography at the beginning of the disease and progressively finds it difficult to continue, so that at the end it is his son who corrects and completes it – a very clever solution to the narrative problem⁸.

In Munro's story the narrator is extradiegetic, but the focalizer this time is the protagonist, an elderly woman who seems to be suffering from the onset of dementia, is looking for a doctor whose name she cannot remember, and in the process gets lost in the small town where his office is supposed to be. The whole experience is one of disorientation, told in a fragmented way through a series of disconnected scenes and images. The reader's impression, as well, is one of disorientation while witnessing what happens in the mind of an old woman experiencing a painful loss of memory. She becomes progressively more confused, her mental problems increase, she is lost in space and time. At the beginning of the narrative Nancy (the protagonist) wonders «if her mind is slipping a bit» (217), but she refuses this idea and thinks «It isn't mind. It's just memory» (218). However, pathological loss of memory and madness become intertwined, the 'mind doctor' becomes the 'crazy doctor'. A man she encounters suggests that the doctor might be at a Rest Home nearby, and when she gets there the door opens and she finds herself trapped in a hexagonal space with four doors that don't open, she cannot get out and panics, tries to scream, cannot breathe. She wakes up in bed, and the reader discovers that she is in a nursing home, with a nurse telling her «You must have had a dream. What did you dream about?» (232). She answers she had been dreaming of when her husband was alive and she was still driving a car. Her answer seems that of a person who is in control of her memories and language, not that of a patient affected by dementia. She recognizes the nurse and can read her name on the brooch she wears. She might be in a nursing home for other kinds of ailments, not necessarily because suffering from dementia, or she might be in the early stage of the disease. The final exchange between her and the nurse confirms the ambiguity. The nurse asks her: «You have

⁸ DeFalco mentions this novel as well as Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* and Jeffrey Moore's *The Memory Artist*, together with nonfictional memoirs. See also the texts examined by Wendy Roy in "The Word is Colander: Language Loss and Narrative Voice in Fictional Canadian Alzheimer's Narratives".

a nice car?»). And she answers: «Volvo». «See? You are sharp as a tack» (232). Everything depends on a verbal tense, the present tense used by the nurse. The answer might imply that the patient thinks she still owns the Volvo, but the question might also be a grammar mistake («You have» instead of «did you have?») on the part of the nurse, and then Nancy's answer would be correct. The end of the story is open, the reader is left wondering if the dream was a representation of her painful process of mental decline or rather of her fear of losing memory and getting dementia. If we look at the earlier version of the story, published in the British magazine *Granta*, everything becomes clear. The protagonist tries to explain herself and is cut short by the nurse:

You see, I have an appointment to see a doctor whose name I can't seem to get straight but I was supposed to find him here and I have followed some directions as well as I could but no luck. I felt I had got into some ridiculous sort of trap and I must have a tendency to be claustrophobic, it was alarming – “Oh, Jean, hurry up”, said Sandy. “I'm behind already and I have to get you into your nightie and all. That's the same thing you tell me every time”⁹.

While the final book version maintains uncertainty, this ending, instead, eliminates every ambiguity: Nancy is actually suffering from a form of dementia, her recurring dream is part of her delusion and mind crumbling. Opinions on the two endings differ: Neil Stewart, for example, considers the *Granta* version unquestionably superior while Wendy Rohr values the revised version as the better one and an example of Munro's mastery of compression.

As is often the case with old people, in the dream she doesn't remember words and recent facts, but she has distinct memories of the past, she claims that everything was better in former times, when she was young, we assume both in the world outside and inside her mind. The distinction between reality and dream is blurred to the point of misleading the reader. The story reads as the experience of a person who suffers from pathological loss of memory – verbal, temporal, and spatial¹⁰. The success of the story is based on the writer's ability to construct a dream that looks like the meandering of a deteriorating mind. Dreams have the fragmented quality of the first part of the narrative, they often move from one scene to the next without apparent connection, chronological and causal coordinates are weak, the emotional dimension dominates over the

⁹ Quoted in Stewart. The character has undergone a name change from Jean in the magazine version to Nancy in the book.

¹⁰ In her recent book on Munro, Francesconi interprets the story as a real life experience and the final awakening in the nursing home as happening after a long temporal ellipsis, marked by a blank in the text (*Alice Munro, Il piacere di raccontare*: 91).

rational. Dreams incorporate experiences and fears, they bring to the surface memories that the conscious self may have buried, and Nancy's dream may be a reenactment of past events, through condensation, displacement and symbolization. If dreams allow for accessibility to parts of the mind that are inaccessible through conscious thought, one question posed by this story is if the dreams of a person affected by dementia work the same way, how much they reflect inner life in spite of memory failures. In her essay on "Memory and Desire", Francesconi argues that «dreams do not allow the resurrection of memories but perform illuminating contingent rewriting versions of original material. Dreams are valued in Munro's work for their vibrant narrative potential» (353). It is possibly in this short story that the narrative potential of dreams is explored at its best, together with a visionary attempt to represent the disorientation and painful loss of memory of a person affected by a disabling illness, or of her fear to lose her memories and identity.

In *Illness as Metaphor* as well as in *Aids and Its Metaphors*, Susan Sontag wrote about the ways a culture generates myths about certain diseases that give them meaning beyond that of a physical or mental disorder and reveal culturally shared fears and desires. Apart from being directly connected with population aging in western societies and in Canada in particular, Linda Simon discusses the current popular and fictional focus on Alzheimer's disease within this critical framework and interprets it as a product of the postmodern world, a representation of the «sense of disorientation in a world that seems increasingly alien, a world of the young in which older people feel, inevitably, pushed to the side» (14). Sontag argued that illness as a metaphor needs to be demystified, and disease discussed literally as well as metaphorically. In these stories Munro explicitly explores the very nature of Alzheimer's, «with its painful loss of memory, its tenuous grasp of reality and the intimation of a dissolving self» (Simal 62). Her fiction succeeds in offering a realistic and compassionate portrayal of elderly people and forms of dementia as part of the «absurdity of the human condition» (Cox 277), while resonating with contemporary concerns with fear of loss, isolation, disorientation, fragmentation. Lateness of theme and style in her work keeps reminding us of the inevitability of loss and death.

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GENERATIONS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ALISTAIR MACLEOD'S *TIMESCAPE*

Francesca Romana Paci*

Abstract

In 1790, Alistair MacLeod's ancestors migrated from Scotland to Canada, where they settled in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Born in 1936, MacLeod died in 2014. Although he is not an autobiographical writer, his centuries-long family history is fundamental to his writing, families and generations being for him the natural configuration of human existence. In turn, generations inscribe themselves in the history of the countries they live in. In his short stories and one novel, MacLeod succeeds in problematizing both heritage and generational conflict. Emblematically, in the novel *No Great Mischief*, the narrator, while walking through a busy thoroughfare in Toronto, is made meditative by a sentence he reads on the front of a girl's t-shirt: "Living in the past is not living up to our potential".

Generazioni ed eredità culturale nel timescape di Alistair MacLeod

Nel 1790 gli antenati di Alistair MacLeod (1936-2014) emigrarono dalla Scozia in Canada, per stabilirsi permanentemente a Cape Breton in Nova Scotia. Non è uno scrittore autobiografico, ma la storia secolare della sua famiglia è fondamentale alla sua scrittura, perché famiglia e generazioni sono per lui la configurazione naturale dell'esistenza umana. A loro volta le generazioni si iscrivono nella storia dei paesi dove vivono. Nei suoi racconti e nel suo unico romanzo, MacLeod problematizza eredità culturale e conflitto generazionale. Nel romanzo, *No Great Mischief*, il narratore, mentre cammina in un'affollata strada di Toronto, è spinto a meditare da una frase emblematica che legge sulla t-shirt di una ragazza: "Vivere nel passato è non vivere appieno le nostre potenzialità".

From Skye to Cape Breton

Immigration from Scotland to Canada had its beginning as far as 1622 under the reign of James VI of Scotland (James I of England), with the founding and naming of the colony of Nova Scotia in the Gulf of St. Lawrence¹. Scottish im-

* Università del Piemonte Orientale.

¹ The Gulf, which is more an internal sea than a gulf, was named by the French explorer Jacques Cartier in 1534. Also the name Canada, meaning roughly 'abode', 'home', is believed to be due to Cartier.

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migration increased when many Highlanders fled Scotland after the failure of the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite risings, the ensuing defeat at Culloden in 1746, and the death of Bonnie Prince Charlie, Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender, in 1788. Today Scottish Canadians are distributed all over the country and are one of Canada's largest and more influential ethnic groups². Alistair MacLeod's ancestors migrated to Nova Scotia from the isle of Eigg, one of Scotland's Inner Hebrides, in 1790, settling in the island of Cape Breton. He was born in North Battleford, in Saskatchewan, in 1936³, where his parents had temporarily migrated. After other migrations from migration, first to Edmonton and later to Mercoal, Alberta, where the father worked in a coal mine, in 1946 the family went back to Cape Breton. This is the deep eidetic timescape⁴ Alistair MacLeod elects to deal with in his less than twenty short stories⁵ and in his novel *No Great Mischief* (2000). Although he may be easily misinterpreted as such, he is not an autobiographical writer; instead, he makes cultural history and his family history, his mine, using its ore to build the foundations of stories and characters belonging to our time.

The geographical and historical choreography of his fictional families and their patterns are fundamental to his vision of human progress through time because to him families, generations and their ties are the natural configuration of the very existence of the human race. In turn, generations inscribe themselves into the systemic structure of the country of which they are citizens. In every single one of his short stories and, with more emphasis on historical facts, in his one novel, MacLeod problematizes the often-conflicting issues of tradition and progress, heritage and contemporary realities, education and lack of it, parental and extended family relationships and bonds, including in-laws. Although contexts and agonists may seem to be reiterated, they are in fact varied presenting what could be almost called a range of case studies on and of family configurations. None of his characters seem to find optimal solutions to the conflicts they live through, because, ruthlessly and feelingly at the same time – quite an achievement on MacLeod's part –, the stories show that what is good for one person or community is bad for another. Nonetheless his characters cannot help making choices. MacLeod does not add judgements or even

² Scottish Canadians have registered tartans varying from province to province, or territory.

³ Alistair MacLeod died April, 20, 2014 in Windsor, Ontario, where he lived and taught English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor.

⁴ 'Timescape' was first used by the astrophysicist and novelist Gregory Benford, notably in his novel *Timescape* (1980). 'Timescape' has affinities with but is not Bachtin's 'chronotope'.

⁵ Sixteen of his short stories are collected in *Island - Collected Stories* (2001). Two are published separately in periodicals, while some are still unpublished and some unfinished.

opinions to representation, but often makes his characters debate those issues within themselves – in *No Great Mischief* between a brother and a sister who are twins.

The boat and the book

In MacLeod's writings, education and/or the lack of it are paramount factors in determining not so much the characters' choices but rather working as antagonists in the shaping of their lives. When some of the characters exit the enclosure of their clan – indeed it could be called a stage – they do it at a cost. The following pages will necessarily confine themselves to some, yet exemplary, of his short stories. In "The Boat" (1968), MacLeod's first published short story, the first person narrator, recalling his and his family's past, is a young academic, whose dead father was a fisherman, owner of his boat, in Cape Breton Island. Here the conflict over education versus fishing as a means of earning a living involves father, mother and son – with six sisters in the background. When he was not in the boat, the narrator's father spent most of his time reading in a room of his own, where he accumulated magazines and books, many of them novels⁶. The mother, beautiful in a severe fashion, strong and not illiterate, believes only in physical work, in homestead self-sufficiency and in maintaining the *status quo* of her family in the local community. She disapproves of her daughters' marriages because none married a fisherman but young men from outside and went with them to live in towns; and she bitterly, relentlessly resents her only son's desertion of his father's fishing 'profession' to go to university and make a 'profession' of reading books. He, the son, reflects that:

[She] had not read a book since high school. There she had read *Ivanhoe* and considered it a colossal waste of time. [...] At times, although she was not overly religious, she would bring in God to bolster her argument, saying, 'In the next world God will see to those who waste their lives reading useless books when they should be about their work'⁷ (MacLeod. *Collected Stories*: 8).

⁶ The father's room cannot but recall Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, giving the theme an additional perspective.

⁷ The narrator's mother attitude shows a curious analogy with that of Stephen Dedalus' mother in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*, when, at the beginning of Chapter 5, she tells her son: «you'll live to rue the day you set your foot in that place» – «that place» being the university (179).

Yet MacLeod makes it very clear that the young academic admires her mother, making him repeatedly add details to a portrait of her that borders on aestheticization, the semiconscious nature of which is part of the character of the young professor of English Literature, who describes her as «tall and dark and powerfully energetic» and for years «a local beauty», slightly disturbingly also telling the implied readers that she reminded him of Thomas Hardy's Eustacia Vye⁸, quickly adding «in a physical way» (5). She is beautiful in an almost Pre-raphaelite-like way⁹ even when he recalls that:

She fed and clothed a family of seven children, making all of the meals and most of the clothes. She grew miraculous gardens and magnificent flowers and raised broods of hens and ducks. She would walk miles on berry-picking expeditions and hoist her skirts to dig for clams when the tide was low (5).

His ties with his father are just as complex and mature slowly. One night, during a summer spent home trawling with him in «the boat», while they were talking about *David Copperfield* in his room, his father told him he had always wanted to go to university. Later, the narrator, by then an academic, thinking in retrospect about that personal confession, remembers how that summer he realized the existence of a new bond between him and his father, based on their common love for literature, and how he was simultaneously struck by the privilege of going to school he had been given and the life of forced endurance his father had to go through:

And then there came into my heart a very great love for my father and I thought it was very much braver to spend a life doing what you really do not want rather than selfishly following forever your own dreams and inclinations. [...]. And I knew then that I could never live him alone I felt that I had been very small in a little secret place within me and that even the completion of high school was for me a silly shallow selfish dream (21).

Nonetheless, when he remembers that momentous summer and the death of his father the following autumn, he lives in a town and teaches at university. The treatment of time in the story may at times seem difficult because of the interplay of flashbacks with reflective moments of the fictional present, but it is, in fact, very precise and consistent with MacLeod's representation of the

⁸ Eustacia Vye is a very complex and controversial character in Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878).

⁹ The Pre-Raphaelite painter Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) offers interesting examples of tall, dark, beautiful women.

layered feelings of the narrator. In his present, the young academic has to face both old and new conflicting bonds and rifts: his father's confession makes him feel he would have approved his choice, yet he also senses a bitter remorse thinking of his life and death, and thinking of the «lobster beds off the Cape Breton», «grounds» the community and his mother consider «sacred» and waiting for him (24). Centuries of culture make his literary present fight with his family heritage: fathers had always been fishermen, mothers had reared children and took care of the whole household tasks, sons and daughters should follow in parents' footsteps. It is part of the character, decidedly a round character, his thinking of his mother always through a sequence of images, making her a severe, tragic and yet aestheticized epitome of his betrayal of their community culture:

It is not an easy thing to know that your mother lives alone on an inadequate insurance policy and that she is too proud to accept any other aid. [...]. And that she lies awake in the early morning's darkness when the rubber boots of the men scrunch upon the gravel as they pass beside her house [...] and she alone [...] has neither son nor son-in-law who walks toward the boat that will take him to the sea. And it is not an easy thing to know that your mother looks upon the sea with love and on you with bitterness because the one has been so constant and the other so untrue (24-25).

The fog

The choreography of family members changes in another short story, "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" (1974): a ten-years old grandson is being brought up by maternal grandparents in a small fishing village in Newfoundland, not far from Cape Spear¹⁰; his mother and official father are absent from the scene because they died in a car accident; his natural father arrives in the village summoned through a sense of duty by the grandfather, while the boy does not know the stranger is his father, and the father has never seen the boy before and did not even know he had a son. Like in "The Boat", the narrator in "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" is a young and clearly successful academic, but this time the point of view is that of a father not that of a son¹¹. The narration, fictionally lasting no more than twenty-four hours, is scrupulously maintained within his knowledge and perceptions.

¹⁰ Cape Spear is the easternmost point of Atlantic Canada, dramatically beautiful and awe-inspiring – a good example of the picturesque sublime.

¹¹ There is not the least sign of the young academic in "The Boat" being the same person of the academic in "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood".

His arrival at the village, literally at the end of the road from the nearest town, driving a «small rented Wolkswagen», is a highly pictorial and emotional homage to the stunning beauty of the landscape and at the same time a proleptic intimation of a perduring cultural heritage: «Now in the early evening the sun is flashing everything in gold. [...] Even farther out, somewhere beyond Cape Spear lies Dublin and the Irish coast; far away but still the nearest land, and closer now than is Toronto or Detroit [...]» (118-119). It is protracted for more than two pages and does not end abruptly but lingers on almost to the end of the narrative, intermingled with the characters' motions and dialogues.

In the middle of that three-dimensional scenery, the narrator meets his son, John, serenely unaware that the stranger is his father, and, soon after, is invited by the boy's grandfather to stay for the night. Through the natural and anthropological landscapes, the characters features and clothes, and a number of knowledgeably selected tell-tale objects, the story is a representation of the traditional life of fishermen and their family in an epitomic village, which is made by MacLeod to appear as an outpost of Gaelic Ireland in a Canadian contemporary context. The family in "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" is Irish and Catholic and, not unexpectedly, very similar to the Scottish family¹² in "The Boat". After supper, during which John does most of the talking, and after some family playing and singing a couple of old traditional songs, ingeniously chosen by MacLeod to be read as connected with the story, the narrator and the grandfather are alone, playing chess, drinking hot rum toddies and talking. It is at this point that the artefacts are grafted into the present situation, so that past and present are told in two parallel tracks, a not chronological one for the past, a chronological one for the present.

The grandfather starts his part of the story in *media re*:

When she married in Toronto [...] we figured that maybe John should be with her and with her husband. That maybe he would be having more of a chance there in the city. [...] Well, what was wrong was that we missed him wonderful awful. [...] Anyway, they could have no more peace with John than we could without him. [...] They sent word that he was coming on the plane [...]. Well, it was all wrong the night before [...]. The signs all bad [...] (134-135).

A list, a compendium of centuries-old superstitious beliefs follows – the omens and the human beings immersed together in a flood of fog, which is to

¹² During our private conversations (I was translating some of his short stories), MacLeod frequently underlined the similarities between Scotland and Ulster – and his interest in both.

the grandparents the most frightening of all bad omens. Yet, the aircraft transporting John lands safely through the fog, but the car accident where John's mother and her husband die takes place that night in the far away fog of Toronto: «That night they be killed» (135).

The narrator's part of the story spills over in his thoughts later, when he is alone in the room where he will spend the night, which is near the room where he fathered John and where the boy now sleeps. Literary images cram his mind intertwined with images of the local imported popular culture, the culture he investigated as a student, in particular the girlish belief that helped him to seduce his host's daughter. The quotation, though shortened, is long but worthwhile:

The room is full of sound. Like a foolish Lockwood I approach the window [...]. There is no Catherine who cries to be let in. [...] there is no boiled egg or shaker of salt or glass of water waiting on the chair within this closed room's darkness. Once, though, there was a belief held in the outports, that if a girl would see her own true lover she should boil an egg and scoop out half the shell and fill it with salt. Then she should take it to bed with her and eat it, leaving a glass of water by her bedside. In the night her future husband or a vision of him would appear and offer her the glass. [...] It is the type of belief that bright young graduate students were collecting eleven years ago for the theses and archives of North America and also, they hoped, for their own fame (137-138).

MacLeod endows his young scholar's thoughts with a touch of irony¹³, but chooses to stop short of making him a courageous and profound thinker. The key-word, and therefore the key image of the story is «fog», the fog without duplicating itself in the fog within: «I would like to see my way more clearly. I, who have never understood the mystery of fog» (138).

The boy and his grandparents are unaware that they live a life that is 'heritage' and 'folklore' to scholars and archives, they do not know the word 'picturesque'. The successful academic knows all that, and knows that the disappearance of cultural heritage is something to be fought against. Yet, how can this be done? Who does preserve the cultural heritage better, the scholar through his work or the illiterate grandparents who still live their 'heritage', or, may be, John will? John, of whom his grandfather says: «John here has the makings of a good fisherman» (128); and about whom his father asks himself: «And perhaps now I should go and say, come away from the lonely gulls and the silver trout [...]. Or may I offer you the money that is the fruit of my col-

¹³ MacLeod's allusion to the protagonists of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is perhaps too evident to be pointed out.

lecting and most successful life?» (139). He does not tell John he is his father and leaves him with the grandparents, leaving to the reader the interpretation of the title: John, the «gift of blood», is a gift from a father to the lonely grandparents, or rather a gift refused? Or is the fathering of the boy ironically called a gift? Or the scholar wants to preserve the harmony and beauty of the village and its inhabitants, almost as a gift to a living, necessarily impermanent archive? Besides, there is another gift, briefly mentioned: the boy gives his unknown father «a smooth round stone [...] worn and polished» by sea and sand to «near perfection», and says «I like to collect them» (140). Does he, like his father, have «the makings» of a good collector of knowledge of the past? MacLeod's titles are always difficult and layered. Once more, the quotation of the entire passage would be too long. Suffice to point out again that MacLeod's characters make choices, but, as anticipated, do not find pacifying solutions. It would be easy to read the father and the grandparents in the story as instances of selfishness in different degrees of consciousness, but MacLeod makes things much more complex and ends the story with far more questions than answers.

Song and silence

The family pattern changes again, and utterly, in “The Tuning of Perfection” (1984). The central character, Archibald, is a seventy-eight years old ‘lumberer’, faultlessly respectful of the beauty of the woods, «a tall, slim man with dark hair and brown eyes and his own teeth» (271), whose ancestors had come to Nova Scotia from the Isle of Skye four generations before. At the beginning of the short story he has been a widower for forty-nine years; his wife died giving birth to a son, their fourth child, who died with her. After that, their three daughters had been brought up by his wife's sisters, within an enlarged family. Now, in the year 1980, he lives alone high up on a Cape Breton Island mountain in a log house he himself had built to near perfection and where he has a superb, pictorial view of the valley below, the sea, Prince Edward Island and the Magdalen Islands.

The generational conflict involves the entire family, particularly the younger members of it, but becomes especially alive when it extends itself out of the family clan to include a «gang» of young men belonging to other families. The story is narrated in the third person, by a very subtle narrator who mostly (not always) limits his knowledge to Archibald's life and thoughts, oscillating from inside and outside elements. The text of the short story is crammed with meaning, all the words and information are pondered to contribute to the whole, every word counts. Archibald, who clearly received a secondary school educa-

tion, still speaks Gaelic, knows by heart a large number of traditional songs and ballads and is an extremely good singer. He is well known to researchers in the field and is frequently asked for contributions:

Many of the letters [...] came from the folklorists who had 'discovered' him in the 1960s and for whom he had made various tapes and recordings. And he had come to be regarded as 'the last of the authentic old-time Gaelic singers'. He was faithfully recorded in the archives at Sydney and Halifax and Ottawa [...]. He did not mind the folklorists, enunciating the words [...] explaining that 'bh' was pronounced as 'v' (like the 'ph' in phone is pronounced 'f', he would say), expanding on the more archaic meaning and footnoting himself the words and phrases of local origin (280).

When he and his family receive an invitation to sing traditional Gaelic songs in Halifax, at a Festival connected with «the year of 'Scots Around the World'» (184), while his relatives, especially those in their twenties or thirties, seem more excited by the prospect of spending a week in Halifax than interested in singing, he reacts with a mixture of warm feelings and philological passion, although the word philology is obviously unknown to him. The organisers interview other groups of singers, but Archibald's family is the one they prefer, mainly because of Archibald's leading skill and exceptionally good voice and enunciation. Yet, when they are singing and Archibald is asked to cut the song before it ends, he becomes very upset: «It's not finished [...]. It's a narrative». The producer says that there is no problem, since nobody knows the language and they are «just trying to gauge audience impact» (298). But, the austere and passionate philologist in Archibald strives toward perfection and cannot compromise. To his family's chagrin, since he cannot accept the songs to be cut in the middle, he declines the invitation to sing in Halifax. Another group will sing in their place, the 'gang' of those reckless young men always ready to pick up a good 'fight', far less good and respectful of heritage and authenticity, but a group who can accept to cut a song because they do not know the meaning of the words they sing. Archibald, in the end, envies and admires them for their «closeness [...] fierceness [...] tremendous energy» (309), thinking that perhaps «men like them» (309) fought in the «storm past» (309) of Scotland. Archibald prefers silence.

Timescape and irreversibility

Several others of MacLeod's short stories would be interesting too, especially considering that they cover a gamut of family structures. No less interesting would be the novel, *No Great Mischief*, where the case studies coalesce into the history of the generations of one family, from Culloden to contemporary To-

ronto, via Cape Breton. Almost at the beginning of the novel, the narrator, Alexander MacDonald walking through a busy thoroughfare in Toronto, is made meditative, and partly upset, by a sentence he reads on the front of a girl's t-shirt: «Living in the past is not living up to our potential» (56).

MacLeod's concept of time is linear and its movement unidirectional; it could aptly be described by Arthur Eddington's 'Arrow of time'¹⁴: the past can be remembered, preserved, studied, imitated, acted and enacted, obeyed in its commands, endured in its consequences, expiated, and much more, but it cannot be 'the present' a second time – its unidirectional movement is irreversible. In his timescape, paradoxically, the two academics and the folklorists of the three short stories here privileged¹⁵ do more to preserve the past than the mother in "The Boat", John and his grandparents in "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" – though the natural father's choice makes the situation multi-layered – and Archibald in "The Tuning of Perfection".

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¹⁴ Arthur Eddington (1882-1944) was an English astrophysicist and literary writer. He developed the concept of the 'Arrow of time' or 'Asymmetry of time' in 1927.

¹⁵ At least "Island" (1988) and "Clearances" (1999) must be mentioned, because the choice of the protagonists of both stories, albeit for very different reasons, is, like Archibald's, silence.

TRANSGRESSING BORDERS: INTERSECTIONALITY AND GENRE IN THOM FITZGERALD'S *CLOUDBURST* (2010)

Ulla Kriebnernegg*

Abstract

This paper discusses aspects of identity and intersectionality in Thom Fitzgerald's road movie *Cloudburst* and focusses on the role genre conventions play for the construction of the protagonists' identities. Canadian nursing home escape stories and their interpretations can be seen as textual interventions in the deconstruction of the limited spatiality of old age and counteract stereotyping on several levels of intersectionality.

Violare i confini: intersezionalità e genere in Cloudburst (2010) di Thom Fitzgerald

Questo saggio discute alcuni aspetti legati all'identità e alla intersezionalità nel road movie *Cloudburst*, focalizzandosi su come le convenzioni di genere influenzino la costruzione dell'identità delle protagoniste. Le storie sulla fuga dalle case di riposo e le loro interpretazioni possono essere viste come interventi testuali nella decostruzione della spazialità limitata riservata agli anziani e nella lotta contro la stereotipizzazione a diversi livelli di intersezionalità.

Introduction: *The Journey of Life*

The topic of escape is of course a foundational motif in American literature that can be traced as far back as the first immigrants' escape from Europe (see Bluefarb). Care home narratives that culminate in escape include both old men and women who set out on their life-altering journeys as heroes and heroines. Thomas R. Cole analyzes the topos of the journey in his 1992 groundbreaking book *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America*, tracing it back to biblical traditions. The journey as escape narrative already played a role in late nineteenth century care home narratives such as Mary Wilkins Freeman's "A Mistaken Charity" (1887), in which two elderly sisters run away from an 'Old Ladies' Home', since they feel like «two forlorn prisoners» in their genteel surroundings» (Wilkins Freeman 244). In 1964, Margaret Laurence's

* Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

Stone Angel most famously addressed the topic of escape again, but especially during the last two decades, a massive increase in the number of stories that feature elderly protagonists fleeing long-term institutional care has been observed. One of the most popular texts has been Swedish author Jonas Jonasson's *Hundred-Year Old Man Who Climbed Out of A Window and Disappeared*. The novel (2009) has been translated into 36 languages and the film by Felix Herngren (2013) has been shown in over 40 countries. With its more than \$50 million in revenue, it is said to be the most successful Swedish movie ever. The plotline is not very innovative and resembles several other escape stories, yet the story of an elderly man's rebellion seems to have touched a nerve.

Characters such as 'the 100 year old Man' are seen as voiceless victims while still in their roles as frail, old nursing home residents, but transform into picaresque heroes as soon as they attempt escape. As Pam Gravagne explains, «we secretly cheer for the elderly, for the success of those made less than human by an overarching narrative of decline» (47, also quoted in Chivers. "Blind People": 140). Well-known literary examples of such escape stories are Sara Gruen's *Water for Elephants*¹ in which the 93-year-old protagonist, Jacob Jankowski, walks out the nursing home door one day and runs away with a circus, or Todd Johnson's *The Sweet By and By* (2009), in which Margaret and her friend Bernice escape from Ridgecrest, even if only to have dinner in a diner. In Andrea Barrett's *The Forms of Water*, eighty-year old Brendan Auberon convinces his nephew to hijack the nursing home van to make a final visit to the only family estate remaining.

Nursing home escape stories as road narratives

Individual texts that center on the nursing home as a place from which to escape follow the conventions and patterns of the escape narrative, the road novel or quest story. Films and stories, therefore, can also be interpreted in terms of such genres. However, the aspect of age and the starting point of the nursing home add an additional dimension to the interpretation of such «geriatric road narratives», as the genre has pejoratively been called (imdb, "Cloudburst"). Even if some of the protagonists' escapes are only temporary and end in confinement or even death, their journeys and explorations affect their narratives of self and thus change them. The characters who escape confinement are struggling to acquire a new kind of subjectivity (Uten g and Cresswell 2).

¹ The novel *Water for Elephants* was made into a movie in 2011, starring Reese Witherspoon, Robert Pattinson, and Christoph Waltz.

Their spiritual and physical journeys change them forever and challenge the notion of old age as being static and immobile.

«Lack of movement is characteristic of decrepit age», Kathleen Woodward argues. «If movement bespeaks life, immobility – lack of movement – is akin to death, and inertia verges dangerously on the inert» (Woodward 53). It can be argued that escape narratives, therefore, counteract the myth of immobility in old age, and celebrate the protagonists' resistance to the inertia forced upon them by institutional life.

Elderly characters who refuse to obey institutional rules and claim the road for themselves feature more prominently in novels and films today than ever before, thus, as Sally Chivers notes in "On the Road", «conveying [a] shift from self-consciousness to self-empowerment» (213). She writes, «[c]ontemporary depictions of elderly characters on the road again do more than expand literary and film road genres; they reconfigure expectations of old age in a way that stands to make elderly mobility important enough to matter socially» (214).

When elderly characters run away from the confinement of institutional care and hit the road, the genre's conventions are challenged: whereas young protagonists flee from conventions and break out of the familiar, the old protagonists attempt to reclaim the familiar, recover their place in society, and fight against the marginalized social role that has been assigned to them (see Hartung and Maierhofer 15). How does gender play out in this context?

In nursing home escape novels such as Oscar Casares's *Amigoland*, Sara Gruen's *Water For Elephants* or Jonas Jonasson's *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out Of The Window And Disappeared* that feature male protagonists, their journeys are successful. While such stories are examples of road narratives that portray escape as necessary and, most importantly, successful in terms of fulfilling the quest for the spiritual and cultural redefinition of the male protagonists' identities, Thom Fitzgerald's movie *Cloudburst* (2011) is a dramatic story that is, in the words of Sally Chivers, «catalyzed by the threat of long-term residential care» ("Blind": 136) that ends on a sadder note.

Cloudburst

In *Cloudburst*² (USA/CAN 2011, dir. Thom Fitzgerald, prod. Thom Fitzgerald

² The movie *Cloudburst* premiered on September 16, 2011 at the Atlantic Film Festival in Halifax, Nova Scotia where it won the "People's Choice Audience Award for Best Film of the Festival" and the "Atlantic Canada Award for Best Screenplay". With more than 40 awards from Canada, the United States, and Europe it has become one of the most popular

and Doug Pettigrew, 93 min.) which has been called «Thelma & Louise on a pension», Dot and Stella travel north from Maine in the US to Canada. *Cloudburst* is a comedy-drama road movie that stars Oscar-winning actresses Olympia Dukakis (“Moonstruck”) and Brenda Fricker (“My Left Foot”) as Stella and Dot, a butch-femme couple in their eighties who drive from the US to Canada to get married. The film critically reflects on the hotly debated personal and political issue of same-sex marriage and its social and financial implications for aging homosexual couples while telling a partly comic, partly tragic tale of lesbian love, friendship, and death. It addresses the problems many LGBT elders face in heteronormative society especially when confronted with issues of long-term care.

Stella, a feisty, strong, swearing butch wearing lumberjack shirts and boots, and Dot, a plump femme with angelic, curly gray hair, have been happily living together in Dot’s house on the coastline of Maine for 31 years when Dot, legally blind and in need of care after a fall, is assigned to a nursing home by her prudish granddaughter Molly (Kristin Booth). Molly, oblivious of the women’s loving relationship, is more interested in Dot’s house than in her granny’s well-being. After violently taking Dot away from Stella with the help of her boyfriend Tommy, a local policeman (Michael McPhee), Molly asks Stella to look for a new place to stay. Rebelling against Molly’s plans, Stella drives to Bangor in their red pickup truck, dresses up as nursing home resident, and kidnaps Dot from the bleak institution.

During a stop-over in a roadside diner Stella proposes to Dot, and the couple decides to drive to Canada where same-sex marriage is legal. On their way across the border, they pick up a hitchhiker, young and sexy strip dancer Prentice (Ryan Doucette) who is on his way home to visit his dying mother (Marlane O’Brien). While his mother is happy to see him, his father (Randy Bolliver) does not approve of his visit, and it becomes clear that he no longer has a home. Understanding his dilemma, Stella and Dot invite him to join them as their best

and highly awarded LGBT movies. It was shot over seven weeks in various locations in Nova Scotia. Jay Brannan was nominated for the 2012 Genie Award for his song *My Love, My Love* in the category “Best Achievement in Music – Original Song” which is part of the movie’s soundtrack that also features music by k.d. lang, Rick Kurek, and Ryan Doucette. *Cloudburst* debuted as Thom Fitzgerald’s first full-length stage play on April 8, 2010 at the Plutonium Playhouse in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Ryan Doucette also starred as Prentice. It won the 2011 Merritt Award, Nova Scotia’s theatre award, for Best New Play. Thom Fitzgerald’s feature films include *The Hanging Garden* (1997), *Beefcake* (1998), *Wolf Girl* (2001), *The Wild Dogs* (2002), *The Event* (2003), and *3 Needles* (2005). Fitzgerald is an award-winning producer, director and writer who has also worked on short films, documentaries, and for television.

man. Their decision proves life-saving: When Dot during a walk almost drowns in the rising tide and Stella is too weak to pull her out, Prentice runs to their help. Revealing Dot's weakness and Stella's powerlessness, the incident makes it clear that an independent life together might not be possible for the two women anymore. Thus, Stella and Dot need to come up with an alternative care arrangement, striking a deal with Prentice: He will join them to live in Dot's house and help them with their chores such as heavy lifting and driving.

After a scenic drive through the Nova Scotian landscape, the three travelers arrive in the little village of Lunenburg to have the couple's marriage arranged. Just before they are officially wed, however, their ceremony is interrupted by Molly and her boyfriend who come rushing into the church. Dot manages to convince the justice of Molly's treachery, and Molly is taken to the police station where Dot explains her family history, her previous unhappy straight marriage, and her relationship with Stella, which Molly finally agrees to accept in order to have her handcuffs taken off. When the little group finally drives to the courthouse to repeat the ceremony, Dot suddenly takes violently ill. Gathering all her strength, she begs Prentice to marry her and Stella on the spot. He performs a pseudo-ceremony in the car, pronouncing them lawfully married 'women and wives' just before Dot dies in Stella's arms. The movie ends with a scenic shot of Prentice and Stella standing on the shore in front of Dot's house, looking out to the sea, the clouds, and the sunset, and remembering Dot. Her death replicates the conventions of traditional escape movies such as *Thelma & Louise* with which *Cloudburst* has frequently been compared, and highlights the search for individual freedom and identity as well as the social conflicts that precede any escape. However, *Cloudburst* can also be viewed as a critique of current practices of long-term residential care which is portrayed in the movie as a place to be avoided at all costs. It advocates aging in place especially for LGBT elders who are often discriminated against in care-giving institutions.

Stella and Dot pick up a hitch hiker without whom their journey would not be possible. The young, sexy character of Prentice underlines the obvious opposition of youth and age and, according to the movie's director Thom Fitzgerald, fulfils the function of making the «geriatric lesbian road movie» more accessible to a wider audience: «Prentice is the entryway for a lot of viewers into the story. Not everyone can relate to an angry geriatric bull dyke or a vision-impaired grandmother» (Nash n.p.).

Including the figure of Prentice actually means adhering to a conventional narrative: as is typical of the road narrative, he is a «helper character» (Soyka 35). Whereas the male characters in *Thelma & Louise* function as antagonists, Prentice in *Cloudburst* functions as the binary 'other', juxtaposed to the elderly,

vulnerable women, who could not travel without him. Prentice is added as ‘eye candy’ for viewers, once he even saves their lives and distracts the police, who are looking for the old women. He learns only in the car that the women are running from the law but finds this «awesome!» (00:30:12) and is excited to hear that the police already have an all-points bulletin out for them. However, the couple is just about to get married, but before the official ceremony can be conducted, Dot becomes severely ill and dies in Stella’s arms in their car.

The runaway women meet many obstacles, must disguise themselves, use false names, and hide from the police, their families, and the nursing home administrators who are frantically looking for them. Stella and Dot are women travelers who are denied a place where they can be ‘at home’. While it can be argued that this development is in line with traditional road novels, and that the characters never set out with the goal to find a new place, but rather to avoid the care home, their being and remaining ‘out of place’ is also connected to their age, gender, and sexuality. The nursing home is contrasted with the free and open space of the road and configured as its binary opposite. While the nursing home, despite its bleak perspective, is represented as a safe place, the open road becomes a life-threatening space that forces the women to accept the limits of their own very existence in the end. The road is a gendered space, which has been constructed differently for women on the run than for men (Ganser 156). Alexandra Ganser notes in this context,

Drawing on recent remappings in cultural geography, the ‘open road’ appears as a dangerous frontier – in which women’s physical and emotional well-being is always at perilous stake – rather than as an adventurous playground. In women’s road stories, the American [and Canadian, my addition] highway does not maintain its mythical, iconic status, signifying freedom and the heroic quest for identity, which has been ascribed to it at least since the legendary accounts of the flight from domesticity by Jack Kerouac and his fellow (anti-)heroes of the Beat generation (153).

Dot and Stella are ‘out of place’, as Tim Cresswell puts it: «[S]pace and place are used to structure a normative landscape – the way in which ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate are transmitted through space and place» (8). Clearly, Stella and Dot have transgressed the limits of the space and place assigned to them.

The care home as a setting serves to highlight this search for identity, also in old age. Authors consciously employ the space of the care home (instead of, for instance, a hotel or a cruise-ship), precisely ‘because of’ the connotations and cultural assumptions linked to it. While many texts (seemingly) reaffirm these assumptions, others challenge them openly. All of them produce an alternative spatiality of old age and offer the possibility to overcome its negative

interpretations. Here, space becomes a powerful statement of resistance. I agree with Stanka Radović's reading of postcolonial space when she argues that «the reliance on the metaphor of space, rather than the reflection on space as such, produces an act of substitution» (182). In other words, the metaphor of space highlights its contested nature and its unavailability to the elderly characters. It is exactly this «denial of space – drawn into sharper focus by the proliferation of spatial images » (182) that I have examined³ by focusing on the spatial concerns of care home escape narratives with regard to gender. The problem of the 'double marginalization' of old women crystallizes in such narratives that are modeled after the road movie.

To conclude, I would like to argue that as the spatiality of age relations is socially and culturally constructed, the way we narrate and interpret old age is always determined by our own position as readers. We have to interpret texts with the narrative power they have, but also make conscious the ambivalences we as readers have regarding age and aging.

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RESISTING ACQUIESCENCE: INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND LATE-LIFE FRIENDSHIP IN ALICE MUNRO'S "MRS. CROSS AND MRS. KIDD"

Simone Francescato*

Abstract

This essay analyzes Alice Munro's "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" from the collection *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), focusing on the ways in which the story dramatizes the clash between the pervasive vitality which characterizes the two protagonists and their friendship, and the normalizing acquiescence prescribed by the institutional care facility where they reside.

Opporsi alla remissività: istituzionalizzazione e amicizia nella tarda età in "Mrs. Cross e Mrs. Kidd" di Alice Munro

Questo saggio analizza il racconto "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" di Alice Munro, tratto dalla raccolta *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), focalizzandosi sulle modalità con cui esso rappresenta lo scontro tra l'estrema vitalità che caratterizza l'amicizia tra le due protagoniste e la remissività loro imposta dall'istituto in cui risiedono.

Along with Margaret Laurence's novel *The Stone Angel* (1964) and short stories like "Spelling" (1978), or the quite recent "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" (2001) by Munro herself, "Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd" (taken from the collection *The Moons of Jupiter*, 1982) has gradually come to be recognized as one of the most significant representations of institutionalized late life written by a Canadian author. This work has received contrasting scholarly interpretations: some of these have emphasized a certain continuity in the identity of the two protagonists throughout the text; Hooper, for instance, has argued that this story be read as «a simple tale, with no deep psychology or complications of plot [...]. The lesson is that life is always like high school, with alliances and crushes, no matter how old one gets» (72); others have read the story as a fascinating representation of how identities may evolve over time, and of how late-life friendships may help «soften sorrows as we age» (130), as Sandra Buechler has recently argued. The present essay goes in a similar and yet

* Università Ca' Foscari Venezia.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

different direction, focusing on the ways in which institutionalization infiltrates the protagonists' self-representation and possible friendship, leaving very little space for them to exert any sort of agency in their social arena. But, as they realize their helpless condition at the end of the story, Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd are led to a «renewed conjunction»¹ that, while revealing their fragility as human beings, also exposes the subtle oppression to which they are condemned in the nursing home where they reside.

Closing the gaps of difference

The story begins by offering a portrait of Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd in their youth, and by drawing attention to the fact that, after the two women's relocation to an institutional care facility, Hilltop Home, their individual differences have somehow been forgotten or erased. To an external and younger observer, the narrator recounts, the two old women (whose first and maiden names, Dolly Grainger and Marian Botherton, are only mentioned once and parenthetically in the whole story²) have always seemed to be inseparable and very close throughout life. However, the truth is that Mrs. Kidd comes from a very well-off family, and is more educated and mannered than Mrs. Cross, who, by contrast, comes from the working class, is more unrefined, straightforward, but also more physically active. The recent re-balancing of their situation, accomplished by their children, who have closed their «gap [and] equaled things out» (Munro writes: «Mrs. Cross's children, on the average, make as much money as Mrs. Kidd's children, though they do not have as much education. Mrs. Cross's grandchildren make more money», 162) can be read in an ironic way as a reference to the fact that the two women, regardless of their differences, have now been forced by their offspring into some kind of «artificial intimacy», as Rasporich has defined it (116), through their being locked up in the same facility. The social and cultural distance that separated, and still separates, them is no longer a fact, but a memory that the two old women alone remember («They themselves are the only ones who can recall what separated them, and to a certain extent does yet», 161).

¹ Haziron writes: «The narrative structure of 'Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd' appears to be circular. It begins with a state of conjunction between the two elderly ladies in the institution, and unfolds with a transformation of the conjunction into disjunction and finishes with a renewed conjunction between these two characters» (75).

² With the notable exception of Mrs. Cross's mentioning her friend's first name in a significant passage of the text, later on commented upon in this essay.

Perhaps the very objects duly given to them by their children, and with which their rooms have been furnished, are to remind them of their different lives: botany and zoology books, cases of brittle butterflies and songbirds in the case of Mrs. Kidd, and «ornaments, pictures, cushions» (164), which are mostly tasteless knick-knacks, in the case of Mrs. Cross. These objects, however, do not reflect the present identity of their owners, but only a certain 'sweetened' and anachronistic image of them which is cherished by their family. Mrs. Kidd, in reality, cannot read the books because they «are large and heavy and she can't find a way to look at them comfortably»: moreover, «she [doesn't want to] admit it to her children, but her interest has waned, it has waned considerably» (163). As for Mrs. Cross, she values her knick-knacks mainly because they seem to reflect her children's power of acquisition («Mrs. Cross finds out from her children what these things cost and tells people. She says she is shocked», 164). Mrs. Kidd, in particular, seems to be reduced to a sort of fond reminiscence, contrived by her children to avoid the harsh facts of the passing of time and of their own aging («Her children, who all live at a distance [...]. They say in their letters that they remember [...] their letters are full of remembering. They want her fixed where she was forty or fifty years ago, these children who are aging themselves», 163). Mrs. Kidd, very submissively accepts her diminished role as a sort of gifted child («They celebrate what would in a child be called precocity: her brightness, her fund of knowledge, her atheism... all the ways in which she differs from the average, or expected, old lady», 163³), believing that, for her, it is «a duty to hide from them the many indications that she is not so different as they think» (163).

The first part of the story sees the two women hanging around on their wheelchairs and making sarcastic and sneering remarks about the place and its most impaired patients. While Mrs. Kidd keeps herself at a distance, somehow unable to bear the misery she sees, Mrs. Cross faces the less fortunate patients unafraid, especially those residing on the Second Floor of the institution, like her own cousin Lily Barbour. The daily routine at Hilltop Home is initially described in terms of a certain continuity with life outside, but in a kind of miniaturized, dependent form which recalls an experiential horizon reserved

³ The infantilization of elderly persons has often been explored in the fiction about aging and nursing homes. In May Sarton's 1973 classic novel *As We are Now*, written in the guise of a memoir by an old woman secluded by her relatives in what she defines «a concentration camp for the old» (9), we read passages like the following: «They shatter me. I am not worthy, a leper – an old woman without control over herself. When I cried so much in the dark it was a small punished child crying, but that is what I have to battle against – the longing to be forgiven, to be accepted again» (42).

for children («It was like school here. People paired off, they had best friends. The same people always sat together in the dining-room. Some people had nobody», 166).

Something changes, however, as Mrs. Cross notices Jack, a fifty-nine year-old man hospitalized after having a stroke, who not only kindles her affection, awakening in her a sort of motherly instinct⁴, but also appeals to her as a case of medical injustice. This acquaintance with Jack, who is apparently unable to communicate, somehow triggers a latent subversive power in the old woman, which only her friend Mrs. Kidd is able to recognize («Mrs. Cross felt something stretching in her. It was her old managing, watching power, her capacity for strategy, which if properly exercised could never be detected by those it was used on./ Mrs. Kidd could detect it however», 168). Mrs. Cross's heartfelt and furtive commitment to Jack's case exposes the fact that the ultimate mission of sites like Hilltop Home is that of 'preserving' people's physical well-being by tying them to a set of routine activities, rather than helping them broaden and expand their full experiential horizon. Mrs. Cross's disappointment reaches its highest point in her conversation with a doctor, who dismisses her questions and concerns about Jack by replying: «I'd say you'd done your share of worrying» (171), a remark that, when applied to her own case, could be somehow read as: «We don't really worry about you either». For Mrs. Cross, not being permitted to do good towards Jack, whom she deems as an extremely «intelligent man» (169), stands out as a revelation of the absurdity and the helplessness to which she herself seems to be condemned. The woman thus decides to act on her own and to start a program of rehabilitation for her new friend. It is, indeed, at this point that she notices that at Hilltop Home there is nothing really useful for stimulating the patients and their interaction. Patients, in fact, can only benefit from a collection of comforting readings meant to distract them from the limited life they are leading. Sure enough, while looking for an atlas to help Jack communicate about the place he comes from, she finds «to her disgust» that at Hilltop Home «there [is] nothing but [books about] love stories and religion» (168).

Mrs. Cross's commitment to Jack in the story is not entirely disinterested as it also represents an attempt to bypass the doctors and their cold detachment through a delusional identification with a younger patient, whose possible recovery would give her a sense of a renewed agency in the world. In her recent

⁴ Adams, Blieszner and De Vries write: «Because of their stage of life, [older people] participate in a different set of daily routines and activities than those who are employed or have children living at home. This in turn affects their opportunities to make and keep friends» (119).

analysis of this story, Milda Danyté has defined this psychological process as a natural tendency to create «possible selves» intended to undermine «relatively stable and stabilizing patterns» of identity, as those prescribed by the institution where old people are often forced to live⁵. A danger inherent to this tendency, however, is losing contact with reality. Indeed, one should not fail to observe that, after her enthusiastic decision to help Jack, Mrs. Cross not only spends less time with Mrs. Kidd, her equal in age («Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd had not had any falling-out or any real coolness. They still had some talks and card games. But it was difficult. They no longer sat at the same table in the dining-room [...]», 174), but also completely neglects to visit her unfortunate cousin in the upper story of the institution («she hadn't been up to the Second Floor, hadn't visited Lily Barbour, since she took up with Jack», 171), as if her cousin would represent a possible future version of herself which she cannot bear to take into account.

The relationship Mrs. Cross establishes with Jack is also profoundly unbalanced, as Jack's condition leaves space for her to make up a fantasized version of his actual life (which she refers to using the word «secret», 172), largely drawing from her own nostalgic regret for the past. At one point she says to him:

Well. I have a secret too. I had a boy I liked, he was killed in the First World War. He walked me home from a skating-party, it was our school skating-party [...] when I heard he was killed, that was after I was married, I was married at seventeen, well, when I heard he was killed, I thought, now I've got something to look forward to, I could look forward to meeting him in Heaven. That's true. That's how childish I was./ Marian was at that skating-party too. You know who I mean by Marian. Mrs. Kidd. She was there and she had the most beautiful outfit. [...] Also she had a muff. She had a white fur muff. I never saw anything I would've liked to have for myself as much as that muff (173).

In this soliloquy with Jack, Mrs. Cross even gets to confess, unrequested, things she would have never revealed to anyone (she married a man while still being in love with another), and that also introduces an element of ambivalence and envy towards her universally-recognized dearest friend at the institution, Mrs. Kidd.

⁵ Citing socio-psychologist George C. Rosenwald, Danyté identifies in Munro's characters «the human tendency to create new narratives for themselves as a way of rebelling against the 'relatively stable and stabilizing patterns' that are laid out for themselves» (63) in the institution for the elderly. With reference to the newly-established relationship between Mrs. Cross and Jack, Danyté also argues «This new role in Mrs. Cross's life can be understood through what socio-psychologists refer to as 'possible selves': 'Individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming» (68).

Very much like her companion, at a certain point Mrs. Kidd makes a «new friend of her own» (173). This friend is Charlotte, a woman in her mid-forties suffering from multiple sclerosis, whom «years of institutional life had made [...] childish, affectionate, good-humored» (173). This young woman's childish subservience reminds one of the image attached to Mrs. Kidd by her offspring, one which is mentioned in the first part of the story («They have a notion of her that is as fond and necessary as any notion a parent ever had of a child», 163), but such similarity goes entirely unnoticed by the older woman. Although she is «more self-analytical than Mrs. Cross», as Danyté has it (69)⁶, Mrs. Kidd thinks of her own relationship with Charlotte in rather abstract terms, failing to recognize that the latter is largely a projection of her own remissive self, whose only relief is escape into an imaginary world. In a key point in the text she wonders:

Was she turning into one of those old ladies that love to be waited on? Those old ladies also needed somebody to boss. They were the sort who went around the world on cruise ships, she had read about them in novels. [...] Charlotte was itching to be somebody's slave. So why did Mrs. Kidd hope to restrain herself? She did not wish to be such a recognizable sort of old lady. Also, slaves cost more than they were worth. [...] She wanted to float herself clear [...]. She imagines a house on the edge of some dark wood or bog, bright fields in front of it running down to the sea. She imagined she lived there alone, like an old woman in a story (175).

Although in different ways, both Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd develop close relationships with patients through which they build up 'possible selves'. On the one hand, these relationships compensate for the lack of inter-generational exchange in the facility. On the other hand, they also express the different modalities with which the two women respond to their institutionalization: Mrs. Cross with Jack's unexpressed anger and rage, and Mrs. Kidd with Charlotte's submissive acceptance.

Two useless old crocks

Munro's story culminates in a climax sequence where Mrs. Cross attempts to make a further step in Jack's rehabilitation in speaking and writing, by getting him to play scrabble with Mrs. Kidd and Charlotte. Unfortunately, however, her hopes are let down. Munro writes: «[Mrs. Cross] saw Jack's hand descend

⁶ While Mrs. Cross is a people-person, Mrs. Kidd is more literary, and less capable of adapting to circumstances (see also Buechler 132).

clumsily on the Scrabble board. The letters went flying. He turned and showed her his ugly look, worse than she had ever seen it. She was amazed and even frightened, but she did not mean to let him see» (177). Katherine Mayberry has read this scene not only as personal failure on Mrs. Cross's side, but also as an extradiegetic device which, by enhancing uncertainty, works «against the composition of narrative truth» (30). Diegetically speaking, however, Jack's sudden retreat into the unfathomable incommunicability of his illness violently throws Mrs. Cross back to matter-of-factness, forcing her to accept that *she* herself is actually helpless and out-of-control, no matter how hard she tries to reject this idea («she was not able to say a word, such a feeling of grief, and shock, and helplessness rose in her heart», 177).

The thwarted interaction between the two couples, Mrs. Cross/Jack and Mrs. Kidd/Charlotte, has a productive and sense-making effect in the story: on the one hand, it leads the two characters not only to becoming fully aware, together, of their position, but also, and this is for the very first time in the story, to giving a name to it, to representing it to themselves through the image of the «useless old crocks» (178) used at one point by Mrs. Cross. This same image simultaneously conveys a sense of the role and the identity that the institution forces them to assume, and which stems from the limited interactive and inter-generational experience that such an institution guarantees. Their failure in helping two needy younger patients represents a definitive confirmation of their own uselessness, and that is why they both know it is so important to hide from the personnel that they have transgressed the limit imposed on their agency (Mrs. Kidd says: «We don't need to say how it happened», 178).

The full confrontation with their misery leads them to a liberating «combined laughter», which precedes a swapping of roles that sees the two old women, again for the first time, as entirely stripped down to the very bone of their contingent experience, with no outside constriction to force their intimacy. It is now the rather meek and remissive Mrs. Kidd to take an initiative, helping bossy Mrs. Cross to leave by lending her own wheelchair to her and by pushing her back to her room. This pivotal scene sees the two women showing sides of their personality that are very different from those that have always characterized them (as we read at the beginning of the story, Mrs. Kidd is very good at talking but not in moving, and Mrs. Cross is the other way around⁷), and completes the circularity of the story's narrative structure traced by Daziron, as she observes: «This act of charity has not only drawn the two ladies together to an extent they had never experienced, it has also enabled them to reach a state of balance

⁷ See the story 160-161.

which neither of them had known before» (80). The little secret of their failure will remain unknown to others just like the differences that have separated them for many years and went unnoticed. But while their initial intimacy was the fruit of their homologation at Hilltop House, their complicity in hiding failure is now something that binds them authentically as secret conspirators against an institution which they perceive as detached, or even hostile.

Dolly and Marian's rediscovered and reinvigorated friendship, to conclude, is now grounded in the 'here-and-now', and is very far from their rather formal and distant former relationship. Although a belated and sad little conquest, this reciprocity powerfully invites us readers to challenge our conceptions and to question the stereotypical image of serene old age in home care facilities⁸.

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⁸ «Like an epic story, 'Mrs. Cross and Mrs. Kidd' dramatizes the victorious struggle of its heroines. Like a modernist fable, it reduces the ideal and the transcendent to the near caricature. The result is not anti-heroic or mock-heroic. It is simultaneously ironic and heroic, belittled and aggrandized, for Alice Munro does not belong to the school of 'lean modernism' that strips individuals to their skeletons and boils motifs down to their bare essentials» (Daziron 81).

TRAVELLING WITH THE CRONE: *THE JOURNALS OF SUSANNA MOODIE* BY MARGARET ATWOOD

Biancamaria Rizzardi*

Abstract

This essay focuses on Margaret Atwood's 1970 collection of poems entitled *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* because it displays, not only at a figurative level, all the characteristic traits of the old woman: her privileged, though painful, relationship with time; her ability to freely live her life in the present and dwell upon life under the shadow of death; her witchcraft, her magical power over time. This collection of poems also presents an allegorical-metaphysical transposition, which involves the younger generation and the cyclical seasonal rhythms: in the end, in fact, the pioneer, Susanna Moodie, is bound to become herself a crone and to face a new generation, which is unaware of time and pain.

In viaggio con la strega: I diari di Susanna Moodie di Margaret Atwood

L'intervento si concentra sulla raccolta di poesie *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) di Margaret Atwood in quanto in essa sono presenti, a livello figurativo e non solo, tutte le caratteristiche tipiche dell'anziana: il suo rapporto privilegiato, benché doloroso, con il tempo, la sua capacità di vivere liberamente il presente e pensare il domani nell'ombra della morte, il suo potere magico, da strega, sul tempo. Ed è anche presente la trasposizione allegorica metafisica con la generazione più giovane e con i ritmi ciclici stagionali, il fatto che da ultimo la pioniera, Susanna Moodie, è destinata a diventare lei stessa *crone* e a confrontarsi con una nuova generazione ignara del tempo e del dolore.

The polysemic wealth of language

On account of her prolific output, Margaret Atwood is universally recognised as one of the most significant voices in the English-speaking world: at this stage she has completed seventeen collections of poetry, five novels, eight short story collections, eight books for children and ten volumes of critical essays. Added to this is the depth and variety of her subject matter. Despite having amply demonstrated her undoubted narrative abilities with the acclaim that has greeted her

* Università di Pisa.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

novels, which have been widely translated, I agree with those critics who claim that the best indication of her talent may be found in her poetic output.

I should point out immediately that one of the fundamental reasons for the great interest aroused by her poetry lies in the particularly polysemic wealth of language that convergent readings of her texts offer, even from apparently irreconcilable interpretative distances.

It is in this perspective that the theme of the journey may be viewed, which I would define as a real 'semantic prism'. It is present right from her first collection of poetry, and becomes increasingly important, volume after volume, eventually finding its ideal setting in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970). In this volume, the journey represents both the theme and the substance of the work, conferring unity on the text and transforming it into a long poem. So much so that it could also be claimed that the *Journals* are in actual fact a real 'journey' undertaken by Susanna Moodie. For that again, and in Malcolm Lowry's words, are not journeys «Voyages that never end»?

Protected and hidden behind the 'persona' of Susanna Moodie, Margaret Atwood, in a narration that unfolds through the poems contained in three diaries, tells the story of this 19th-century English writer and pioneer. The focus is not on what led her from the Old to the New World, but rather on the journey that, in crossing Canada, brought about her Canadian 're-birth' and from there, her death and even beyond.

It should be emphasised that a qualitative gap exists between the author of *Life in the Clearings* (1852) and *Roughing it in the Bush* (1853), and that of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*: even if potential elements appear in the writings of Susanna Moodie that show why she is given the role of protagonist, it is only by dint of Margaret Atwood's creative imagination that the complete and complex transformation of this pioneer into a symbolic figure comes about, whose myth includes not only her person and the places where she lived, but also embraces an entire country.

This collection offers several points for reflection. These could be categorised by following the tripartite representation of the ages of women previously described by Robert Graves and taken up by Margaret Atwood firstly in *Survival* and subsequently in *Double Persphone*: the maiden and youth; the woman and motherhood; and the old woman, or crone. For reasons of space. I am going to concentrate in particular on the archetype of the old woman, since in the poems in "Journal III", Susanna Moodie displays, and not only at a figurative level, all the characteristics of the archetypal old woman: her privileged yet painful relationship with time; her ability to live her life freely in the present while dwelling on life under the shadow of death; her witchcraft and her magical power over time. This collection of poems also presents

an allegorical-metaphysical transposition, which involves the younger generation and the cyclical seasonal rhythms: ultimately, in fact, Susanna Moodie as a pioneer is herself bound to become a crone that will have to face a new generation.

Overall, in its more typical components, the story of which Susanna Moodie is protagonist appears to be an apotheosis of pure narration: its femininity (narration is female, as in the archetype of the *Thousand and One Nights*, added to the fact that in this specific case it is also entirely Canadian); its gratuitousness (narration is spontaneous, free, unfettered by pre-ordained frameworks, and is an end in itself); its struggle against time and the end (narration is founded on the zero space of death).

Woman (linked to the concepts of identity-generation)

The Journals of Susanna Moodie is unmistakably a woman-centred book. Not only is the protagonist and narrator a woman, but the story is filtered exclusively through her point of view. This choice however is not so much an emblem of feminism as an attribute that conditions its vision. Men only appear as secondary figures, the expressions of a certain kind of character or way of being or interpreting reality, rather than as in-depth psychological studies. From the moment they set foot in Québec, her companions stubbornly attempt to bring everything new they find on their path into the framework of European thought and Euro-centrism; that is, into the dominant cultural systems. In other words, to use an expression dear to Foucault, everything is slotted into their 'epistemes', whose principal purpose is that of assigning names to things and, by so doing, appropriating them in the traditional sense of a rationalisation. Another crucial aspect of these epistemes is inserting things into a hierarchical framework with precise meanings, which then subjugates them to the men that have named them. Her other travelling companions choose names in order to rename this new cultural reality they have come in contact with by drawing on a supply of ready-made images: metaphors and stereotypes that the colonial West uses as methods for processing the information with which it is bombarded in the New World.

In the poems in "Diary I", this woman who comes from civilisation does indeed consider the rivers, forests and swamps she encounters on her travels as obstacles to be overcome, sources of adversity against which she must fight; but right from the beginning she does not react like the other pioneers. She sees and feels that she is 'different' to her other travelling companions:

They deny the ground they stand on,
pretend this dirt is the future.
And they are right. If they let go
Of that illusion solid to them as a shovel,

- open their eyes even for a moment
to these trees. To this particular sun
they would be surrounded, stormed, broken

in upon branches, roots, tendrils, the dark
side of life as I am ("The Planters": 26).

to the inhabitants of the place,

The people I live among, unforgivingly
previous to me, grudging
the way I breath their
property, the air speaking a twisted dialect to my differently-
shaped ears

[...]
go back where you come from ("First Neighbours": 22).

to her husband,

My husband walks in the frosted field
an X, a concept
defined against a blank;
he swerves, enters the forest
and is blotted out.
Unheld by my sight
What does he change into
What other shape
Blends with the under –
growth, wavers across the pools,
is camouflaged from the listening
swamp animals ("The Wareman": 28).

This condition of hers – that of being at a complete remove from the world surrounding her – finds vivid representation in the linguistic metaphor: «I am a word/ In a foreign language». ("Desembarking at Québec": 16).

In other words, Susanna Moodie does not want to colonise the imagination of whoever comes into contact with her; but in a certain sense she is in her turn colonised by 'barbarians'. «I am/ eaten away by light» ("The Planters": 26). Therefore she will be on the side of Caliban.

To Susanna Moodie's demystifying eyes, her companions exist in an unreal space outside time, of an entirely rational order: «the others leap, shout/ Freedom!» (“Desembarking at Québec”: 16). Despite knowing that utopia is an illusion, Susanna Moodie is a prisoner of this adventure: like Aeneas, she cannot rebel against a destiny that has been mapped out before her. There is a difference that affects the entire affair in a decisive manner: the story that is told is not that of a man, but of a woman. One of the most important themes highlighted in Margaret Atwood's work is the defeat of men, or rather, the defeat of that conception of the world based on Cartesian coordinates, which is founded on rationality and predicated on the visible and tangible: clear-cut ideas that find their fullest expression in European civilisation, which for Margaret Atwood is typically masculine. So an alternative remains – the Alternative. Starting with the subject, a woman: totemic body, oracular image, mystical crux, mantic presence – a White Goddess. In fact, it will be the pioneer who, through a painful process of initiation similar to giving birth, will rid herself of the rational superstructures of civilisation and, like the ancient inhabitants of the forest, the Indians, will achieve the fusion of human with nature. One of the crucial points of Susanna Moodie's journey, which marks the rite of passage inherent in her making herself fit for the earth, is beautifully rendered in the poem, “Death of a young son by drowning”. Here, the descent into the womb of the natural world, re-establishes the centrality of the ‘T’ by means of the act of death, because birth, like death, is a moment of convergence between man and nature. The death of the son has redeemed the mother who now, enriched by the metamorphic experience of mediation between wilderness and surface, makes of the son's dead body a conquering totemic body.

By the end of her journey Susanna Moodie will therefore have undergone a profound metamorphosis: she will have changed into the water, the air, and the earth of her new country: she will have completed the slow and painful process of transformation into the elements characterising that primitive world.

Narration (linked to concepts of the memory-construction of the individual and national identity)

It is relatively easy to identify Susanna Moodie as one of the many characters in universal literature afflicted, as the definition by Stephen King has it, by the ‘Sheherazade Syndrome’: that is, forced to tell her own story in a race with time in order to keep death at bay. Just like the oriental princess before death catches up with her, and in a story that as the end approaches becomes more and more laborious, Susanna Moodie – often in barely more than a murmur

and at the cost of great weariness – recounts her tale to her readers, who are also those of an important generation that will leave its mark on Canadian history. And yet, what differentiates Susanna Moodie from Sheherazade or any others, making of her such a highly original character in the panorama of compulsive narrators under threat of death, is the fact that, above and beyond the circumstances of the story, she has reached the end of her existence. In her narrative, therefore, all the characteristics of popular oral narrative traditions are present, allied with the wish – which may be termed ‘testamentary’ – to pass on her experience to future generations. In this way biography and autobiography are conflated; fact, myth and legend overlap and, ultimately, these stories become History with a capital ‘H’, which is shared by all mankind. Susanna Moodie, especially in the poems in “Journal III”, belongs to the popular tradition of story-telling old women who, through lyric fiction become, as Margaret Atwood herself tells us in “Afterwords”, «the myth of the spirit of the earth that she once hated» (115). Hidden and protected by the persona of Susanna Moodie, the elderly narrator bears the traces in her fragile and ravaged body of centuries of history, which she passes on through the story to her Canadian readers. This is why her stories, her story, may be framed above all as the basis of Canadian mythology. In this sense, it is through Susanna Moodie that Atwood becomes aware of her cultural identity and accepts her national history, as well as her own place in all this. As Homi Bhabha states, «It is the development by means of incommensurability that structures all identity narratives and all acts of cultural translation» (509). Indeed, Susanna Moodie’s story may easily be read as an act of ‘cultural translation’ and, undoubtedly, an act of translation in the sense of ‘transculturation’, or the passage from one culture to another.

It is no coincidence that at the beginning of the narrative Susanna Moodie/Margaret Atwood, in introducing herself to the reader, feels that she must supply a prologue, a real ‘riddle’ that once solved will enable an in-depth reading of the text in the direction she wished for:

I take this picture of myself
and with my sewing scissors
cut out the face.

Now it is more accurate:

where my eye were,
every-
thing appears (12).

In these lines of verse, the exclusion of the capacity of the eyes to see in favour of total vision, while it enables Susanna Moodie to break the closed circle of the senses, also restores to the poet the role of seer, of the prophet, of Tiresias.

And so it is that at one of the interpretative levels of the text, telling the story of Susanna Moodie's journey means telling the story of the first pioneers, of all those people that came from other places and different traditions, with different mentalities and cultures, who suddenly find themselves face to face with the wilderness, untamed nature, and primitive chaos. In this way, by going over and telling the story of the traumatised Canadian psyche at its first impact with reality, it provides the distinctive elements of its identity. It is therefore the history of Canada, retrieved by means of the experience of a person like Susanna Moodie who is at the same time real and symbolic, and who through this process of being uprooted and reborn, lived and triumphed.

Death (linked to the concepts of ageing - late life creativity)

Susanna Moodie is a 'Benjamin-esque' story-teller, whose story gains in authoritativeness on account of the presence of death, for which the way is paved throughout the work, but is only actually narrated in the third part of the *Journals*. For her, an Englishwoman thrown in at the deep end of a lacerated and hostile Canada, death – not only her own but that of her whole world, her children and companions – is literally «the natural story wherein all her stories lie» (Benjamin 259).

As confirmation of this double tie linking death and narration, most of the lyric poems contained in *Journal III (1871-1969)*, as Margaret Atwood herself tells us, were written after she fortuitously found a photograph of Susanna Moodie, which shows her when she is old, insane, and worn down by weariness and suffering.

In fact, the final part of *The Journals* may be categorised as an ideal diary made up of lyric poems that do not deal with death but with dying: the old woman at death's door who does not attempt to elude her own passing, who knows and waits patiently, and who is therefore an individual of a completely different type. We are dealing here with the interior aspect of what is 'experienced' dying, with the right to die without dissimulation.

What Benjamin writes on the authority conferred on a story about death would anachronistically appear to be a reflection dictated by a reading of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*:

Just as, as life drains from us, within man a series of images are set in motion – vistas of himself in which he has met himself without noticing –, so too does the un-

forgettable resurface suddenly in his expressions and his eyes, giving everything that concerns him the authoritativeness that, dying, even the basest wretch possesses for the living that surround him. This authoritativeness is at the root of what is narrated (Benjamin 258).

This should be compared with the poem, “Solipsism while dying” (92). A merciless level of introspection allows her to dissociate stereotypical notions and overturn dichotomies, while the search for meaning remains a kind of quest that manages to be both heretical and ethical. “Solipsism while dying” is a cold and lucid description of dying, with neither complaints nor regrets, fully accepting of an event that is part of a naturally occurring rhythm. The skeleton, ears, mouth and hands are now sounds, voices, words and lights. Susanna Moodie’s last word is «ToroNTO», perhaps in memory of the Indian meaning of the term, which is ‘meeting place’.

In addition to this, the narration extends beyond the protagonist’s death: in “A Bus Along St Clair: December”, we see her in the rather grotesque guise of the old woman who contrives to be both furious and protective, on a Toronto bus, and she has now become the spirit of the land she once hated and is intent on conversing with her readers. Beneath this iconology, half traditional-half domestic, lies an all-seeing penetrating eye (the prediction in the prologue comes true in full) that is not put off by physical obstacles; everything is judged in the tones of a cutting prophecy. Yet again Susanna Moodie is capable of distinguishing the real from the utopian, reality from illusion.

I am the old woman
 Sitting across from you on the bus,
 her shoulders drawn up like a shawl;
 out of her eyes come secret
 hatpins, destroyng
 the walls, the ceiling

Turn, look down:
 there is no city;
 this is the centre of the forest

your place is empty (“A Bus Along St Clair: December”: 110).

Furthermore, Susanna Moodie’s narrative acquires even greater authoritativeness from its being told exclusively through female voices. Filtered through Susanna Moodie, Margaret Atwood ultimately transmits a moral that it will fall to the readers to make known to others, to their own people. In this way, pure narration, story in the Benjaminesque sense of the term, does not finish,

«since», as Benjamin himself concludes, «there is no story that does not also carry the question of its continuation» (264). It is interesting to note how the elderly storyteller leaves a living, almost corporeal ‘moral’. Her story does not finish. There is always someone willing to listen to it, someone ready to be charmed and listen to her song of tomorrow: willing, that is, to call into question their own identity, aware that the future is more important than the past. Her story has a mythical value, it offers a testimony to wisdom and communicates the archetypal creativity of the wise old woman.

god is not
The voice in the whirlwind

god is the whirlwind

at the last
Judgement we will all be trees (“Resurrection”: 108).

In the conclusion of her study on the mythical Crone, Barbara Walker writes:

the Crone can represent precisely the kind of power women so desperately need today, and do not have; the power to force men to do what is right, for the benefit of future generations and of the earth itself (175).

With her example, this is precisely what Atwood’s Crone does. In her narration on the point of death and beyond, her awareness of her imminent demise does not transmute into sweeping gestures or an overhaul of her life, but opens magically towards the future in a decidedly emblematic manner. In those who are left behind, Susanna Moodie’s death leaves the same sense of aperture towards the future, through a dextrous play of symbolic references, both magic and philosophical. No longer do objects, with their capacity to endure beyond the end, suggest continuity and life beyond death; rather is it the situations themselves and natural rhythms that do so.

If the stone bestiaries in medieval cathedrals, or the paintings of the great deformers from the past – Grünewald, Bosch and Bruegel – may be said to contain a proto-awareness of Other, the resultant vision always achieved an equilibrium with the blinding light of a deeply-held and apparently incontrovertible truth that enabled fleeting descents into hell. In the modern era, where the tendency described by Margaret Atwood prevails of inspiration from the depths, the Baudelairean descent into the *gouffre* of conscience – «au fond de l’inconnu pour trouver de nouveau» – becomes the itinerary of poetry, in an obsessive attempt to contend with the ghost of the *Doppelgänger* that it gives

rise to, as occurs in Poe, Hoffmann, Melville and Dostojevskij, right up to Faulkner, Kafka and the greatest 20th-century poets.

From this derives the attitude, bestowing a unique touch on Margaret Atwood's writing, which enables her to take on the telling of the ultimate moments and beyond in Susanna Moodie's life, thus passing beyond the limit posed by death. The death of the 'person' occurs in a narrative context that is the most suitable one for presenting, by means of the subsequent metamorphoses, the many facets that make up this character. Time in life is therefore broken down and expanded in order to go beyond death, the representation is deformed by a post-modern gesture, the character's epic-lyrical journey does not accept the truncation, and the gaze flies beyond the cut off point.

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GENERATIONS PASS IN A PARAGRAPH*: LEONARD COHEN'S LATE WORK

Agnese De Marchi**

Abstract

This paper explores themes like aging and late-life creativity as reflected in the poetic world of Canadian song-writer Leonard Cohen (1934). In addition to analyzing biographical material such as recent interviews and documentaries, this paper will focus on how such themes are treated in his latest work, including the album *Popular Problems* (2014) and Cohen's latest poetry collection titled *Book of Longing* (2006).

Generazioni che scorrono in un paragrafo: le ultime opere di Leonard Cohen

Questo studio intende esplorare l'universo poetico del cantautore e poeta, Leonard Cohen (1934) alla luce delle sue produzioni musicali e letterarie più recenti che riflettono inevitabilmente una maturità non solo artistica ma anche 'biologica'. Si cercherà di tracciare lo sviluppo di specifiche tematiche nell'opera di questo autore alla luce del legame fra creatività e vecchiaia.

An iconic figure

The present paper aims to explore the complex issue of aging¹ in the latest work of Canadian poet, singer and songwriter Leonard Cohen², while at the

* «In the Bible generations pass in a paragraph, a betrayal is disposed of in a phrase, the creation of the world consumes a page [...] for my part I describe the whole orchard» (Cohen. *Parasites*: 22).

** Università Ca' Foscari Venezia.

¹ Edward Said's seminal work *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* has provided the theoretical framework within which I have attempted to identify traces of a late style in Cohen's most recent works. At the same time, Michael and Linda Hutcheon's essay "Late Style(s): the Ageism of the Singular" has proved to be an effective warning against the many risks involved in generalizing about late style(s), whereas Susan Sontag's essay "The Double Standard of Aging" has helped me reflect upon the different ways in which male aging (in this case Leonard Cohen's) is portrayed and presented by media.

² Leonard Norman Cohen was born into a wealthy and respected Jewish family in Montreal on 21st September 1934 (Ratcliffe 12).

same time it attempts to investigate the possible existence of a so-called late style characterizing his most recent production which includes a collection of poems, *Book of Longing*, and the studio album *Popular Problems*.

An iconic figure within the contemporary cultural landscape, Leonard Cohen's artistic career has amazingly spanned nearly fifty years. Since the publication of his first collection of poems, *Let Us Compare Mythologies*, in 1956, and the subsequent release of his first album *Songs of Leonard Cohen* in 1967, he has aptly intertwined poems and songs, words and music, to depict a unique personal cosmos which eludes any given definition, but which is undeniably centered on the complexities and paradoxes of the human experience, whose quest for love and self-acceptance collides with its frailties and anguish. Few artists have been capable of making the «strange unity of flesh and mind» (Cohen. *Parasites*: 140) sound so appealing yet so disturbing the way Cohen has. And even fewer have managed to mingle the sacred with the tainted in such an uncompromising way, thus portraying «the most ugly, decadent, disjointed, sinister and threatening underlying realities, not as aspects of life, but present in all of life, the extraordinary in the ordinary, and, what is worst, the ordinariness of the extraordinary» (Boucher 163).

The «poet laureate of despair» (Worrall 1), as he has been often referred to, has charmed generations of readers and audiences who have empathized with his anguish, struggles and obsessions while diving into the poet's bottomless ocean, where his search for a lost divinity and guilt-ridden lust are the driving forces behind what can be defined as Cohen's extremely personal 'rituals of the Word', whether written or sung.

Cohen's fifty-year-long career, with its undeniable ups and downs and contradictions, has finally obliterated the rather diminishing and unforgiving label of «a temperamental romantic, affiliated with the young generation of feelings and flowers» (Dudek 114), as Louis Dudek criticized and quickly dismissed Cohen's rising popularity in the 1960s. It is no secret that such career has also been characterized by long silences and retreats, due to the clinical depression which has affected the Canadian artist much of his life together with a penchant for seclusion and privacy.

However, Leonard Cohen has lately been experiencing a surprisingly renewed creative energy as he himself has pointed out while commenting on the making of his latest album *Popular Problems*: «some of them [the songs in the album] came together with shockingly alarming speed. Usually, I take a long, long time, partly because of an addiction to perfection, partly just sheer laziness» (quoted in Appleford 1). Forced into touring again because of financial difficulties³, the notably

³ Cohen was basically forced onto the stage again when in 2005 he discovered his former manager had robbed him of most of his savings (Worrall 1).

shy and reclusive Leonard Cohen, now well into his eighties, has become appreciative of the unique connection he has been able to establish with his audiences during live concerts.

In fact, in addition to a new album released in September 2014⁴, Cohen is still touring the world at the considerable age of eighty-three and apparently has no intention to stop⁵, thus becoming the epitome of artistic longevity, as many music critics have largely observed while praising his latest album. Among them Petridis's words are quite significant, when he states «few artists have continued writing and recording so late in their lives, and certainly no one as poetically gifted as Cohen has» (Petridis 2). The same critics have noticed the process of rejuvenation which has affected Cohen's creative output, at least as far as his music is concerned, in terms of quality as well as quantity. Some others, like Mike Powell, have even claimed that «his music over the years has been more exploratory than his writing» (Powell 2). Powell may have a point if we consider the fact that Cohen's latest collection of poems, *Book of Longing*, dates back to 2006, whereas he has released in a relatively short time span two new albums, *Old Ideas* and *Popular Problems* respectively in 2012 and 2014.

On the other hand, though, I would argue that *Book of Longing* stands out as a unique visual and written account of the artist's very personal journey through time and his own aging and maturity. The book was published after a considerably long period of silence, twenty years, which included Cohen's five-year retreat at Mount Baldy having become an ordained Rinzai Zen Buddhist monk, under the Dharma name of 'Jikan', meaning, ironically, 'the silent one'.

Getting old

But before attempting to identify Cohen's late style and his take on aging, it is necessary to tackle the complex issue of the definition of old age: in other words, as Michael and Linda Hutcheon have aptly put, «How old is old? Conceptions of old age vary with the time and place, the person, and the society» (Hutcheon 6). Significantly, our society's fear of aging combined with science's fierce attempts to prolong life expectancy of older adults have resulted in radical changes when it comes to our perception of old age and the process of aging; as Jason Karlawish has suggested, «our culture of aging is one of extremes. You are either healthy or executing vigorous efforts to build your

⁴ *Popular Problems* is Cohen's 13th studio album.

⁵ In a 2013 interview with his biographer Sylvie Simmons, Cohen claimed he had «no appetite for retirement» (3).

health account, or you are dying» (2). It seems the bar marking threshold of old age is being constantly raised: «Besides, isn't 75 the new 65? [...] is Mr. Cohen at 80 really 80?» (2), wonders MD Karlawish while commenting on Cohen's announcement of his rather provocative decision to start smoking again when he would turn eighty.

Hence, how old is 'old' for Leonard Cohen? Evidently the issue of Cohen's age and longevity, both biological and artistic, has appealed to the media: a quick look at some headlines will reveal their interest in the singer's old age: «Leonard Cohen on Longevity, Money, Poetry and Sandwiches (Edwards 1)»; «Leonard Cohen Turns 80 (Mitchell 1)»; «Leonard Cohen: an Octogenarian Rejuvenated» (Petridis 1). At the same time, one of the most recurrent questions Cohen has been asked in recent interviews concerns his relationship with mortality and his fear of death⁶. We can assume the Canadian singer who has defined himself 'an old man'⁷ in several occasions, has finally entered the realm of the elderly.

In terms of chronological age Cohen turned seventy in 2004 and two years later he published his latest collection of poems *Book of Longing*, which marked a turning point in the poet's exploration of maturity, aging and death, themes which are reflected in many poems of this collection.

Cohen's *Book of Longing*

We may argue that Cohen's perception of the beginning of his own process of aging dates as far back as 1988, when at the age of fifty-four a relatively young Cohen sang these rather unexpected lines about himself in *Tower of Song*: «Well, my friends are gone and my hair is grey. I ache in the places where I used to play. And I'm crazy for love, but I'm not coming on»⁸. In a sense, these prophetic words seemed to hint at that very exact moment when we realize that our desires and appetite for life, and in Cohen's world such appetite often corresponds to sexual desire, do not coincide with the limited possibilities our aging bodies offer us. Significantly, in the *Book of Longing* the Canadian artist fully explores this clash between the carnal and the spiritual, whose chiaroscuro hues are dramatically enhanced by the aging process. The sense of the aging self and the obtrusive presence of death do permeate most poems of the collection, as Cohen himself has explained in an interview:

⁶ See for example, "Leonard Cohen on QTV.

⁷ «And the voice seemed to say to me you are an old man» these were Cohen's words during the Prince of Asturias Awards Ceremony in 2011.

⁸ From the album *I'm your Man*.

LC (Leonard Cohen): [...] and then we're stuck with this body, you know that, I mean, we're all dying of this incurable disease called age.

JB (Jeffery Brown): this sense of aging is in this book.

LC: Yes, definitely.

JB: Does that signify you are, in fact, feeling that?

LC: Oh, of course, sure. Of course you feel it, you know. My friend, Irving Layton, our greatest Canadian poet, he said, 'the inescapable lousiness of growing old' (Brown. PBS interview).

The juxtaposition of death and aging resulting in the troubling feeling of being, at least partially, already dead, is well illustrated by Cohen's sketches: significantly, one of the many portraits of himself includes the telling line «Vibrant, but dead» which sounds like a witty epitaph commenting on the artist's dissolving face⁹.



While confronting his aging self and the immediacy of death, Cohen offers the reader a book whose cohesive force is still love, both romantic and sexual, which unexpectedly becomes the place where age and death manifest themselves. Critics have agreed on the fact that Cohen has been probing the dangerous territory of human relationships, especially in terms of emotional and sexual confrontation between male and female, for the past fifty years: his poems

⁹ It is interesting to note that the use of colors in the original drawing is limited to the contouring lines: black and blue are employed to define the artist's face. The vibrancy of the blue lines seems to hint at the artist's inner vibrancy mentioned in the caption.

and songs have explored love and sexual desire always perceived as disruptive forces: «a dangerous arena [...] a ferocious activity resulting in countless defeats and exultations» (*QTV interview*). This ‘ferocious activity’ is still the core of Cohen’s poetic meditation, though it is transfigured and reinterpreted through the unsettling condition of being old.

Book of Longing chronicles the poet’s journey through maturity using both words and images, as the poet employs these two mediums in order to define, verbally and visually, his aging self in an effort to negotiate the new meaning attached to his changing identity.

The relevance given to the visual element, Cohen’s own drawings and sketches, characterizes a peculiar aspect of what could be defined as his late style: whereas the themes¹⁰ remain the same, the poet seeks new ways or modes of expression to convey a picture of that «interior landscape that has its own rules, its own mechanisms» (Cohen quoted in Boucher 162), since words alone do not seem to suffice. The function of the images transcends the mere decorative concern, as the book progresses, its true core is revealed in the alluring, provocative, subversive and often ironic interplay between the verbal and the visual: the use of visual poetry thus becoming a pivotal element of Cohen’s artistic discourse.

The visual poem “Dear Roshi” is highly illustrative in this regard: it marks the end of the first part of the book dedicated to the poet’s five-year experience as a Rinzai Zen Buddhist monk under the guidance of Zen Master Sasaki Roshi. The page layout juxtaposes the poem “Leaving Mt. Baldy” with “Dear Roshi” since they both focus on the poet’s farewell to monastic life, thereby offering two complementary explanations of the poet’s choice. The one given in the visual poem is witty, self-mocking and thought-provoking: the poem is presented as a scribbled note to his Master, in which the poet tells him he is giving up his spiritual commitment because of a woman:

Dear Roshi
 I’m sorry that I cannot
 help you now, because
 I met this woman.
 Please forgive my
 Selfishness (Cohen, *Book of Longing*: 22-23).

¹⁰ See David Boucher’s remarks on Cohen’s obsession with «the politics of the personal» (Boucher 139), together with sex and religion: «throughout Cohen’s work, from the early poems to his latest offerings two themes dominate with alacrity and in intricate entanglement: the quest for an elusive God and the search for respite or comfort in sexual fulfillment» (220).

Once again the poet faces and meditates upon his endless struggle between the Body and the Soul, the carnal and the spiritual: the highly allusive woman portrayed by the artist's hand is a naked beauty reminiscent of Indian goddesses. As the image engages the reader's attention, it also enhances the metaphorical connection between words and their meaning through the exploitation of visual semantics.

Cohen's drawings disclose the significant predominance of two subjects which can be divided into two main groups: self-portraits and portraits of women, mostly women's bodies.

On the one hand, the large number of self-portraits reflects Cohen's «politics of the personal» (Boucher 139) and emphasizes the fact that Cohen's «vision is so self-centric that the other as individualized personality is eclipsed by his own» (202). On the other though, these self-portraits reveal the artist's preoccupation and obsession with the representation of the self through his own face. These images are almost caricatures of the artist's face, at times grotesque: dark, thick and forceful lines define the irregular and fragmented architecture of the poet's facial features suggesting the image of a face which is slowing decaying and melting away. Are the effects of the aging process taking their toll on the artist's vibrant vitality? Is the artist looking at his own face through the unforgiving mirror of time? Are these images nothing but Cohen's expressionistic reinterpretation of the aging self? Our poet offers no explanatory solution as usual: «the work itself, Cohen argued elsewhere, is beyond significance and meaning. [...] poetry is nevertheless an activity that is not merely summoned or invoked; it is not self-consciously premeditated, and the images present themselves as a consequence of the desperate and dismal lost battles of life» (Boucher 162).

The other large group of images comprises beautiful sketches and drawings of alluring female bodies and faces: there are no caricatures here, but intense and skillfully drawn representations of women, whose beauty, nudity, and sex appeal clearly hint at the possibility of fulfilling the poet's longing. We are not going to discuss women's role in Cohen's poetical universe, although as David Boucher has suggested «in Cohen's work women are so often the medium through which some sort of fulfillment is attained, whether sexual gratification or religion salvation, or both simultaneously» (Boucher 201). Thus, it cannot be denied that the choice of pictorial subjects of Cohen's drawings seems to reinforce such reading of the poet's relationship with females. In addition to this, it is also undeniable that the contemplation and description of the female body, whether through words or images, is to the artist a source of aesthetic pleasure.

The title itself, *Book of Longing*, focuses on yearning, desire and eroticism suggesting the fact the seventy-year-old man and artist still finds in his own

capacity of yearning the identifying element which validates him. But the fragility and contradictions of his aging body clash with its own necessity and ability to desire, in other words, to live fully¹¹. Cohen, now an old man, tackles with shrewd realism a very relevant aspect of aging sexuality, particularly male sexuality: he captures the contradictory and, at times, grotesque; dimension of his own sexual desire as an aging man. Such preoccupation is shamelessly unveiled in the poem “Disturbed this morning”:

Ah. That.
That’s what I was so disturbed
about this morning
my desire has come back,
and I want you again.
I was doing so fine,
I was above it all.
The boys and the girls were beautiful
and I was an old man, loving everyone.
And now I want you again (Cohen. *Book of Longing*: 39).

Here is a baffling surprise for the poet: the discovery that at seventy he has not become the idealized version of the wise old bohemian he had imagined in his youth, such as in the 1956 poem “Les Vieux”¹² in which he depicted the romanticized and melancholic image of the old «public men of Montreal» (Cohen. *Let Us*: 69), inhabiting its parks.

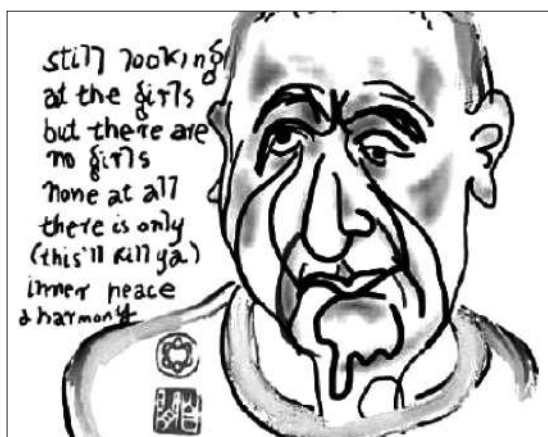
In another poem, “Sorrows of the Elderly”, Cohen continues his perusal of the paradoxical relation between sexuality and old age, while a quite telling charcoal sketch of a tantalizing woman’s back reinforces the message conveyed by the poem. At the same time the playful sound pattern of the lines recalling a nursery rhyme contrasts with the naked-and bitter-truth expressed by the words:

The old are kind
The young are hot.
Love may be blind.
Desire is not (Cohen. *Book of Longing*: 171).

¹¹ See Dr. Karlawish’s keen observation when commenting Cohen’s plan to start smoking again: «Mr. Cohen’s plan presents a provocative question: when should we set aside a life lived for the future, and, instead, embrace the pleasures of the present?» (1).

¹² From his first poetry collection *Let Us Compare Mythologies*. It is worth noting the choice of French title to the poem “Les Vieux”, thus suggesting an enticing atmosphere reminiscent of French chansonniers or even Jacques Prévert’s poems.

However, the 'rejuvenated' seventy-year-old Cohen tries not to take himself too seriously, as he strives to be loyal to his motto: «self investigation without self indulgence» (Cohen. *QTV interview*). And the sketch entitled "The Evening in the Hotel" clearly suggests such attitude: the poet's wrinkled face stares at the reader while a caption, whose language is reminiscent of Bukowski's colloquial tone, dispenses the grotesque truth: «still looking/ at the girls/ but there are/ no girls/ not at all/ there is only/ (this'll kill ya)/ inner peace & harmony» (Cohen. *Book of Longing*: 207).



A sense of ending

But *Book of Longing* is not only about aging, women and desire: together with Cohen's most recent records *Old Ideas* (2012) and *Popular Problems* (2014), it also offers the reader a profound and lucid meditation on mortality and human frailty, particularly when confronting death. All these works are endowed with a «backward-looking glance» (Updike 3) which filters the poet's experiences and enhances his awareness of the immediacy of death as he sings «going home without my sorrow/ going home sometime tomorrow/ going home to where it's better than before» (Cohen. *Going Home*¹³) and «In places deep/ with roots entwined/ I live the life/ I left behind» (Cohen. *Nevermind*¹⁴). The clock is ticking and the poet has to face those dreaded «preliminaries of death» (Cohen. *QTV interview*), the fear of which permeates not only his poetic cosmos but everyday life as well. Cohen's baritone voice conveys the feeling of life 'folding

¹³ From the album *Old Ideas* (2012).

¹⁴ From the album *Popular Problems* (2014).

in' while at the same time it provides an answer to a pivotal question: «How real is death to those who still live?» (Updike 11). Cohen seems to suggest death is a presence as real as his own insatiable appetite for life; however, the poet surprises the reader hinting at the possibility that at last Eros and Thanatos can be unexpectedly reconciled:

Now that my mission
Has come to its end: [...]

The Body I chased
It chased me as well
My longing's a place
My dying a sail (*Book of Longing*: 68).

To conclude, although it is clearly impossible to 'pinpoint' the exact moment when an artist's old age and/or old style begin, Cohen's *Book of Longing* and latest records do mark a turning point in the development of his late style for they represent a deep exploration the artist's confrontation with aging and death. At the same time, Cohen experiments with form¹⁵ as he tries to convey his own understanding of what it means to be old: his works suggest the possibility of a reconciliation of the Self whose fragmentation becomes the place where the carnal and the spiritual finally meet.

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MAKING CANADA WHILE NARRATING IT: MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *IN THE SKIN OF A LION*

Pia Masiero*

Abstract

This article addresses the themes which, unquestionably, Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* deals with, starting from an exploration of the formal choices structuring the book. Specifically, it argues that positing Patrick Lewis as (an impossible) narrator goes a long way in reinforcing formally Ondaatje's thematic concerns, namely, the problematic relationship between center and periphery, between Toronto documented official history and the undocumented and unofficial stories of its protagonists.

Costruire il Canada narrandolo: In the Skin of a Lion di Michael Ondaatje

Questo articolo affronta i temi che sono al centro del romanzo di Michael Ondaatje *In the Skin of a Lion* a partire dalla presentazione delle scelte formali che strutturano il libro. In specifico, il lavoro dimostra come indicare Patrick Lewis come narratore (impossibile) abbia l'effetto di rispecchiare formalmente i temi cari all'autore, in modo particolare, il rapporto tra centro e periferia, tra la storia ufficiale documentata di Toronto e le storie invisibili dei suoi protagonisti.

Introduction

In what follows, I would like to address the themes which, unquestionably, Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* deals with – the problematic relationship between center and periphery, between documented official history and undocumented and unofficial stories against the backdrop of the development of the city of Toronto and of the protagonist's personality¹ –, starting from an exploration of the formal choices structuring the book. The very basic question concerning the thematic aboutness of Ondaatje's novel will hopefully proceed from an in-depth understanding of the narratological stakes at play in the book.

* Università Ca' Foscari Venezia.

¹ In spite of the many different readings Ondaatje's novel has fostered, the themes I here list are unanimously recognized as occupying the thematic core of *In the Skin of a Lion*.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

In one of the most touching self-reflexive moments of the book, the protagonist, Patrick Lewis, while trying to cope with the absurd death of his beloved Alice, meditates on how he «has clung like moss to strangers, to the nooks and fissures of their situations», how he has, in his own words, «always been an alien» (163). After listing all the strangers he has so far clung to, he reflects: «Each person had their moment when they assumed the skins of wild animals, when they took responsibility for the story» (163)². The clear reference to the title and the spelling out of the key-term “story” make of Patrick’s meditation the right place to look at to try and unlock the meaning of ‘this’ story.

The first of the two epigraphs to the novel, taken from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* – «The joyful will stoop with sorrow, and when you have gone to the earth I will let my hair grow long for your sake, I will wander through the wilderness in the skin of a lion» (n.p) –, has already paratextually created the connection between mourning a loss (Gilgamesh grieves for the death of Enkidu) and wearing the skin of a lion. Here, two thirds into the book, Patrick connects mourning to taking responsibility for the story: Patrick’s wording may actually suggest that the real mourning happens ‘when and only when’ one takes responsibility for the story. To successfully provide a more precise answer concerning this story’s aboutness, however, it is necessary to delve into the exact contours of ‘this’ specific story and try and define what kind of responsibility it may call for.

To flesh out these key issues, I will slow-read some (opening) scenes to unearth the blocks on which the entire novel stands; more specifically, I will analyze the frame as it contains crucial indications on how we are expected to read what follows and the second chapter of book one as a representative example of the jumbled chronology that characterizes Ondaatje’s book. The two analyses will pave the way to a more pertinent articulation of what lies at the thematic center of the novel that gave Ondaatje a first taste of success back in 1987.

Framing the frame

This is a story a young girl gathers in a car during the early hours of the morning. She listens and asks questions as the vehicle travels through darkness. Outside, the countryside is unbetrayered. The man who is driving could say, ‘In that field there is a castle’, and it would be possible for her to believe him.

She listens to the man as he picks up and brings together various corners of the story, attempting to carry it all in his arms. And he is tired, sometimes as elliptical as his

² Unless specified, page numbers refer to Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*.

concentration on the road, at times overexcited – ‘Do you see?’ He turns to her in the faint light of the speedometer.

Driving the four hours to Marmora under six stars and a moon. She stays awake to keep him company (n.p.).

This passage presides over the entire novel as it precedes the page announcing the beginning of Book One. It is, thus, crucial to assess its contents in detail as its positioning – a diegetical antechamber which cannot be considered as part of the paratext proper – gives it an authoritative, prefatory quality.

Shorn of any reference to a specific content of the story whatsoever – we are ‘not’ told what the story is about –, the scene has to be interpreted as staging metafictionally the act of telling itself which is presented as a dialogic endeavor that involves two parties. Notably, the passage first concerns the listener – a clear indication that each and every story comes to life because there exists a listener/reader. Before asking questions, the young girl «gathers» the story; this is the first of the physical verbs which unconventionally describe here both the act of listening and the act of telling. This verb is, in fact, followed by «to pick up», «to bring together», «to carry [...] in his arms» (n.p.) which express what the driver/teller is trying to do. Carrying it «all» together is presented as an attempt: a provisional tentativeness is here conveyed, a fluidity that indicates the possible recalcitrance of the various fragments to fall into place and compose a coherent whole. As such, the story seems to be presented according to that cubist poetics which has been explicitly mentioned by Ondaatje as one of his main influences while writing the novel³. The nod to a choice of formal fragmentation corresponds as well to a clear thematic intent: as Salgado suggests, «Ondaatje privileges the provisional in order to foreground fragmentation, dispersal and the isolated image or moment, thereby unsettling the possibilities for monumentalizing historical inscription» (196).

The story which is being told, furthermore, depends on believing; the reference to darkness («outside the countryside is unbetrayered», n.p.) not only stages a context of undivided attention on the listener’s part as no distractions are available, but is suggestive of the absolute dependence on what the teller says: even if the story is elliptical or may bear signs of overexcitement, the listener has no alternative but to stay in its uneven flow.

As the story the young girl listens in the car is the one we will read in a moment, it is quite obvious that the scene does not simply flesh out the act of telling, but also the reading act this kind of story requires. I would thus argue that the physicality this passage evokes and invites to consider is not only sug-

³ For a detailed account of Ondaatje’s cubist imagination cf. James, especially 65-95.

gestive, as Linda Hutcheon maintains, of «the kind of physicality that will characterize the lives of the characters and the history of Toronto in this book» (93), but gestures toward the intuitive notion of the embodied nature of our understanding both the world that surrounds us and what we read. The work of second-generation post-classical narratologists has placed particular emphasis on this dimension, working on the premise that fictional worlds and real worlds are cognitively permeable and contiguous: we make sense of characters in the same way in which we make sense of the people we meet and interact with. Delving on this crucial tenet of our readerly engagement is outside the scope of the present work; suffice it to underline how the vocabulary here employed makes perfect sense within the framework neurosciences present on how our brain works.

The closing of the frame, well in keeping with the fragmented nature of the novel, is split in two. In the first half that comes before we read about the crucial confrontation between Commissioner Harris and Patrick, the protagonist is woken abruptly up by Hana, Alice's sixteen-year-old daughter, because there is Clara Dickens over the phone: Clara tells Patrick that Ambrose died, that she is in Marmora and asks him if he could come to pick her up. Among the other pieces of information which are relevant for us while we consider the frame as a whole, we learn that Marmora is four hours away from Toronto, that the young girl is going with him to keep him awake and that Patrick has a broken arm. Most significantly, the exchange between Patrick and the young girl after the decision to go and pick Clara up has been made, ends with a promise on his part to tell the by now curious girl about Clara during the drive («You going to tell me about her on the drive? – Yes. – Great!», 230). All these details set the stage for the scene in the car creating an unmistakable relationship with the opening section.

Almost thirty pages later, after Patrick's climactic confrontation with Commissioner Harris, the consequences of which, in the umpteenth chronological twist, we already know about – Patrick's broken arm – our protagonist is woken up again and the young girl and him are eventually ready to leave for Marmora. Once reached the parked car, this conversation follows: «– Do you want to drive? he asked – Me? I don't know the gears. – Go ahead. I'll talk the gears to you till we are out of town. – I'll try it for a bit»⁴.

Once we examine the frame in its entirety (something the very nature of this textual device both invites and warrants), thus, it is worth considering it in the

⁴ I agree with Michael Greenstein that reads the change in the driver's seat as gesturing toward a much vaster necessity «to shift gears, exchange positions, and adapt the rear-mirror to reverse history's mimetic process» (118).

reverse, that is, in the chronological order the *fabula* presents so as to appraise both its relationship with the storyworld and its transformation.

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------|
| – You going to tell me
about her on the drive? | – Tell me about her. | <i>This story</i> |
| – Yes. | – She was your mother's
best friend. I'll tell you the | |
| – Great! (230) | whole story (256). | |

Patrick's storytelling intention takes initially a rather circumscribed shape – telling about Clara – but soon becomes «the whole story» even if Hana had simply asked again about Clara. The diegetic material, here marked by the normal font, is ready to be transformed in the italicized piece that we have already considered. There are a few other instances of italicized passages in the novel⁵ but the positioning of this passage invests the graphic shift with a stronger authoritative tonality: the italics coupled with the location, in fact, single out the passage amplifying our attentional investment. In the transition between the end and the beginning (of the book), Hana and Patrick lose their individual identities. The anonymity of the two protagonists magnifies the focus on the act of telling and its dynamics we have already sketched out as it channels our attention not on their individualized identities but on their respective roles of teller and listener.

The italicized passage opens with the demonstrative 'this' which creates an indexical relationship with the story the book we are holding in our hands contains. The passage poses Patrick as the one in charge of the telling of 'this story'. This is well in keeping with the issue of taking responsibility we have started off with, as the most direct way to take narrative responsibility is becoming a narrator. And yet, this is far from being an unproblematic move as there is no place in the whole diegesis which bothers to explain how Patrick learned what he tells about various characters's lives (Clara, Caravaggio, and most notably Commissioner Harris and Ambrose Small) when he was not present. We may certainly come up with naturalizing⁶ explanations – after all,

⁵ Patrick's remembering bits and pieces of what Alice told him about Conrad and her life when she was alive, Caravaggio remembering a dream, Cato's letters to Alice, come to mind.

⁶ The verb "naturalize" here and the term "naturalization" below refer to the reader's automatic attempts to come up with 'natural', that is ordinary, conversational contexts for the textual material presented. Typical naturalizing moves concern – as in the case at hand – imagining a textually plausible situation in which the narrator learns what he talks about. When this attempt at naturalizing fails we may be facing different kinds of violations (of the narrative pact); cf. Fludernik.

Patrick is a searcher, a role that implies collecting thing – but there is at least one story that is impossible to naturalize: the account of Ambrose Small’s final days which we are told (through Clara’s focalizing perspective) ‘before’ Patrick picks Clara up at Marmora. Patrick thus becomes conspicuously possessing a knowledge that he could not have.

Be as it may, this initial frame creates a story about the story the novel tells that wants us – crucially – to entertain the idea that Patrick is the narrator, to posit «Patrick as the pivotal agent through whom the reader is encouraged to enter the fictional realm» (Schumacher 1).

I would argue that this (false) positioning fits the logic of the narrative in a profound way. Before spelling out my argument more precisely, it is however necessary to understand how this narrative works in more detail.

The most evident formal trait characterizing the novel is its jumbled chronology. After a first section, significantly titled “Little Seeds”, which, in presenting some scenes of Patrick’s childhood could be read as a promise to follow him through his life, we enter a world of fragments in which flashbacks and flash-forward follow one another in an apparently disordered fashion. We should actually acknowledge that the novel maintains an overall sense of chronology: we first meet Patrick as a eleven-year-old child and we leave him almost 30 years later. This macroscopic trajectory salvages a certain sense of linearity and may justify a reading of the novel as a *Bildungsroman* of sorts. And yet, at the level of the single chapters, linearity is repeatedly mined in a back and forth movement that may be taken to parallel the gradual but jumbled understanding that dawns on Patrick along the way.

Let us consider the second chapter of Book One – “The Bridge” – which is exemplary in its remarkable interconnections between formal and thematic choices.

Crossing “The Bridge”

The chapter opens with «a truck [that] carries fire at five a.m. through central Toronto, along Dundas Street and up Parliament Street, moving North» (27). The truck which during its ride gathers, intersection after intersection, more and more workers, «moves towards the half-built viaduct» (27). We are plunged in the making of the bridge, the rawness of its being made and not yet completed conveyed by the choice of the present tense which is reinforced by deictics bespeaking presentness – «for *now* all that is visible», «*this* odour» (italics mine). The bridge – this much dense of metaphors – is first presented as the final destination of those who are helping to build it and who are driving

through an urban landscape which is progressively becoming visible. This first short scene is followed by a second bipartite one which shows us the bridge's fast-forwarded completion, its christening and the moment of its inauguration.

«The bridge goes up in a dream. It will link the east end with the centre of the city. It will carry traffic, water [...]. It will carry trains that have not even been invented yet. Night and day. Fall light. Snow light. They are always working [...]. On 18 October 1918 it is completed. Lounging in midair. The bridge. The bridge. Christened 'Prince Edward'. The Bloor Street Viaduct» (28-29). The strength and power of a dream transforms the present tense into a future tense which claims a futuristic projection (the train not yet invented). To measure the dream come true a list of numbered items that detail and concretize it are provided – this is Commissioner Harris's dream significantly devoid of the human presence which excavated the 45,000 cubic yards of earth. The following snapshot describes the inauguration of the bridge, or, to be more precise, multiple inaugural gestures. A cyclist escapes through the police barriers and manages to cross the bridge publicly before anyone else. He has not actually been the first one to cross it: the previous night «the workers had arrived and brushed away officials who guarded the bridge in preparation for the ceremonies the next day, moved their own flickering lights [...] like a wave of civilization, a net of summer insects over the valley» (29). Both gestures are symbolic claims: both the cyclist and the workers want to express what they feel; the former claims the bridge as a citizen proud of the new urban highlight, the latter to attest their physical, literal paternity. Two interrelated details are here worth stressing. This is the first scene in the chapter in the past tense; the present tense, as we have seen, precedes it and the present tense will soon return together with the bridge as yet to be completed. This positioning gestures toward the incontrovertible reality that the novel strives to redress: the future – that is the completion of the bridge – will soon become past and as such it will be accessible through what about the past has been documented. The first crossing that represents the true, physical paternity of the bridge, will not be recorded in official documents. We will learn about these documents much later on in the novel when Patrick goes to the Riverdale Library looking for references to the building of the Viaduct, but here we are already told about the photographs he will find there.

There is an inverse ratio at play in this scene: political ceremonies are just mentioned, whereas the workers' ritual walk across the bridge is lyrically depicted. The latter's comparison to «a wave of civilization» (29) amplifies the countering force of this narrative which tries to illuminate a parallel history which is doomed to be mentioned only in a novel. What may be taken to be a paradoxical, maybe ironical, reference to civilization, a word much frayed with

imperialistic and politically incorrect undertones, may actually point to the fact that the communal, shared effort that goes into such kind of construction is inherently civilizing for those who do it as it requires the organized orchestration of individual efforts. Constructing means advancing one's social skills, developing a common language, finding a unisonous voice past one's culturally and linguistically inflected diversity. This wave is physically framed and potentially forgotten by what will make it to the official documents. The cyclist occupies a middle ground between the official ceremonies here bypassed and the workers' crossing here represented. His flight, in fact, is chronicled both by the official documents and by the novel we are reading. It manages to be recorded because it has stolen the official stage, snatching momentarily the photographers' attention. The cyclist's feat is destined to survive even if it will remain anonymous. The «thunderous applause» that greets him at the far end of the bridge attests a recognition on other citizens' part of the symbolic significance of the cyclist's anonymous claim and belongs in the novel's general objective of giving voice to the silenced.

Here follows a synopsis of the scene in its constitutive elements: the italicized sentences refer to scenes in the present tense, the normal ones to scenes in the past tense and the underlined one refers to a sentence in the future:

The truck with the bitumiers – The completion of the bridge – The bitumiers – Commissioner Harris during the construction – The night of the incident – About Temelcoff's work at the bridge – About Temelcoff's life – The night of the incident – The night of the incident – A week later – In a year.

It is evident that there is no easily discernible pattern here. Thus, both at the macro-level (the structure of the chapter) and at micro level (the various passages) this section projects an idea of instability and incoherence which nonetheless does not hinder our sense that we are witnessing the shaping of the story world. Well in keeping with the explicit poetics at work here, the novel builds a cubistic whole made up of fragments which happen to make sense when they are juxtaposed⁷.

The section we have just analyzed gives an exemplary taste of how this story works. It is exactly in the juxtaposition of the internal mechanics of the novel proper which defies strict linearity while maintaining a recognizable sense of development and of its instructional prologue that lies the key to unlock

⁷ «You're getting everyone's point of view at the same time, which, for me, is the perfect state for a novel: a cubist state, the cubist novel» (Interview. "Michael Ondaatje's Cubist Civil War": n.p.).

Ondaatje's own responsibility for this story. As with the completed bridge, it is a matter of claiming, that is, of challenging the boundaries of attribution.

Patrick as (impossible) narrator

Let me thus return to the key question of the narrator of this story which the frame addresses and to my arguing that positing Patrick as (an impossible) narrator, namely, a narrator who cannot possibly know all he speaks about, fits in the narrative logic of the book in a profound way.

In such an engaged novel that clearly addresses the crucial issue of being granted an audible voice, what matters is that 'this story' be narrated through the dispersal and defusing of an authoritative, that is, privileged perspective. In presenting Patrick as the narrator and sustaining this positioning throughout the novel constitutes a way to mine any official controlling discourse – a very subtle way in which form reinforces content, indeed.

If Ondaatje had called more direct attention to the limits of Patrick's knowledge, the distance between what he actually knows and what the story succeeds at conveying would have weakened the strength of Ondaatje's suggestion – that Canada is founded on a multiplicity of heterogeneous stories that need to be heard⁸. Stories reach the reader unmoored from an overt narrating instance, or, to put it in another way, unrelated to a precise knowledgeable narrator.

In the prologue, Ondaatje sets the stage, preparing a frame that, given its positioning, exudes authority and then bends it debunking it. In giving it the lie, he attacks the idea that only master narratives can survive. He creates an experience of looseness, of fragile stability (if not instability), of fragmentation. And yet, the story made up of stories survives in the very basic interplay between a teller and a listener provided the second is ready to contribute her part, which is not merely listening, but is «enacting experience» (Caracciolo 49) to attend to the people that inhabit the story by setting in imaginative motion her whole embodied self.

This may be deemed a rather superficial compromise, and yet it opens up the book to our own involvement: it is now our turn as readers (and as citizens) to take responsibility for this story. Not just the story of Canada, but of all our own multicultural countries.

⁸ Ondaatje underlies this polyphonic approach repeatedly: «I've tried in my novels to have various points of view, various speakers, various narratives, so it's more of a group conversation as opposed to a monologue» ("Ondaatje's Table").

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rites of passage: generational cycles in canadian animated movies

Davide Giurlando*

Abstract

Active for more than seventy years, the National Film Board of Canada has allowed the creation of countless experimental animated films. Many works explore delicate and complex themes, such as generational passages and the structure of identity; the paper will take into account how works by artists like Landreth, Forbis, Tilby and Janke developed the theme of memory in cultural, social and psychological contexts.

Riti di passaggio: cicli generazionali nel cinema d'animazione canadese

Nel corso di più di settant'anni di attività, il National Film Board of Canada ha permesso la realizzazione di innumerevoli film d'animazione sperimentale. Molte di tali opere esplorano argomenti complessi e delicati, come il passaggio generazionale e la struttura dell'identità; nel corso dell'intervento si analizzerà il modo in cui opere di autori come Landreth, Forbis, Tilby e Janke hanno declinato il tema della memoria in ambito culturale, sociale e psicologico.

The National Film Board of Canada, since its foundation seventy-six years ago¹, has emerged not only as one of the main institutions aimed at the creation and the distribution of films, but it has also strongly encouraged visual experiments in many of its productions, in particular animated movies. As noted by master animator Alexander Alexeïeff, animated works present themselves as the visual realization of an author's idea, freed from the burden of physicality which live action movies cannot release themselves from²; therefore, it is quite

* Università Ca' Foscari Venezia.

¹ The company, an agency of the Canadian Government, was founded in 1939; more information can be found on the official website of the National Film Board of Canada, in particular the page containing a brief history of the institution: <http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/en/our-collection/>.

² Alexeïeff himself is reported to have stated: «Contrary to live action cinema, Animation draws the elements of its future works from a raw material made exclusively of human ideas, those ideas that different animators have about things, living beings and their forms, movements and meanings» (quoted in Bendazzi XXII).

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

clear that animation is one of the art forms which are more suitable for displaying internal turmoil, psychological traumas and restlessness. The analysis which will appear in the following pages focuses on three short movies financed by the National Film Board of Canada: all of their directors, with the support of the production, succeeded in representing particularly complex themes by adopting a visual language of great expressivity and poetic value. These works are entirely different from one another, and they were made by directors who followed their own personal styles. However, all of the three movies share an interest in one dominant theme: the importance of personal and collective memory, whose value in Canadian contemporary society is approached by the filmmakers from at least three different perspectives – ancestral remembrance, autobiographical reminiscences and historical memory. The artistic outcomes are outstanding, even in the rich field of Canadian animated films. The individual characteristics and the uniqueness of each of the works will be highlighted in this paper.

The body and the city: *When the Day Breaks*

The movie, directed in 1999 by Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbis, is a partial expansion of themes which Tilby had already addressed in her previous work *Strings* (1991), of which *When the Day Breaks* is almost a sequel³. *When the Day Breaks*, which over the years has garnered several awards⁴, takes place in a universe populated by anthropomorphic animals, or rather zoomorphic humans, since the characters retain the traits and feelings of ordinary human beings, despite their animal-like appearance and – in part – their eating habits and some ‘beastly’ physical features, although these connotations are used mainly for humorous purposes (for example, a man-goat is shown while shaving his ‘goatee’). The main character, Ruby, is a cheerful girl-pig whose destiny intersects with that of an old and distinguished man-rooster, in a crowded urban environment whose streets and shops resemble a modern metropolis of which both characters are fellow citizens. While entering a grocery store to buy some milk, Ruby inadvertently bumps into the gentleman, who drops his purchases; a lemon falls into a manhole. After scowling at Ruby, the old man walks away;

³ Unless otherwise stated all information concerning the movie and the themes discussed in these pages was provided by the directors themselves in an interview carried out by the author of this essay. The interview was held on December 12, 2015.

⁴ A selected list, which includes also the Palme d’Or at Cannes Film Festival, can be found on the official site of Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbis.

a moment later he is killed after being hit by a car. Shocked by the event and maybe by her feeling of guilt (the accidental bump delayed the gentleman's walk, and he crossed the road on a red light), Ruby retires to her room and lowers the blind. In a series of rapid images, we are shown the lives of the inhabitants of the city: they are all strangers to each other, but nonetheless interconnected by an endless network of wires, tunnels, roads and water pipes. After slightly cheering herself up, Ruby opens the blind again.

The main narrative of *Strings* revolves around two main characters: a man and a woman – both of them elderly, residents in the same block, and strangers to each other – whom a water leak unites, albeit briefly. The connections between *Strings* and *When the Day Breaks* are evident, but in the latter movie single individualities progressively disappear and are replaced by a collective consciousness represented by a complex urban organism, a city-hive whose individual inhabitants form, all unawares, tiny components of. The movie, which according to the directors (Pilling 58) was inspired by the Socratic concepts of community and citizenship, tells the story of the individual growth and development of a human being; the man-rooster's death triggers an inner struggle which leads Ruby to the final epiphany, a lightning flash of a journey through the veins and organs of a body-city which contains the girl, countless citizens and the even the old man, although he has passed away – what remains of him is the lemon in the manhole, an organic element which will soon be subject to dissolution and fusion within the large metropolitan body.

The choice of using animals as protagonists serves the main purpose of the narrative. The initial notion of adopting human beings as main characters was later discarded by the directors, both for aesthetic reasons and in order to facilitate identification for the audience: an excessive adherence to recognizable human models, especially when the movements of the characters are modelled on real-life actors through the technique of rotoscoping, can easily induce an instinctive rejection in the viewers. It is, therefore, obviously preferable to encourage empathy towards characters who, as in one of Aesop's fables, do not physically resemble anyone: hence anyone can identify with them⁵. It should also be pointed out that the protagonists are farm animals, even if the gentleman's clothes identify him as a businessman (Slowik 287), thus highlighting the way he blends into the urban context. After his death, the appearance of an enigmatic and almost subliminal image of a countryside view, apparently with-

⁵ It is interesting to note, however, that in the world of *When the Day Breaks* 'real' animals do exist: the ambulance which takes the lifeless body of the elderly gentleman away is chased by actual, four-legged barking dogs, to emphasize the urban setting, but also the desolation of the scene.

out any ties to the rest of the story, has been explicitly interpreted by the authors as a reference to the ‘Happy Hunting Grounds’ – the concept (of Native American origin) of a rural afterlife, sometimes used by the parents of kids whose pet has died in order to comfort them about the otherworldly fate of the animals. In *When the Day Breaks*, after dying, the animal-citizen reverts to farm animal; however, the whole sequence can be interpreted as Ruby’s inner farewell to her rural roots, of which she preserves a vestigial memory, before finally embracing her new identity as a city person.

Ruby’s inner upheaval induces her to detach herself from the outside world, until the final reconciliation. Fragmentation and reunification are also key elements of the sequence following the car accident: after a shot of the old man’s hat on the pavement, the camera moves up (thus suggesting that the spirit of the gentleman is raising itself from the ground) and a series of abstract images are shown: private pictures of the man-rooster, anatomical plates and microscopic images of cellular processes. Physical existence and memories crumble, organs begin to disintegrate into smaller and smaller components, and the only remaining evidence of the man’s existence is the lemon in the manhole; however, it is still part of a whole, a large organism made of bodies, lives and individualities, including Ruby’s, as she finally finds herself again.

Inner and outer torment: *Ryan*

Inner growth triggered by the encounter with an older alter ego is also the focus of *Ryan* (2004), a short film made by animator Chris Landreth, who was born in the United States, but is active primarily in Canada. The movie, which won several prizes (including the 2004 Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film), is considered a landmark work in the field of movies made by using computer-generated imagery. The film revolves around a meeting between Landreth and Ryan Larkin, who in the 1970s was a promising Canadian animator before entering a downward spiral of alcoholism and drug addiction. Landreth interviews Larkin – who in the meantime has become a beggar – in a cafeteria. The interview (which really happened: Landreth interviewed Larkin several times and the movie can be considered a documentary to all intents and purposes) allows Larkin to relive some phases of his career and personal life, enriched by casual and nostalgic remarks, and occasional bursts of anger.

The enduring fame of *Ryan* is largely due to the peculiar technique with which the film was made: all of the characters are deformed or disfigured, and resemble the anatomical models of Gunther von Hagens’ series of exhibitions *Body Worlds* – even if not as gory – according to an artistic approach which

Landreth has named ‘psychorealism’⁶. A large portion of Landreth’s skull is missing, and on the inner surface of his cranium there is a smiley-shaped field of tiny sunflowers. Landreth’s face is devastated, too: only some shreds remain, hanging on a thin strip of skin – he is, quite literally, a shell of his former self. During the interview the characters are subject to endless metamorphosis: their bodies constantly change, depending on the pace of the conversation, and they occasionally generate excrescences, lights, prehensile appendixes or even everyday objects. In the universe of *Ryan*, the boundaries between inner and outer world seem to have vanished: human bodies are grotesque, monstrous masses, and walls and roads seem to melt – a metaphor of Larkin’s feverish state of mind. In *When the Day Breaks*, the main character discovers her own connection to the rest of the world, but in *Ryan* nobody needs to come to the same conclusion: the characters already live in a sort of distorted world of Platonic ideas, and they are perfectly aware of it.

At the beginning of the movie Landreth introduces himself; later, he states that this is not his story, but rather Ryan’s. This assertion seems at least partly contradictory, since much of the film features Landreth’s personal memories – in particular those focused on his own mother, Barbara, whose symptoms of alcoholism he recognizes in Larkin. Landreth is in effect the co-star of the movie, and it could be said that *Ryan* is in fact the story of how Landreth gradually identifies himself with his fellow, and eventually comes to understand the world through Ryan’s resigned, occasionally embittered eyes: during the final farewell, Landreth’s face shows the same deformities as that of Larkin’s. Such empathy is inspired in the first place by Ryan’s artistic influence on his interviewer: in the film, some extracts from two of Larkin’s best-known movies, *Walking* (1968) and *Street Musique* (1972) are shown, and they are both experimental works without a real plot; the films are basically a concatenation of abstract, multicolored shapes in constant transmutation – in particular *Street Musique*, which can be described as a visual stream of consciousness triggered by the melodies of some street musicians. In both cases, the similarities with Landreth’s magmatic universe are evident.

However, the identification between the two artists becomes explicit when, during the interview, Landreth asks Larkin to moderate his alcohol consumption. The remark, uttered in a strongly paternalistic tone (a detail which Lan-

⁶ Landreth offered an explanation of the concept by declaring that: «what I’m most interested in is not achieving photorealism in CGI, but in co-opting elements of photorealism to serve a different purpose – to expose the realism of the incredibly complex, messy, chaotic, sometimes mundane, and always conflicted quality we call human nature. I refer to this as ‘psychorealism’» (quoted in Robertson 2004).

dreth, with self-mocking irony, emphasizes when a neon lamp resembling a halo appears above his character's head) provokes Ryan's violent and unexpected reaction: on Larkin's face quills sprout. Aware of the emptiness of his appeal, Landreth admits to himself that Larkin reminds him of his own mother, and his failure to save her is mirrored in his lack of success in saving Ryan. Bright threads, the symbol of an ancestral fear of failure, wrap Landreth's head; the same tangle, a few minutes earlier, had bound the head of a younger Larkin, already on the brink of the psychological nightmare which would destroy him.

As correctly suggested (Robinson. *Ballad*: 146-147), *Ryan* is the story of a failure, since Landreth cannot save Ryan, nor does he convince him to change his life⁷. Nevertheless, a message has been communicated: Landreth accepts Larkin's worldview by mixing it with his own, and notes that, no matter how stray and self-destructive Ryan's existence may be, he managed to give his life meaning and balance: Larkin's acceptance is transmitted to Landreth.

Life and stories: *How People Got Fire*

In *When the Day Breaks*, the exponent of an older generation triggered in a young woman, albeit unintentionally, a wider and more complex existential view; in *Ryan*, a senior artist transmits his own artistic and psychological dimension to his disciple; *How People Got Fire* (2008), directed by Daniel Janke and animated by Christopher Auchter and Jay White, concerns similar considerations, in a more strictly educational and cultural context. The story takes place in Carcross, a community located in the Yukon territory and home to the Carcross/Tagish First Nation⁸; the film focuses on Tish, a twelve-year-old girl, who begins to spend time with Grandma Kay, a respected and venerable member of the community. At the beginning the encounters bore Tish, but later they succeed in awakening her interest. During the meetings, Kay narrates a Native Canadian legend, about how the crafty Crow, in ancient times, managed to set fire to a stick with the help of his naïve friend Chicken Hawk, thus allowing all men to get fire.

⁷ The release of *Ryan*, however, succeeded in bringing Larkin back to public attention: after the success of the film, Larkin began to work on a new, semi-autobiographical movie, *Spare Change*, before succumbing to cancer in 2007. The film was not completed, even if Larkin's preliminary sketches were later rearranged into a re-worked project by some of Larkin's fellow animators. The movie can be viewed on the official site of the National Film Board of Canada: https://www.nfb.ca/film/spare_change.

⁸ The community belongs to the group of Canadian Natives located in the zone of the MacKenzie and Yukon River basins. More information can be found on the official site of Indigenous and Northern Affairs of Canada.

Inspired by the oral narratives of Kitty Smith, a storyteller of Tlingit descent whose version of the legend had already been adapted in 1988 into a radio program created by Janke and Louise Profeit-LeBlanc – an Aboriginal storyteller from the Nacho N'yak Dun First Nation and the narrator in *How People Got Fire*⁹ –, the film is a narratively and visually fascinating call to preserve the historical memory of ethnic minorities from cultural levelling. Janke's movie can be compared to a cry of alarm whose importance is particularly remarkable in the Canadian context, where residential schools – Christian-oriented institutions devoted to the forced eradication of Aboriginal culture which were active from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to 1996 – have been accused in recent years of cultural genocide (in addition to multiple types of abuse)¹⁰. Grandma Kay's first appearance in the film focuses explicitly on a call to abandon institutional education in order to rediscover oral narration, which is part of Tish's cultural roots.

Daniel Janke – a highly esteemed musician and composer, occasionally involved in filmmaking – is greatly interested in the theme of the persistence of memory, as his subsequent short movie *River* (2011), centred on the physical and temporal stream of the Yukon river, demonstrates. In *How People Got Fire* he adopts a unique aesthetic approach to emphasize the timelessness of the world of legend, and to reiterate its value as one of the basic elements of the education of young Aboriginal Canadians. The sequences which take place in the real world were created from live footage through the technique of rotoscoping, while black and white charcoal drawings were used for the scenes which tell the legend of Crow; the stylized characters almost resemble cave paintings. The sketches of the animals also show humorous connotations: the Chicken Hawk, who in his attempt to steal fire burns his long beak, thus reducing it to the current, smaller size, is more candid than the Crow and therefore his eyes are always humorously wide open. On the contrary, the Promethean Crow, a trickster-like character whose presence is widespread in Canadian Native myths, has no eyes nor any discernible expression, thus revealing his unfathomable nature. The worlds of legend and reality are not completely separate, though: the Crow and the Chicken Hawk appear, alive and moving, on the mugs in Grandma Kay's house, and even the old woman's dress is embroidered with flowers which endlessly bloom and wither.

⁹ Unless otherwise stated all information concerning the movie and the themes discussed in these pages was provided by people involved in the making of the film in a series of interviews carried out by the author of this essay. In particular, Christopher Auchter (May 13, 2015), Daniel Janke (May 19, 2015), Louise Profeit-LeBlanc (June 3, 2015).

¹⁰ For further information see: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>.

Tish's education follows a ritual: every day she comes back from school, and her return is followed by a meal prepared by Grandma Kay and the narration of a new part of the tale. Tish is initially reluctant, but later develops a closer connection with Kay: at the end of the movie, she sketches the Crow in her personal notebook, thus accepting her role as the custodian of the culture of her own people, and using a personal instrument – this time a purely visual one – to perpetuate the narrative. The possibility of using different means of expression in order to convey knowledge is indeed one of the central themes of the movie – which is in fact none other than the transposition of one of Kitty Smith's tales, transcribed in 1977 by anthropologist Julie Cruikshank, later transformed into a radio program and a film – even if it reaffirms the importance of staying true to the original cultural essence: it is no accident that the actress who plays Grandma Kay is Mae Hume, daughter of the late Kitty Smith, on whom the character of Grandma Kay is based.

The paintings on the walls in Grandma Kay's house, representing the old woman's family, are populated by moving men and women; similarly, the movie asserts that the world of legend is alive and all around us: human connections and the importance of memory, which were among the central themes of *When the Day Breaks* and *Ryan*, are echoed in *How People Got Fire* and reaffirmed as a call to honour the memory of our ancestors. After all, as reiterated by Tish at the end of the movie, «there's only one story: it's big»¹¹, and the only thing which changes is the way to tell it.

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¹¹ As personally reported by Janke, Tish's line is in fact a direct quotation from Kitty Smith.

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STALIN'S DAUGHTER BY ROSEMARY SULLIVAN. AN INTERVIEW ON MEMORY

Rosella Mamoli Zorzi*

Abstract

This article deals with Canadian biographer Rosemary Sullivan, one of the most important voices in Canadian literature. *Stalin's Daughter* (2015) is a biography of the woman who tried to free herself from the terrible weight of being the daughter of a dictator. Memory is an essential element in Svetlana Stalin's life, as in all those who knew her. In a sustained effort to understand Svetlana, Sullivan explored archives (including the KGB), travelled to the places where Svetlana had lived, asked questions of those who had met her. She reconstructed the life of Svetlana in a passionate and deeply researched biography. The article contains Sullivan's answers to questions asked during a skype interview.

Stalin's Daughter di Rosemary Sullivan: un'intervista sulla memoria

L'articolo si riferisce alla canadese Rosemary Sullivan, una delle voci più importanti in Canada. *La figlia di Stalin* (2015) è la biografia di una donna che cercò di liberarsi da un peso terribile: essere la figlia del dittatore Stalin. La memoria è elemento fondamentale nella vita di Svetlana Stalin e nel libro. Sullivan, in un tentativo, riuscito, di capire la vera Svetlana, ha lavorato negli archivi (anche del KGB), è andata nei luoghi dove visse Svetlana, ha interrogato chi l'aveva conosciuta. Sullivan ha ricostruito la vita di Svetlana Stalin, una biografia appassionante e altamente documentata. L'articolo pubblica inoltre alcune risposte di Rosemary Sullivan a domande poste via skype.

Rosemary Sullivan is one of the best-known living biographers, not only in Canada. Her latest biography, *Stalin's Daughter*, shares all the qualities that have made her books loved and famous: a most accurate and in-depth research and a passionate writing. It comes after a number of books, many of which obtained prestigious prizes¹.

* Università Ca' Foscari Venezia.

¹ *Stalin's Daughter* was: winner of the 2015 Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction. Longlisted for the PEN/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award for Biography. Finalist for the BC National Non-Fiction Award. Longlisted for the RBC Taylor Prize. One of *Newsday's* Best

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Her first biography, *By Heart, Elizabeth Smart* (1991), told the story of a Canadian writer who went to England, supported four children and frequented mid-century bohemian artistic circles: the story of a single woman-artist is told against the milieu she frequented. One of Sullivan's great abilities is to tell the story of one single person (writer, poet, etc.) and recreate at the same time the milieu and the epoch she lived in. This is true also for her second biography, *Shadow Maker. The Life of Gwendolyn McEwen* (1995, Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction), the famous Canadian poet. A third Canadian writer, Margaret Atwood, is again the subject of a biography, *Margaret Atwood Starting Out* (1998), concerning the early years of the writer who became perhaps the best known Canadian novelist of our time. In 2009 a biography of Sullivan's Irish family came out, *The Guthrie Road*, which is a personal story but also a story of Irish immigration in Montreal.

This book somehow shows the way to Sullivan's later choices, when she moved on to writing on more tragic subjects, where the life of a single individual is projected against great historical tragedies: in *Villa Air-Bel. World War II, Escape, and a House in Marseille* Sullivan reconstructed the story of a house in the South of France, near Marseille, where Jews and intellectuals escaping from the Nazi invasion of France passed on their way to Spain, and eventually to America, creating an island of art, energy, will to survive. The story was based on diaries, memoirs, and letters of the individuals involved. Sullivan also revealed the private worlds of these people and the web of relationships they developed, in a tragic historical moment.

The special quality of Sullivan's biographies is on one hand that they are thoroughly researched – with a great amount of work in different archives and trips to the various countries and places to check what they might have been like – and on the other the sympathetic approach to the subject discussed.

Books of 2015. The *Daily Mail's* Book of the Year (2015). One of *The Boston Globe's* Best Books of 2015. A *New York Times Book Review* Editor's Choice. One of *The New York Times'* 100 Notable Books of 2015. One of *Kirkus Reviews'* Best Nonfiction Books of 2015. One of *The San Francisco Chronicle's* Best Nonfiction of 2015. One of *Washington Post's* Notable Nonfiction Books of 2015. One of Minneapolis Public Radio's Top Nonfiction Picks of 2015. A *Globe & Mail* Bestseller. A *Maclean's* Bestseller. Sullivan was the recipient of Guggenheim, Trudeau, and Jackman Fellowships and was awarded the Lorne Pierce Medal by the Royal Society for her contribution to literature and culture. In 2012 she became an Officer of the Order of Canada. Sullivan is professor emerita of the University of Toronto, and she is also the author of books on the poetry of Theodore Roethke, *The Garden Master: The Poetry of Theodore Roethke*, and of collections of essays, *Cuba: Grace under pressure; Labyrinth of Desire: Women, Passion and Romantic Obsession; Memory Making. Selected Essays of Rosemary Sullivan*. She is also a poet, and published *The Space a Name makes* (1986) and *Blue Panic* (1991).

Stalin's Daughter has all of these qualities: Sullivan researched the archives of the CIA, of the KGB, the Soviet archives; she went to Georgia, Tbilisi, where Stalin was born, and where his daughter, Svetlana, lived for a while as an adult; she went to Russia, to Moscow, to the Kremlin and the dachas where Svetlana grew up, married, had children; she went to India, where Svetlana was allowed to take the ashes of the man she had been forbidden to marry: in New Dehli, Svetlana walked up to the American Embassy, to defect to America, in 1967, causing great worry in the political circles of three countries, India, the Soviet Union and the USA. She went to England, where Svetlana lived in order to give her American daughter, Olga, a good education. Obviously she also went to the places in the USA where Svetlana lived: a pilgrimage that was linked to one characteristic of Svetlana, i.e. her continuous moving from country to country, from place to place, from house to house, a 'nomad', as Sullivan calls her.

But this is part of how one researches. What is so striking in this biography is the effort to understand a woman who tried, all her life, *not* to be Stalin's daughter, somehow never managing to escape that horrific brand or destiny; a woman, who in spite of everything, in spite of getting to know Stalin's crimes, in spite of her mother's suicide due to her impossibility to live further with Stalin and his criminal power, in her own way loved her father and in some ways was similar to him.

This biography is strictly linked to the theme of this conference: memory. Sullivan's book is based on memory, on the memories of the people who had actually known and written about Svetlana, on Svetlana's memories, and partly also on Sullivan's own memories.

Touchingly, Sullivan often underlines how one's childhood is always remembered as a period of joy, of love. It is so for her own childhood (Sullivan's) but it is so even for Svetlana, whose childhood becomes something to be cherished: when she lived in the Kremlin and in the dachas, when she had not yet discovered that her mother had committed suicide, when she was, as a child, Stalin's "little sparrow".

At the 2015 Venice Biennale, in the pavilion "Codice Italia", there was a video presenting Umberto Eco speaking on memory. Eco rightly underlined how memory is something that moves and changes: things we remember are not like things one can recover in the attic, they change as we grow old, as we try to remember: remembering is an active function – one could say a little like the CERN proton which changes as we look at it. Therefore using memory is trying to catch something that is not static, that changes as we try to capture it.

Memory is an essential element in *Stalin's Daughter*. In a skype interview we asked the following questions to Sullivan. We are most honoured and happy to be able to print here her answers.

A skype interview

Do you think that Svetlana, in old age, as Lana Evans (her American name, with which she tried to cancel Svetlana Stalin), or as Svetlana Alliluyeva (her mother's name), thought of her childhood with nostalgia, because it was so far and gone? Was she imagining it? Or did she really have a joyful childhood?

When Svetlana spoke of her childhood, she referred to it as 'that place of sunshine I call my childhood'. She was remembering the summers and weekends she spent at the Stalin family dacha called Zubalovo. She could recall every inch of the dacha – the lilac gardens, the duck pond, the tree house where she played with her brother, the streams where she fished with her grandfather, Sergei, and the surrounding birch forest where they collected mushrooms. There were picnics with the children of visiting relatives and with the husbands and wives of her father's political colleagues. She called them all aunts and uncles. She kept this memory sealed, as in a glass globe, for it was destroyed when her mother died in 1932 when Svetlana was six-and-a-half. She was told her mother had died of appendicitis and did not learn that the cause of her death was actually suicide until she was sixteen years old. But Svetlana was too honest and too intelligent not to admit that many of the 'uncles' who visited had participated in the political purges of those years under Stalin's policy of forced collectivization. So her childhood was a strange fiction; she had to insist on her right to see it through the innocent eyes of the child. She was able to do this by believing that her mother had created this beautiful world of sunshine. After her mother's death, the world changed and a terrible darkness followed.

Memory seems to be important in Svetlana's life: not only the memory of her father's crimes – killing off or imprisoning even members of the family – but also the memory of what her mother – and one may say even her father – had done for her, giving her a very good education: Svetlana seems haunted by the sense that she must give Olga a good education, and her move to Cambridge is very much depending on the presence of a very good school, the Quaker "Friends' School" for Olga. Would you agree on this?

In actuality, Nadya [Svetlana's mother] was a distant, preoccupied mother. Svetlana never remembered her mother embracing her, and only recalled the smell of her mother's perfume as she came to say goodnight. She treasured one photograph of her mother holding her as an infant because it was a testament to the fact that she was loved. But she held to the idea that her mother demonstrated her love for her by her devotion to her children's education. In addition to her nanny, Svetlana had a governess and music and art lessons, and was taught German by the time she was six. Svetlana transferred the same obses-

sion with education to her children. Even as her finances became increasingly precarious when she lived in the US after her defection, she found the money to send her daughter to private schools, both in Princeton and in Cambridge.

Which are the most fascinating, or horrifying memories you have of your trips around the world to check out documents, things and places for this book? Which of your books offers you the best memories?

Each of the biographies I've written has offered fascinating memories. When I wrote my biography of Elizabeth Smart I ended up having breakfast with the actor Peter Ustinov. He had met Elizabeth when both had attended acting school together. He was wonderful as he recalled "Canadian Betty". At the time, he had no idea she would turn into the woman who wrote the masterpiece *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*. In writing about Gwendolyn MacEwen, I wanted to understand, first hand, her obsession with all things Egyptian and particularly with the Pharaoh Akhenaton about whom she wrote a novel. I was able to travel to Egypt with the world specialist on Akhenaton, Donald Redford, who invited me to accompany him with a number of his patrons on a three-week trip. We visited his dig sites, and many of the temples and landscapes that Gwendolyn wrote about. In writing about Margaret Atwood, I climbed through the ravines that abutted the bottom of the street where she lived as a child and that are such an obsession in her fiction and I followed her down to Radcliffe and Harvard so that I could reconstruct her graduate student years. However, no journey has been longer and more elaborate than the journey I took to follow Svetlana—from Saint Petersburg and Moscow to Tbilisi and London and the Lake District. The people I met compelled me, from Stalin's grandson, Alexander Burdonsky, to the archaeologist Lady Jane Renfrew, all so willing to speak about Svetlana whom they cared about deeply and whose fate they felt was tragic.

The reader's reaction in reading this book is also a questioning of his or her own memory: as I was reading it, I was wondering: in 1953 how much did people, ordinary people, not politicians, know of Stalin's crimes? This is a more general, historical question, that touches on one's teen-ager's memories. One feels that one lived in a bubble, ignoring the tragedies that were going on in the Soviet Union, and of course in Europe in the Jewish annihilation camps. Which are your first memories of historical tragedies, gulags, Jewish persecution, war? Did you have any as a young girl?

In 1953, it would have been impossible to know anything about Stalin's crimes. When these crimes were revealed by Khrushchev in his Secret Speech in 1956, the Soviet public were devastated. This only goes to show how powerful pro-

paganda can be. Soviet citizens believed in Stalin's cult of personality – he was the benevolent father who protected them against their enemies. It's a terrible strategy – to use fear to create the “enemies of the people” so that people can be manipulated and remain docile. I only became aware of the tragedies of the Stalin era when I entered university in 1964 and began to read Russian literature. It was then too, through my Jewish friends, that I began to really understand the enormous tragedy of the Holocaust. One of the first places I visited when I went to study in England in 1969 was Dachau.

We are very grateful to and we thank Rosemary Sullivan for allowing us to publish this interview.

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QUÉBEC: MEMORIA E FILIAZIONE



DE LA NOUVELLE-FRANCE AU QUÉBEC: ÉCRIRE LA FILIATION EN FRANÇAIS

Alessandra Ferraro*

Abstract

Briève introduction au dossier qui regroupe les textes de la section québécoise présentés lors du séminaire “Narrating Canada: Generations, Memories, Identities / Raconter le Canada: générations, mémoires, identités” (Venise 11-12 novembre, 2015).

From Nouvelle-France to Québec: Writing Filiation in French

Brief presentation of papers delivered at the Colloquium “Narrating Canada: Generations, Memories, Identities / Raconter le Canada: générations, mémoires, identités” (Venise 11-12 novembre, 2015), focusing on the francophone contribution to Canadian identity and culture.

Dalla Nouvelle-France al Québec: scrivere la filiazione in francese

Breve presentazione degli studi di ambito francofono presentati al seminario “Narrating Canada: Generations, Memories, Identities / Raconter le Canada: générations, mémoires, identités” (Venezia 11-12 novembre, 2015).

Ce dossier consacré à la littérature de la Nouvelle-France au Québec recueille des textes présentés lors du séminaire *Raconter le Canada: générations, mémoires, identités* qui s’est tenu à Venise le 11 et 12 novembre 2015. À ce noyau originaire que constituent le témoignage de l’écrivain québécois Pierre Samson et les textes d’Amandine Bonesso et de Valeria Sperti, s’ajoute la contribution de Marie-Emmanuelle Lapointe. Clôt la section une bibliographie dans laquelle Maura Felice recense les écrits critiques portant sur la thématique, surtout par rapport à la francophonie québécoise, et en se limitant à rendre compte des domaines sociologique et littéraire.

Le fil rouge qui traverse les textes réunis dans ce dossier est constitué par la réflexion sur le récit de filiation, catégorie définie par la critique française et québécoise depuis le tournant des années 2000 (Baetens, Viart; Demanze; Demanze, Lapointe; Cellard, Lapointe).

* Università di Udine.

Oltreoceano. L’identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

Dans son texte liminaire, l'écrivain québécois Pierre Samson met en perspective sa propre expérience autobiographique avec le thème de la filiation qui parcourt toute sa production romanesque. Plus particulièrement son avant-dernier roman, *La Maison des pluies*, raconte du point de vue du père, un professeur de linguistique, la recherche généalogique de son enfant, dont il ignorait l'existence. Les thèmes de la langue et de l'héritage se croisent alors en mettant en jeu le passé et le présent, mais également le futur, dans la mesure où le manque, l'absence et la perte qui marquent la transmission entre le sujet et sa descendance affecte également la possibilité d'un avenir.

Cette nécessité de rétablir un lien entre générations est présente dans le film *Tout ce que tu possèdes* de Bernard Émond. Comme beaucoup d'ouvrages contemporains dans le contexte québécois, la production du cinéaste, remarquée Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe, témoigne du désir de s'inscrire dans une histoire et dans une durée.

L'essai de Valeria Sperti sur Nancy Huston focalise sur une autre œuvre de la filiation qui renouvelle les formes autobiographiques dans la littérature contemporaine. La romancière de langue maternelle anglaise, mais qui écrit en français, raconte dans *Bad Girl* sa propre vie sur le fond de l'histoire d'une famille appartenant à la classe moyenne canadienne anglaise du milieu des années Cinquante. La narratrice adresse son récit à son double, représenté par elle-même quand elle était un fœtus. À travers cette autobiographie intersubjective et intergénérationnelle, Huston élargit ainsi le domaine du récit de soi au point de vue temporel, faisant remonter la formation de la subjectivité à la période d'avant la naissance et y incluant l'histoire sociale contemporaine.

L'essai d'Amandine Bonesso prend en considération quelques aspects thématiques et discursifs de la correspondance de Marie de l'Incarnation, première missionnaire catholique en Nouvelle-France, doublement liée à la figure de son fils, Claude Martin, qui en édita les œuvres

Imprégnés d'un sentiment d'exil perpétuel et marqués par la coupure des origines, aussi bien géographiques que familiales les écrits de l'ursuline, ainsi que les textes de Nancy Huston, racontent le sentiment de la perte d'un lien biologique important, que ce soit son propre fils quitté pour embrasser la cause missionnaire, ou sa propre mère qui a abandonné la jeune Nancy en bas-âge.

Ces textes confirment que les questions de la mémoire et de la filiation se présentent comme centrales dans la littérature au Québec. Depuis les écrits fondateurs, vie individuelle et vie sociale s'entrecroisent intimement car, à travers le récit de ses liens biologiques, on imagine dans le futur sa propre identité et l'identité de la communauté à laquelle on appartient.

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FICTION ET MÉMOIRE VIVE OU LA DISSIPATION D'UN MALENTENDU

Pierre Samson*

Abstract

À travers des références à sa biographie et aux personnages de ses romans, l'écrivain Pierre Samson propose une réflexion sur les conditions actuelles qui permettent d'accéder à la connaissance et de s'approprier une langue. Il révèle ainsi des inquiétudes à l'égard des risques de régression en termes de langage, de mémoire et de relations humaines qu'impliquent le mode virtuel et la sur-information du progrès technologique.

Fiction and Memory or Dissipation of a Misunderstanding

Pierre Samson, through references to his biography and his fictional characters, offers a reflection on the current conditions of access to knowledge and appropriation language revealing some concern with respect to the risks of regression in terms of language, memory and human relationships implicated by the virtual mode and over-information technological progress.

Finzione e memoria viva o la dissipazione di un malinteso

Pierre Samson, attraverso riferimenti alla propria biografia e ai suoi personaggi romanzeschi, propone una riflessione sulle circostanze attuali relative all'accesso al sapere e all'appropriazione linguistica. Esprime preoccupazione rispetto ai rischi di regressione sul piano della lingua, della memoria e delle relazioni umane implicati dalle modalità virtuali e di sovra-informazione generate dal progresso tecnologico.

Qu'est-ce qu'un malentendu? Selon l'Académie française, il s'agit d'une «divergence d'interprétation sur des paroles et des actes, qui empêche l'accord». En fait, peut-être est-ce l'exact contraire d'un mensonge, un 'malparlé' et, dans ce cas, nous sommes, c'est-à-dire moi et mon travail, les fruits d'un malentendu. Je m'explique.

Quand Pauline Carrier, issue d'une caste s'apparentant à celles des intouchables, rencontre Jacques Samson, de la petite-bourgeoisie, elle a déjà une enfant, fruit d'un mariage violent, interrompu par la désertion du mari. Jacques, honnête catholique, avait été convaincu par sa mère, qui le destinait à la prêtrise, qu'il était stérile parce que diabétique. Par conséquent, toute relation

* Écrivain, Montréal.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

sexuelle représentait un péché mortel. Or, les tourments hormonaux dépassant en efficacité les pires menaces de l'enfer, ce qui devait arriver arriva: Pauline, qui n'avait jamais voulu être mère, se retrouva enceinte trois fois plutôt qu'une, et adultère par-dessus le marché, car le divorce était chose impensable.

Je suis, donc, comme mes sœurs, le résultat d'un truculent malentendu. Mais, me direz-vous, quels liens unissent cet *imbroglio* à la fiction, à la mémoire, à mon travail?

Vous avez devant vous un homme destiné à l'amnésie et à l'oubli, au silence et à la mutité, parce qu'issu du prolétariat, un homme qui, grâce à la lecture, ou est-ce à cause d'elle, s'est détourné du sort qui l'attendait, a décidé de prendre la parole et tente depuis de la graver dans un marbre mémoriel.

J'aurais dû être un homme sans histoires. Le pedigree que je vous ai dévoilé en est la prémisse. De surcroît, j'ai grandi dans un environnement dépourvu de toute référence à la famille réelle, car elle était indésirée, comme celles qui les ont précédées, et les nobles sentiments qui auraient dû l'animer ont été remplacés par une suite de gestes et d'attitudes tenant davantage du procédé mimétique qu'à une véritable expression des sentiments. Nous agissions comme un clan idéalisé et nous évoluions au sein d'une construction du bonheur possible échafaudée à partir de modèles extérieurs à notre réalité: idées reçues, images pieuses, représentations télévisuelles. J'ai grandi au sein d'une fiction dans laquelle les joies, les manifestations d'affection et même les accès de colère revêtaient une texture artificielle. Je n'étonnerai personne en affirmant que mes premières lectures romanesques ont immédiatement dégagé un parfum d'authenticité qui me charme encore aujourd'hui s'il émane d'un bon roman.

Ici s'interrompent les confessions intimes: je n'ai pas du tout l'intention de vous dresser une liste d'événements éloquents, voire traumatisants, qui, aujourd'hui, m'apparaissent cocasses. Vous avez une bonne idée de l'origine de ma soif de réalité qu'étanche, étrangement, une exploration de toutes les fictions possibles. Mes problèmes psychologiques égaieront, si le besoin se fait sentir, un autre symposium.

Maintenant, permettez-moi de citer un peu longuement Platon, traduit par Mario Meunier en 1922:

Et le roi répondit:

«Très ingénieux Theuth, tel homme est capable de créer les arts, et tel autre est à même de juger quel lot d'utilité ou de nocivité ils conféreront à ceux qui en feront usage. Et c'est ainsi que toi, père de l'écriture, tu lui attribues, par bienveillance, tout le contraire de ce qu'elle peut apporter.

[275] Elle ne peut produire dans les âmes, en effet, que l'oubli de ce qu'elles savent en leur faisant négliger la mémoire. Parce qu'ils auront foi dans l'écriture, c'est par le dehors, par des empreintes étrangères, et non plus du dedans et du fond d'eux-

mêmes, que les hommes chercheront à se ressouvenir. Tu as trouvé le moyen, non point d'enrichir la mémoire, mais de conserver les souvenirs qu'elle a».

Ce n'est pas une mince affaire d'être en désaccord avec Platon, surtout si vous le citez malhonnêtement (Phèdre n'est pas une condamnation de l'écriture, mais son procès) et si, comme moi, vous n'êtes pas un universitaire à proprement parler. Toutefois, mon intervention, aussi candide soit-elle, s'appuie sur deux arguments principaux: entre la mémoire orale et l'écrite, je choisis la dernière et, n'en déplaise à plusieurs, j'avance qu'il n'est pas nécessaire d'avoir raison. Être crédible suffit amplement.

Mais comment cette approche se traduit-elle dans mon travail?

Mes premiers romans, qui composent ma trilogie brésilienne, s'intéressent déjà à la famille et à la mémoire. *Le Messie de Belém* adopte une structure biblique pour recomposer la vie d'un homme jugé providentiel à partir de lambeaux de souvenirs, mais des lambeaux enjolivés par des élans fantasmagoriques. Ces bribes de mémoire, fixées sur papier par un historien étranger au phénomène, et l'addition de ces vérités survoltées – et subjectives – donnent, au bout du compte, un récit qui se tient, surtout si on lui confère un rôle utile: l'édification d'un mythe pacificateur. Ce messie, de bien mauvaise tenue, issu d'une mère analphabète, totalement ignorante de l'ecclésiété de son fils – *Ecce Homo* –, et d'un géniteur plus près de l'animalité que de l'humanité, représente, en quelque sorte, le miracle de l'écriture: un récit lacunaire le rend miraculeusement crédible.

Dans *Un garçon de compagnie*, une mère, pauvre et déshéritée traverse à pied l'État du Minas Gerais pour accomplir un double exploit: dire à son fils qu'elle l'aime et déchirer les membranes qui isolent des classes sociales pour atteindre son but, car la pauvreté, entre autres méfaits, rend plus pénibles les efforts – ici, le franchissement d'une longue distance – et elle vous réduit au silence.

Finalement, dans *Il était une fois une ville*, un homme, dans un élan désespéré d'amour, sacrifie une partie de son être pour abriter, dans sa chair même, une entité féminine, couple moins stérile qu'il ne paraît: il engendre le pardon. J'imagine, au bout du compte, que je suis un écrivain catholique, ce qui en dit déjà pas mal sur ma conception de la famille, sainte ou non, possible ou idéale.

Je glisse rapidement sur *Catastrophes*, ce *divertimento* littéraire soumis aux seuls caprices de l'immédiateté, et, malheureusement, sur *Arabesques*, dans lequel le phénomène de la descendance est nodal. Mais sa structure est trop complexe – de méchantes langues diraient qu'elle est compliquée, amphigourique, laborieuse, et je les maudis – pour en parler maintenant. Je me contenterai de préciser que la mémoire y tient un rôle capital tout comme la notion de digressions et qu'ils agissent en supports en apparence superfétatoires aux souvenirs qui enrichissent nos vies et nos avenir.

Nous voici enfin arrivés à *La Maison des pluies*, premier tome de ce que je désigne désormais comme ma trilogie de la filiation.

Dans ce roman, deux droites, deux certitudes – la langue et la filiation – se croisent sur un axe troublant. Ce point central est la mémoire – et sa négation qui n'est pas vraiment l'oubli, mais sa réduction à une suite de réminiscences sans effets réels ni sur le présent ni sur l'avenir. Peut-être est-ce que *La maison des pluies* est un long pamphlet sur le post-modernisme et son *no future?*

Je résume l'intrigue: Benjamin Paradis, linguiste amoureux des langues en voie de disparition, apprend qu'un fils insoupçonné remonte les sillons de la vie de son père, glanant ici et là des détails sur l'homme à qui il doit la vie. Autrement dit, le Petit Poucet part à la rencontre d'Ulysse. À partir de ces fragments, cueillis sur un mode capricieux et pratiquement aléatoire, il pourra dresser le portrait de notre héros, mais en se fiant strictement à son itinéraire biographique. Or, voilà ce qui désespère notre homme: cette recreation sera nécessairement mensongère, puisque le garçon devra tisser une toile basée sur un nombre ridiculement bas de fibres mnémoniques et user de son imagination, voire de sa brève expérience de vie, pour en combler les gigantesques trous, comme le font les lecteurs de romans ou les généticiens irresponsables du Parc jurassique qui tentent de recréer des dinosaures avec l'ADN des grenouilles.

Au bout du compte, la question fondamentale que se pose notre homme est: ne sommes-nous rien de plus que la somme de nos expériences? Un lecteur de son côté serait en droit de se demander s'il n'en va pas de même avec un roman, c'est-à-dire un enchaînement de sous-intrigues menant à une conclusion irrémédiable. Dans ce cas, argumente *La Maison des pluies*, pourquoi relire un roman? Pourquoi se préoccuper du sillage que nous traçons et des legs – à commencer par les patrimoines mnémoniques et généalogiques – que nous laissons derrière nous?

Me voici réduit, hélas, à l'état de me citer moi-même: Quand Benjamin revoit un ami d'enfance et peine à le reconnaître, il ne peut s'empêcher de se demander s'il s'agit, pour ressusciter le visage d'antan «d'effacer les marques que les années et les abus ont gravées ou, plutôt, de greffer des attributs associés à une jeunesse universelle sur un visage ravagé?» (57) Pour le linguiste qu'il est, une autre interrogation surgit aussitôt: «Peut-on reconstituer fidèlement une langue éteinte à partir des traces qu'elle a parcimonieusement semées sur son passage, empreintes que, par surcroît, les siècles se sont employés à brouiller?» Et il en vient à conclure, en désespoir de cause: «Un visage est un roman» (57).

Autrement dit, peut-on reconstruire une vie en s'inspirant d'un visage, des épisodes passés qu'il peut suggérer? Oui, bien sûr. En résultera-t-il une biographie fidèle à la vérité? Peu importe, répondra un romancier peu regardant. Dans un autre ordre d'idée, pouvons-nous exprimer notre pensée, notre histoire

intellectuelle, en nous contraignant à n'utiliser qu'une partie de la langue? Sûrement, mais ce discours sera plus vague ou à portée limitée si nous rétrécissons notre champ linguistique. Voilà un combat que je mène discrètement, voire maladroitement: je prétends que, non seulement nous avons le droit de nous servir de tous les mots qui figurent aux différents dictionnaires, nous avons, écrivains et lecteurs, le devoir de désobéir aux consignes plus ou moins subtiles que nous fixent des instances parfois obscures. Un terme savant, technique, archaïque n'est hors jeu pour personne, quoi qu'en dise le *Robert*. Un langage châtié n'est pas réservé à l'élite et s'en servir, si vous êtes issu des classes laborieuses, n'est pas un acte de félonie. Les subtilités de la langue peuvent être maîtrisées par tous, car tout le monde est capable de forger des idées raffinées, quoi qu'en pensent les... bienpensants.

En outre, l'un des dangers qui nous guettent, en cette époque de dématérialisation généralisée, est l'évaporation de cette eccéité, de notre essence d'êtres humains, une volatilisation qui lui permet de fluctuer selon les supports disponibles. Où se trouve notre identité quand, branchés sur Internet, nous adoptons naturellement, par simple fantaisie ludique ou par soumission à une convention, une persona détachée de notre réalité? Tout jeu a son prix, qui va s'élevant à mesure que nous nous y abandonnons. La même chose pourrait être dite de l'écrit qui résiste encore efficacement à une attaque menée sur deux fronts par la technologie aveuglée par l'idée de progrès: l'iconographique et le virtuel.

À mon avis, la recherche de la facilité favorise les sources d'information vidéo-numériques où le langage laisse, en bonne partie ou en totalité, la place à une suite d'images qui s'évanouissent aussi rapidement qu'elles apparaissent, sauf si elles sont rafraîchies, phénomène comparable à la mémoire vive des ordinateurs dont le contenu, à défaut d'être réactualisé périodiquement, se déleste de ses informations.

Une image, dit-on, vaut mille mots. Vraiment? Les mots liberté, justice, égalité, ne valent-ils pas mille et une images? Les sources du problème, enfin je crois, sont une abstraction du langage et sa contraction. En découle une difficulté de plus en plus grande d'exprimer clairement le fond de sa pensée sans béquilles, de tourner autour du pot, et de recourir à ces incises qui émaillent les conversations quotidiennes et, de plus en plus: 'vous voyez, tu comprends, genre ceci' et l'indispensable 'T'sais veux dire' québécois. Le drame, c'est que ce salmigondis, cette novlangue de bois, fait fureur en politique, comme l'ont démontré les résultats aux dernières élections canadiennes.

D'ailleurs, la virtualisation des textes (journaux sur tablette, livres numériques) me cause un souci occulté par plusieurs, y compris les lecteurs de George Orwell: un texte ainsi publié peut être, à tout moment, modifié ou, comme le pépient les zélotes de la chose virtuelle, 'mis à jour'.

Bref, je me rends compte qu'il y a un danger insoupçonné: grosso modo, nous assistons à une étrange 'oralisation' de la langue écrite et il semble en aller avec la mémoire comme il en va de plus en plus fréquemment avec les relations familiales et amicales: évanescences. Malgré le discours échevelé sur la modernité, sur le progrès, sur l'évolution, j'ai l'impression que nous sommes sur le point de régresser jusqu'au haut moyen-âge et d'assister à la résurgence du palimpseste comme dévidoir de notre histoire, de notre mémoire, de notre identité et, par conséquent, des relations que nous entretenons avec nos proches, nos prochains, nos contemporains, nos ancêtres et nos héritiers. Nous devons nous fier à une mémoire qui, de surcroît, devra se débrouiller avec un vocabulaire restreint et une grammaire approximative.

Voilà sans doute une facette de ma recherche artistique depuis, disons, *Arabesques*, qu'ont éludée ceux et celles chargés d'approfondir la production littéraire présente: l'évanescence de notre faculté de bien fixer des repères mnémoniques à partir desquels nous pourrions axer nos pensées et nos actions.

Ainsi, Kurt, le fils fantomatique de *La Maison des pluies*, fait fausse route en se basant sur des témoignages fluctuants pour élaborer un portrait de son père. La mieux qu'il puisse espérer est le portrait d'un homme possible, d'une vie crédible, d'une arborescence vitale qui se tient: un roman. De son côté, Benjamin, ce père virtuel, devra bien réaliser un jour qu'il doit sa fascination pour les langues en voie de disparition à la certitude, instillée par sa propre mère, que des «gens comme eux» (253) – c'est-à-dire des classes laborieuses – sont condamnés à disparaître sans laisser de trace. Son seul espoir de faire mentir cette malédiction est, selon lui, de préserver, dans la mesure du possible, ce que nous pourrions appeler les langues perdantes dans un monde abandonné aux lois de l'efficacité à tout prix, une planète où les distances s'estompent et où les disparités font figure d'excentricités, de caprices.

Le deuxième tome de cette trilogie de la filiation représente ce que j'aime bien appeler le 'gant retourné' du premier. Dans *L'Œil de cuivre*, nous adoptons le point de vue d'un fils, Lévy, qui reconstruit, à partir d'artefacts découverts dans la maison paternelle, la vie et la personnalité d'un homme qu'il a mal connu: son géniteur, Bernard. Cette fois, le protagoniste, lui-même sur le point de devenir père, base également sa recherche sur des documents imprimés, quête que viennent enrichir (1) les souvenirs de personnages qui ont gravité autour du père à différentes époques de sa vie, (2) le pragmatisme de sa compagne enceinte et (3) les excentricités d'une jeune voisine aux prénoms changeants, Gitane, Marie-Belle et palindrome Ava (également une variante de la langue guarani et évocation du langage informatique Ada), dotée d'une culture wikipédienne. Quel résultat obtient-il? Eh bien, le même que celui espéré par un romancier: une narration qui étanche sa soif, un univers plus ou moins ré-

confortant qui lui permet, enfin, de passer à autre chose. Ironiquement, Lévy parvient à élaborer un tel monde grâce à la délicatesse du témoin le plus important, sans doute, de l'événement ayant mené à la rupture entre lui et Bernard. Ce témoin passe sous silence les éléments les plus traumatisants pour Lévy, prisonnier d'un cadre de la bien-pensance, une prévenance que le narrateur et l'auteur refusent aux lecteurs. Reste que la sérénité relative qui s'installe dans l'esprit de Lévy est basée sur un 'malparlé'. Et un malentendu, salutaire pour notre héros qui peut alors construire une mémoire filiale qui se tient et qui lui permet de dormir sur ses deux oreilles, ce qu'un compte rendu fidèle ou un procès-verbal jetés sur papier ne lui auraient nullement permis. Voici un prix que plusieurs sont prêts à payer pour goûter au bonheur.

Le dernier volet de cette trilogie, s'il voit le jour, opte pour une approche diamétralement opposée: un homme, démuné face à la mort de sa mère, tentera de donner une histoire à cette femme méconnue et secrète en tirant de sa seule imagination des épisodes d'une vie possible. Il essaiera désespérément, donc, de conjurer la malédiction qui poursuit les individus issus des classes dites laborieuses: l'oubli, la disparition des mémoires, le silence et la mutité. Il s'agit pour moi du projet le plus intime de cette trilogie, car je m'inspire de la relation que j'ai entretenue avec ma propre mère, tirée d'une pauvreté extrême par l'homme qu'elle a fini par marier, une fois le divorce prononcé dans les années 1970. Il s'agira, je l'espère, de l'ultime hommage que je lui rendrai, moins par amour filial que par solidarité avec les gens de ma classe sociale. Ce texte – roman? recueil de nouvelles? – aura pour titre *Écrits dans l'eau*, tiré de l'épithète du poète John Keats, inhumé à Rome et en partie responsable, avec Pasolini, de ma présence en Italie.

Finalement, je m'en voudrais de négliger un élément qui expliquerait, en partie, la qualité tant québécoise que canadienne de notre relation avec la mémoire: nous sommes persuadés que l'histoire nationale – peu importe nos ambitions politiques – ne revêt aucun véritable intérêt, surtout si elle est comparée à l'europpéenne ou à celle de nos voisins états-uniens.

Comment un peuple, accoutumé à se détourner de son patrimoine parce qu'il le juge mineur, peut-il favoriser, par l'entretien d'une mémoire familiale intégrale, l'avènement de romanciers adoptant une approche intellectuelle d'une réalité, c'est-à-dire une démarche qui privilégie un rapprochement des parcours personnels à une histoire universelle, une analyse lucide de la politique contemporaine et, dans le meilleur des cas, une prévoyance salutaire à la société qui se risque à les lire?

Ma trilogie de la filiation survole également cette situation en émettant l'opinion – ou en suggérant – qu'il doit bien y avoir un espace respirable entre la mémoire eidétique, ou absolue, rendant toute fantaisie impossible, et une

autre, lacunaire, criblée, miteuse, neutralisant toute saisie de la réalité et son arrimage à un territoire référentiel nourri par l'alluvionnement d'expériences historiques, à commencer par ce qui devrait être le b.a.-ba des exercices de retour en arrière: les relations familiales.

Ce que je propose est de combler cet espace avec de longs efforts d'imagination – littérature, musique et tout ce que vous voudrez – qui, loin de représenter des occasions d'évasion de la réalité (la culture de divertissement, dénoncée par Pasolini) nous permettent de donner un sens à notre état de créature pensante, consciente de sa mort inévitable et révoltée par l'effacement plus ou moins rapide des traces qu'elle laisse derrière elle. Ces 'malparlés', ces 'mal-dits', ces maudits que je vous ai esquissés pourront être démasqués et corrigés, que ce soit par la science, la réflexion et, – je me permets d'être de parti pris – la littérature. Et que ces malentendus, au lieu de servir d'excuses faciles à la conclusion précipitée d'une conversation, d'un ensemble d'échanges, agiront comme propulseurs d'un effort d'enrichissement du patrimoine réflexif de cette grande famille qu'est le genre humain.

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VOIR CE QUI EST DEvenu INVISIBLE. LECTURE D'IL Y A TROP D'IMAGES ET DE TOUT CE QUE TU POSSÈDES DE BERNARD ÉMOND

Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe*

Abstract

Dans le cadre de cet article, l'auteure s'attache aux différentes métaphorisations du regard qui traversent le recueil d'essais *Il y a trop d'images* afin de réfléchir à certains des paradoxes – avoués ou non – qui sous-tendent la pensée du cinéaste Bernard Émond. L'analyse porte également sur le film *Tout ce que tu possèdes* (2012), lequel est centré sur la question de la transmission des héritages et des valeurs tant culturelles que matérielles. Le cinéaste conjugue une critique impitoyable du monde contemporain à une forme d'engagement dans la cité et il tente, sans toujours y parvenir, de juger son propre temps sans succomber à l'aveuglement. La transmission des legs et des valeurs y est ainsi indissociable d'une réflexion éthique sur la construction de l'identité et de la mémoire collectives au Québec.

See What Has Become Invisible. An Analysis of Il y a trop d'images and Tout ce que tu possèdes by Bernard Émond

The analysis includes the collection of essays *Il y a trop d'images* and the film *Tout ce que tu possèdes* (2012) by the filmmaker Bernard Émond which focuses on intergenerational relations as well as the transmission of heritage and cultural and material values. The filmmaker combines a relentless critique of the contemporary world in a form of commitment and is trying, not always successfully, to judge his own time without succumbing to blindness. The transmission of legacy and values is thus inseparable from ethical reflection on the construction of identity and collective memory in Quebec.

Vedere ciò che è diventato invisibile. Analisi di Il y a trop d'images e di Tout ce que tu possèdes di Bernard Émond

L'analisi si concentra sulla raccolta di saggi *Il y a trop d'images* e sul film *Tout ce que tu possèdes* (2012) del regista Bernard Émond, che trattano delle relazioni intergenerazionali e della trasmissione del patrimonio e dei valori sia culturali che materiali. Il regista coniuga una critica impietosa del mondo attuale con una forma di impegno sociale e tenta, senza riuscirci completamente, di giudicare il presente in modo imparziale. La trasmissione del patrimonio e dei valori risulta quindi inseparabile dalla riflessione etica sulla costruzione dell'identità e della memoria collettiva in Québec.

* Université de Montréal.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

Les discours critiques sur la mort de la culture littéraire se multiplient à l'époque contemporaine. Dominique Maingueneau (2006), William Marx (2005) et Tzvetan Todorov (2006), notamment, ont consacré leurs récents ouvrages à la déconsidération dont la littérature serait aujourd'hui la victime. Ces lectures trouvent un écho dans plusieurs textes consacrés à la littérature québécoise contemporaine: l'histoire de la culture québécoise se diviserait en un avant et un après. L'avant, rien de neuf sous le soleil, se présenterait comme un véritable moment d'apothéose moderne, renverrait aux mythiques années 1960 et à la période de la Révolution tranquille, dont on retient généralement les aspects les plus célébrants et les plus lyriques. L'après en est la suite logique, le prolongement moribond et désengagé. L'après se situe dans un espace temporel aux contours imprécis. Il aurait un commencement – autour de 1980 – mais pas de fin car il serait la fin. Il incarnerait le dénouement sous toutes ses formes, l'épuisement des signes de la culture, l'essoufflement, la morosité sociétale, l'absence de projets, le règne des idéologies molles. Dans *L'écologie du réel* paru en 1988, Pierre Nepveu lui a associé de manière nuancée l'émergence d'une littérature «post-québécoise» (Nepveu 14). François Ricard, quant à lui, a d'abord noué à cet épisode une forme de normalisation qui retirerait à l'œuvre littéraire son pouvoir subversif (1988). D'autres commentateurs¹ ont tantôt déploré la pauvreté de la culture québécoise contemporaine ou le dépérissement des expériences et des idéaux collectifs.

Au fondement de ces analyses se trouve un constat récurrent: à l'époque contemporaine, il s'avérerait impossible de réfléchir à partir de valeurs communes. La question de la valeur serait devenue obsolète, vidée de sa substance. Insolubles, convoquant des enjeux extérieurs au domaine culturel, jouxtant parfois involontairement le moralisme, les réflexions sur la valeur – esthétique, politique, morale – sont au cœur du travail du cinéaste Bernard Émond. Dans ses essais, rassemblés dans *Il y a trop d'images* en 2011, il s'en prend à la société contemporaine «encombrée de milliards d'images futiles et triviales» (quatrième de couverture) qui condamneraient ses membres à évoluer dans un monde factice, dépourvu d'une hiérarchie des valeurs et privé de la distance nécessaire à la transmission des legs culturels. Cette lecture, librement inspirée des *Écrits corsaires* de Pasolini, s'accompagne d'une réflexion sur l'aveuglement des contemporains. Ces derniers n'arriveraient plus à dépouiller leur regard, à voir au-delà des apparences et à admirer des œuvres d'art exigeant leur attention et leur recueillement. Dans le cadre de cet article, je m'attacherai à certaines des métaphorisations du regard qui traversent le recueil d'essais d'Émond.

¹ Voir notamment le dossier anniversaire de la revue *Liberté*, «Littérature 1959-2009» n. 286, décembre 2009, p. 5-125.

L'analyse portera également sur le film *Tout ce que tu possèdes* (2012), lequel est centré sur la question de la transmission des héritages et des valeurs tant culturelles que matérielles, mais aussi sur celle des relations intergénérationnelles. Il s'agira de mieux comprendre comment le cinéaste conjugue une critique impitoyable du monde contemporain à une forme d'engagement dans la cité et de voir comment il tente, sans toujours y parvenir, de juger son propre temps sans succomber à l'aveuglement. La transmission des legs et des valeurs y est ainsi indissociable d'une réflexion éthique sur la construction de l'identité et de la mémoire collectives au Québec.

Il y a trop d'images: à la défense d'un art éthique

Résumons rapidement les fondements de la pensée éthique de Bernard Émond. Même s'il accorde une importance particulière à la forme de ses œuvres cinématographiques, souvent fondées sur un rythme lent, une direction photographique soignée, des plans fixes étudiés, Bernard Émond ne pourrait être considéré comme un défenseur de l'art pour l'art. Le cinéma, bien au contraire, tout comme l'écriture d'ailleurs, doit servir, être fait «pour quelque chose», de manière à «venir en aide à [son] prochain» (Émond. *Il y a trop d'images*: 9). Faisant écho aux idées défendues par certains de ses contemporains – pensons notamment aux derniers essais d'Yvon Rivard qui soutiennent également une telle conception de l'art éthique, pour ne pas dire engagé –, Bernard Émond a également puisé certaines de ses thèses dans les *Écrits corsaires* de Pasolini, textes pamphlétaires dans lesquels le cinéaste italien s'en prend ouvertement à l'hédonisme, à la culture de consommation et aux mass médias. Dans son texte «Acculturation et acculturation» écrit en décembre 1973, il affirme:

Une grande œuvre de normalisation parfaitement authentique et réelle est commencée et – comme je le disais – elle a imposé ses modèles: des modèles voulus par la nouvelle classe industrielle, qui ne se contente plus d'un 'homme qui consomme' mais qui prétend par surcroît que d'autres idéologies que celle de la consommation sont inadmissibles. C'est un hédonisme néolaïque, aveuglement oublieux de toute valeur humaniste et aveuglement étranger aux sciences humaines (49-50).

Notons la double occurrence de l'adverbe «aveuglement» qui rend compte de l'imposture dans laquelle la culture télévisuelle plongerait le spectateur, dompté, soumis à une seule manière de voir et de consommer le monde. Ces mots de Pasolini auraient pu être repris textuellement par Bernard Émond qui, bien qu'agnostique, «intellectuel non croyant» (*Il y a trop d'images*: 20) pour le citer exactement, déplore lui aussi la perte de l'horizon religieux qui conférait

un sens, voire une forme de transcendance à la culture commune. À la manière de Pasolini qui fustige le conformisme et l'embourgeoisement des sous-prolétaires et des paysans italiens, Émond se place du côté de la croyance en «quelque chose de plus grand que soi» (40, 94, 98, 113) – cette expression revient d'ailleurs comme un leitmotiv sous sa plume –, quelque chose d'invisible, d'indicible et d'impalpable. Ce quelque chose permettrait néanmoins de continuer à vivre sans s'aveugler, sans refuser de voir au-delà des apparences.

Le motif du regard, et plus particulièrement les thèmes du voilement/dévoilement, traverse les textes d'Émond. En témoigne éloquentement la définition de l'art cinématographique donnée dans l'avant-propos du recueil. Le cinéma est en effet une «manière de regarder, ce qui s'appelle vraiment regarder, une manière de s'appliquer à voir, à voir derrière, à voir au-dessus des choses, à voir ce qui ne se voit pas du premier coup d'œil, à voir ce qui est devenu invisible dans un monde encombré d'images» (11). Loin d'être inédite, cette définition s'érige sur une contradiction fondamentale: comment le cinéaste peut-il continuer à offrir des images justes du monde qui est le sien dans un environnement social dominé par la surenchère des images? Sans adhérer à la rhétorique militante du cinéma québécois des années 1970, Émond cherche plutôt à déformer le regard du spectateur, à le subvertir en lui proposant un rythme autre, en le poussant à renouer avec la contemplation, en lui proposant de dépouiller son regard². «Le détour par le cinéma [lui] semble alors pleinement justifié: il nous arrache à notre aveuglement» (11), affirme-t-il. Reprenant plus d'une fois une idée de George Steiner – écrits de circonstance, les essais sont assez redondants –, Émond affirme que l'art doit être à la fois rupture et rencontre: il nous «bouscule», nous «arrache à nous-mêmes, à nos habitudes, à notre confort intellectuel, à nos partis pris» (34). Et ce déracinement est la condition même de la rencontre car il exige de la part du spectateur une véritable attention à ce qui lui est inconnu et étranger. Ce serait donc l'exact contraire du divertissement qui ne serait que célébration de l'instant présent, retour à soi et légèreté. En un mot: aveuglement.

La véritable subversion, selon le cinéaste, se trouverait donc dans une forme plus subtile de transgression: «Dans un monde inondé d'images inutiles, manipulatrices et menteuses, nous allons essayer de faire [des] films où chaque plan a du sens et résonne d'une vérité humaine» (46). La trilogie cinématographique

² Dans son article «La pensée qui fourche: dislocation de l'essai québécois», Anne Caumartin en présente une interprétation similaire: «Paradoxalement, le cinéaste-essayiste explique dans ses textes d'accompagnement que faire des films n'est utile que dans la mesure où on enseigne comment voir à des yeux déjà ouverts, où après la réception de l'œuvre peut s'engager un dialogue avec le spectateur-lecteur» (91).

d'Émond, constituée des films *La neuvaine* (2005), *Contre toute espérance* (2007) et *La donation* (2009), irait dans ce sens puisqu'elle renouerait avec des valeurs oubliées de la société québécoise, soit les vertus théologiques de la foi, de l'espérance et de la charité. La subversion serait donc à la fois stylistique – rythme lent, contemplation, dépouillement des images – et éthique – résurgence d'un fonds culturel chrétien tombé en désuétude – et viserait une forme de communion entre destinataire et destinataires afin de rompre avec le flux continu d'images sans ancrage et sans histoire que dissémineraient les médias de masse. L'image tant recherchée par Émond serait ainsi très proche de 'l'image dialectique' de Walter Benjamin, telle que l'interprète et la glose Georges Didi-Huberman dans *Devant le temps*: cette image «réunit et, pour ainsi dire, fait exploser ensemble des modalités ontologiques contradictoires: d'un côté, la présence et de l'autre la représentation, d'un côté le devenir de ce qui change et de l'autre la stase pleine de ce qui demeure» (115). «Fragilité de tout cela, ajoute Didi-Huberman, puisque une fois rendues visibles, les choses sont condamnées à replonger presque immédiatement dans le noir de leur *disparition*, tout au moins de leur virtualité» (116). Cette analyse de l'image dialectique nourrit chez Didi-Huberman une réflexion plus ample sur la valeur de l'anachronisme en histoire de l'art. Plus qu'une erreur d'interprétation ou qu'une confusion des époques et des temporalités, l'anachronisme aurait une valeur heuristique. Le philosophe de l'art, en effet, ose aller à l'encontre de l'un des fondements de la méthode historique en affirmant, à la suite de Nicole Loraux, qu'«il n'y a d'histoire que d'anachronismes» (39). La fécondité de l'anachronisme ne ferait aucun doute car

pour accéder aux multiples temps stratifiés, aux survivances, aux longues durées du plus-que-passé mnésique, il faut le *plus-que-présent* d'un acte réminiscent: un choc, une déchirure de voile, une irruption ou apparition du temps, tout ce dont Proust et Benjamin ont si bien parlé sous l'espèce de la «mémoire involontaire» (20).

L'on pourrait en effet dire du point de vue d'Émond sur l'art et la société contemporaine qu'il est volontiers – volontairement – anachronique... Intellectuel non croyant mais attaché à la mémoire et à la culture chrétiennes, conservateur de gauche, Émond n'hésite pas à fustiger les membres de sa génération – le baby-boom – qui, «voyant reculer les idéaux de leur jeunesse, se sont enfermés dans le confort et l'indifférence, préférant profiter des avantages que leur confère leur statut» (*Il y a trop d'images*: 72). La pire arme de ceux-ci serait le cynisme, manière prétendument lucide d'affronter le désenchantement du monde. «Confort et indifférence», les deux mots font bien sûr signe vers l'histoire politique du Québec, rappelant à la fois le titre et le contenu du documen-

taire de Denys Arcand sur le référendum de 1980. Au cynisme, Émond préfère la croyance, le sérieux, recherchant la grâce, la Présence avec un grand P, comme l'aurait écrit Pierre Vadeboncoeur (Émond. *Il y a trop d'images*: 98), silence, beauté des espaces isolés et déserts, des images imposant une déchirure du voile.

Tout ce que tu possèdes

Le dernier film de Bernard Émond, *Tout ce que tu possèdes*, sorti en 2012, se présente, à sa manière, comme une illustration des principaux constats et griefs exposés dans *Il y a trop d'images*. Ce film traitant de la transmission incertaine des héritages culturels et des legs familiaux met en scène un fils, professeur de littérature d'Europe de l'Est, et son père, entrepreneur prospère. Entre eux, le dialogue a été rompu depuis plusieurs années: ils ne parlent pas le même langage, ne partagent pas les mêmes valeurs; ils refusent en somme de s'entendre l'un l'autre. Difficile de ne pas prêter une valeur emblématique, voire sociologique, au différend entre père et fils. Chacun répond à une sorte de stéréotype: le père est ambitieux, égoïste et malhonnête, a accumulé une fortune colossale en manipulant autrui. Le fils, Pierre, a choisi de rompre avec l'enseignement – les étudiants ne savent plus lire ni écrire, selon lui –, et de quitter le milieu universitaire, devenu «un bureau de comptables», pour se consacrer exclusivement à la traduction des poèmes du Polonais Edward Stachura. Il vend plusieurs des livres de sa bibliothèque, non pour accumuler de l'argent, mais pour créer plus d'espace dans son petit appartement du Vieux Québec. Pierre est ombrageux, taciturne, cérébral, isolé du monde social. Son père, en revanche, est un notable participant pleinement à la vie économique de sa ville. Se sachant atteint d'un cancer fulgurant, le père lègue sa fortune de 50 millions à son fils. Ce dernier, vivant en accord avec ses principes, la refuse dans un premier temps, puis n'en accepte qu'une parcelle, soit la maison ancestrale de Saint-Pacôme.

Ce scénario plutôt classique est troublé par l'apparition d'un tiers qui, sans rétablir le dialogue entre le père et le fils, sert de révélateur, permettant à Pierre de reprendre sa place dans la filiation générationnelle. Ce tiers, c'est Adèle, la fille de Pierre. Elle surgit au sens strict du terme, reconnaît son père à la suite d'un bref échange de regards entre Pierre et sa mère. Treize ans plus tôt, Pierre avait refusé la paternité pour mieux se consacrer à ses études et à ses projets de recherche. À l'instar de son propre père, il a préféré le travail – aussi peu utilitaire soit-il – à l'amour et à la vie de famille. La suite du film se présente sous la forme d'un lent apprivoisement entre la fille et le père. Ils se reconnaissent sans se connaître, partagent le goût de la lecture et de la contem-

plation. Leur idylle se termine brutalement: après une querelle, Adèle s'enferme dans un silence buté, Pierre tente sans succès de maintenir le lien entre eux. C'est la mère d'Adèle qui impose un retour au réel en invoquant la loi: Pierre n'a aucun droit sur sa fille car il n'a pas voulu reconnaître légalement sa paternité. Reconnaître sa paternité, cela signifie aussi, dans la grammaire du film, se porter garant d'autrui, sortir de soi et de l'aveuglement qu'imposent la solitude et la surconscience narcissique. Le fils abandonné, après avoir quitté à son tour femme et enfant, doit choisir de rompre ou de rétablir la filiation.

Plusieurs séquences du film auraient pu illustrer ce dilemme. J'en ai choisi une qui, en plus de faire écho aux réflexions du recueil *Il y a trop d'images*, représente assez clairement, voire littéralement, le passage de l'aveuglement à la juste vision. Dans cette scène qui apparaît aux deux tiers du film, Pierre fait découvrir la maison de Saint-Pacôme à sa fille Adèle et l'initie malgré lui aux secrets et aux silences de la filiation paternelle. Tout, de la configuration des lieux au contenu des dialogues entre le père et sa fille retrouvée, fait signe vers le propos d'*Il y a trop d'images*. Il s'agit de renouer le fil entre le passé et le présent, de réactualiser des valeurs anciennes, de retrouver la beauté des espaces et des paysages intouchés par l'industrialisation. La maison de Saint-Pacôme, située à plus d'une heure de la ville, constitue un endroit hors du temps: elle est conçue comme le lieu de l'enracinement et de la culture commune. Les traces du passé y sont manifestes: le portrait des arrière-grands-parents orne le mur, la cuisinière est ancienne, la grange cache des vestiges d'une autre époque. Le lieu semble parfaitement préservé, contrairement à la mémoire familiale qui n'a guère été entretenue et transmise. Pierre ne sait rien du passé de sa propre famille. Ses réponses aux questions de sa fille sur l'histoire de la lignée sont vagues, «probablement», «je suppose», «pas dans mon souvenir», et montrent bien que son imaginaire de la filiation est fait d'incertitudes, d'absences. Sa mémoire familiale est trouée et imparfaite, voire inexistante.

La scène la plus importante de la séquence, du moins dans le cadre de cette réflexion, scelle la communion entre la fille et son père. Dans la grange, Adèle lance à Pierre: «papa, viens voir». Cet appel, qui pourrait paraître anodin, a une double résonance: pour la première fois Adèle confère à Pierre le titre et le rôle de père; Pierre, d'une part, ne peut plus démissionner en se soustrayant aux conventions sociales, il est appelé à s'engager. D'autre part, l'injonction «viens voir» impose un double mouvement: Pierre doit se tourner vers l'autre et accepter de 'voir'. Notons qu'au moment où il rejoint Adèle devant l'enseigne portant le nom de l'aïeul Octave Leduc, celle-ci lui lance «regard». La scène rappelle ainsi l'acte réminiscent dont il était question plus tôt dans la citation de Didi-Huberman: il y a «déchirure de voile, irruption ou apparition du temps». Le souvenir surgit par l'intermédiaire de l'objet oublié, de cette

prosaïque enseigne qui témoigne du passé familial des Leduc. À la rupture de la filiation succède la réconciliation des origines oubliées et du présent, voire de l'avenir de la lignée. La fin de la séquence confirme le passage de l'aveuglement à la juste vision: Pierre à son tour demande à sa fille de regarder le paysage, lui désignant Charlevoix et la Malbaie. Ce paysage doit être laissé en paix, ce qui fait écho à un autre moment du film. Dans une séquence antérieure, le père de Pierre emmène son fils pour la première fois à la maison de Saint-Pacôme, et lui fait part de son projet de construction d'un village-vacances. À l'instar de la cerisaie de Tchékhov, menacée par les idées nouvelles de Lopakhine qui souhaite y voir construire des datchas, la maison ancestrale est le symbole de ce qui persiste malgré la menace de l'industrialisation.

À la fin de la première séquence analysée, Adèle demande à son père s'il vivra à Saint-Pacôme. Ce scénario, envisagé par la descendante de la famille Leduc, sera adopté par Pierre qui, à la fin du film, choisit de s'installer dans la maison de ses ancêtres. En voix off, il s'adresse à sa fille, qu'il a officiellement reconnue:

Sans lien humain, la vie n'a aucun sens. Je n'ai pas voulu que tu naisses. Mais maintenant un monde où tu ne vivrais pas m'apparaît impossible. Tu es là, au fond c'est tout ce qui compte. Tu es là et quoiqu'il arrive je serai là pour toi. J'ai quitté la ville. J'ai marché jusqu'à Saint-Pacôme. J'ai dormi par terre dans la maison de nos ancêtres, et j'ai décidé d'y rester. Je serai là. Cette maison est la tienne. Ton père, Pierre (Émond. *Tout ce que tu possèdes*).

L'apparition d'Adèle constitue un moment épiphanique, provoque à la fois une rupture – Pierre reconnaît sa paternité, se responsabilise, s'engage et renonce par là même à son mode de vie autarcique – et une rencontre – avec le passé collectif et familial, pour reprendre les constats de George Steiner cités plus d'une fois dans *Il y a trop d'images*. Il s'agit bien d'une épiphanie, mais aussi d'une illumination, d'une sortie de l'ombre. À la suite de leur première rencontre, Pierre traduit l'un des poèmes de Stachura. À plusieurs reprises, Émond use du même procédé: l'écran d'ordinateur de Pierre nous est présenté, de manière à ce que nous puissions assister en direct au travail de traduction. Or les vers que traduit Pierre après la rencontre d'Adèle se lisent d'abord comme suit «L'écarquillement des yeux fixé». Puis Pierre s'interrompt, consulte le dictionnaire, corrige les vers ainsi «L'écarquillement des yeux fascinés/ Le cillement des paupières étonnées». Le regard est fasciné, étonné, et non plus fixe. Le regard accepte d'accueillir le changement, sidéré, bouleversé par la découverte qu'il vient de faire.

L'on pourrait reprocher à Bernard Émond le caractère par trop pédagogique de la démonstration: il y a trop d'images, il faut donc voir au-delà des ap-

parences, refuser l'artifice des conventions sociales pour mieux renouer avec autrui, pour mieux créer des liens humains. Si ces constats dysphoriques trouvent écho chez les essayistes qui ont réfléchi à la déconsidération dont la littérature serait la victime à l'époque contemporaine, ils n'en demeurent pas moins étroitement liés chez Émond à une réflexion sur la transmission des legs culturels, ce qui suppose une pensée tout de même tournée vers l'avenir et la postérité. Émond, tout comme certains de ses modèles, Vadeboncoeur notamment, se place résolument du côté de la continuité, de la filiation, cela même s'il défend une certaine conception de la rupture et de la subversion. Car il s'agit bien de rompre avec l'idéologie du présent et de vivre à contretemps, un peu à la manière de Pierre qui choisit de quitter la ville pour s'installer dans la maison de ses ancêtres. Mais il s'agit aussi, comme nous l'avons vu, de rétablir le fil entre les générations. Le film *Tout ce que tu possèdes* se termine d'ailleurs sur le *topos* suivant: la confiance en l'avenir se traduit par un legs à une héritière potentielle. Ce lieu commun, sorte de passage obligé de plusieurs œuvres littéraires et cinématographiques contemporaines, illustre le refus du solipsisme, témoigne du désir de s'inscrire dans une histoire, dans une durée. Le *topos* du legs intervient ainsi à la manière d'une fin ouverte, et ne propose pas de réponse définitive au problème de la transmission des héritages. En somme, le film est tendu vers un avenir incertain, vague espoir d'une suite, d'un prochain épisode. «Un certain usage du temps, le temps de la promesse» (24), pour reprendre l'expression de Jacques Rancière, s'avère indissociable de la projection de soi dans un avenir collectif et, par là, d'une forme d'engagement, aussi discrète et modeste soit-elle.

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LE RÉCIT DE FILIATION DANS L'ŒUVRE DE NANCY HUSTON: MÉMOIRE ET IDENTITÉ DE *CANTIQUE DES PLAINES* À *BAD GIRL*

Valeria Sperti*

Abstract

L'analyse se propose d'enquêter le rôle que la mémoire intergénérationnelle et identitaire joue dans l'œuvre romanesque de Nancy Huston à la lumière de son dernier récit autobiographique, *Bad Girl*, qui raconte la saga d'une famille de la *middle class* canadienne dans les années 50 du point de vue du fœtus que Nancy Huston a été. Cette perspective confère des enjeux nouveaux, que l'analyse mettra en relief, à la relation mère-fille et à la culture familiale et nationale.

The tale of filiations in Nancy Huston's work: memory and identity from Plainsong to Bad Girl
The analysis will investigate the role that inter-generational memory and identity play in Nancy Huston's works in light of her latest autobiographical novel, *Bad Girl*, which narrates the story of a Canadian middle class family in the 1950s from the point of view of the foetus that Nancy Huston was at the time. This perspective creates new issues that the analysis will highlight, in the mother-daughter relationship, family and national culture.

Il racconto di filiazione nell'opera di Nancy Huston: memoria e identità da Cantique des plaines a Bad Girl

L'analisi si propone d'indagare il ruolo che la memoria intergenerazionale e l'identità giocano nei romanzi di Nancy Huston alla luce dell'ultima autobiografia, *Bad Girl*, che racconta la saga di una famiglia della classe media canadese degli anni cinquanta dal punto di vista di Nancy Huston nel feto.

Introduction

La foisonnante production narrative de Nancy Huston aborde maints sujets qui ont comme dénominateur commun l'histoire d'une ou plusieurs familles représentées à travers leur destin intergénérationnel. Les changements liés aux filiations, qui modèlent la mémoire et l'identité familiale, constituent un thème fécond et une source d'inspiration privilégiée que l'auteure décline avec succès

* Università di Napoli "Federico II".

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

depuis son début littéraire avec *Les Variations Goldberg* (Huston 1981) jusqu'à son dernier roman, *Danse noire* (2013)¹.

Autre spécificité de ce corpus fictionnel est sa stratification: la parole littéraire hustonienne s'inscrit souvent dans le sillage d'un autre texte écrit, comme dans *Trois fois septembre* (1989), *Cantique des plaines* (1993), *Instruments des ténèbres* (1996) et *Limbes/Limbo* (2000) ou bien emprunte un médium artistique: c'est la musique dans *Les Variations Goldberg*, la danse dans *La Virevolte* (1994), le chant dans *Lignes de faille* (2006), la photographie dans *Infrarouge* (2010) et le cinéma dans *Danse noire* (2013). Le recours fréquent à différentes formes de support dans la narration romanesque – texte écrit ou médium artistique – donne à penser qu'il existe, dans les coulisses de la création romanesque, la nécessité d'une charpente binaire, d'un hypotexte – réel ou imaginaire – comme dispositif d'écriture². Celui-ci, par sa fréquence, constitue une figure du double qu'il est possible de considérer comme une projection dans le texte du dédoublement identitaire et linguistique qui habite l'œuvre et la vie de Nancy Huston et dont l'autotraduction serait une explicitation extratextuelle (Sperti. "Autotraduction...": 70).

Ce dispositif est le résultat de l'ambiguïté identitaire et linguistique connotant l'écrivaine qui, bien que d'origine canadienne anglophone, a décidé de prendre la plume en français, quelque temps après son installation à Paris, en 1973. Dans cette langue nouvelle, affranchie des traumatismes de l'enfance et des déterminismes de l'âge adulte, l'auteure construit son «théâtre de l'exil» (Huston. *Nord Perdu...*: 30) où se joue la fuite de l'idiome maternel et le sauvetage par la langue acquise, considérée comme une planche de salut, de «liberté et de légèreté» (Huston. "Traduttore non è traditore": 155).

La fiction «immersible» de l'écrivaine (Holmes: 88) ne doit donc pas nous confondre: dans la surcharge de *make-believe* de ses romans, les «différentes configurations du dédoublement montrent que l'auteure reconnaît, dans la richesse et dans le plaisir du texte fictionnel, la part de subterfuge qui consiste à incarner dans des personnages romanesques ses propres fantômes, ses propres doubles linguistiques et identitaires» (Sperti. "Autotraduction...": 78). En ce sens, ces hypotextes seraient des doubles fictionnels ou artistiques du travail de rédaction de Nancy Huston et encore un autre indice du dédoublement vécu par l'écrivaine.

¹ La publication du prochain roman de l'écrivaine, *Le club des miracles relatifs*, est annoncée pour le mois d'avril 2016.

² *Limbo/Limbes* est un pastiche bilingue, composé en séparant dans les deux langues – le français et l'anglais – un hypotexte que Huston avait précédemment écrit et publié dans internet et où les deux langues étaient mélangées (cf. Danby). La version française de *Danse noire* a des parties en anglais, en français et quelques passages en joul. La traduction de l'anglais en bas de page rappelle le sous-titrage cinématographique.

Ce dernier, en tant qu'autobiographème enchâssé dans la fiction, révèle la persistance subtile et cachée de la dimension personnelle dans l'œuvre romanesque, alors que Nancy Huston a toujours déclaré préférer la fiction familiale et intergénérationnelle à l'écriture de soi. L'évitement autobiographique entraîne avec lui une exclusion du Canada dans la narration, accentuée par la déception liée à *Cantique des plaines* (1993), texte rédigé en anglais en 1989 pour surmonter une impasse existentielle et une fêlure identitaire. Ce roman parcourant l'histoire de l'Alberta, région natale de l'écrivaine, relie le choix linguistique de la composition en anglais au thème de la nation, le Canada. Des difficultés de publication et une polémique âpre à la suite de l'attribution du prestigieux Prix littéraire du Gouverneur général pour la version française autotraduite, poussent l'écrivaine à réfléchir sur le bilinguisme et l'autotraduction et à reléguer le Canada à une présence tangentielle dans son œuvre. Il sert de toile de fond neigeuse et inoffensive dans *Dolce agonia* (2001) et il connote l'atmosphère inaffektive de la maison torontoise où habitent les grands-parents adoptifs de la petite Sadie dans *Lignes de faille* (2006). Dans *Danse noire* (2013), le Canada, avec l'Irlande, nous plonge dans la tension insoluble entre le Vieux et le Nouveau monde; le pays réapparaît à travers une jeune prostituée indienne, mère du héros, et y acquiert une perspective plus idéologique³, éloignant de fait la représentation de la nation de la question autobiographique. Le héros principal, Milo, alterne la parlure jouale⁴ à l'anglais et au français; le lecteur lit la traduction de deux premières langues en de longues notes en bas de page. Une situation paradoxale, qui prouve combien la question des langues et des nations est encore à la recherche d'un équilibre dans l'œuvre hustonienne.

En 2014, la publication de *Bad Girl, Classes de littérature*, faisant d'une pierre deux coups, joint la représentation personnelle et celle du pays natal sous le signe d'une écriture qui remonte le fil du temps et des événements, racontant des épisodes de la vie de l'auteure lorsqu'elle était enfant et jeune fille au-delà de l'Atlantique et, plus tard, écrivaine à Paris. Le prétexte est extratextuel: un déménagement récent – «*a near-death experience*» (Huston dans Trapenard) selon les mots de l'écrivaine – conséquence d'un tournant décisif dans sa vie personnelle. Une panoplie de souvenirs, lettres, écrits l'auraient confrontée à son passé, à son lieu et à sa famille d'origine, en Alberta, dans l'ouest du Canada,

³ Cf., à ce propos, le discours prononcé par l'écrivaine à l'Université d'Ottawa le 4 juin 2010, <http://www.uottawa.ca/enbref/bio/discours-nancy-huston-2010><http://www.uottawa.ca/enbref/bio/discours-nancy-huston-2010>.

⁴ Milo est québécois, ce qui donne l'occasion au narrateur de parcourir son arbre généalogique, sans oublier de mentionner sa parlure jouale, dont la représentation a été critiquée par plusieurs critiques, journalistes et lecteurs.

suscitant une remontée dans le flux de sa vie et de sa production, à partir de laquelle il lui a semblé important de se poser des questions sur son écriture et sur son exil volontaire. Ce dernier se connote de la sensation d'être toujours en transit, de passage, dans un entre-deux constitutif (Huston. *Instruments des ténèbres*), condition que l'auteure prête à ses personnages et qui transforme l'exil de l'écrivaine en un «état de nomadisme» (Harrington). Cela pourrait expliquer les rapports assez faibles entretenus avec sa mère-patrie, si on les compare surtout à la nostalgie de la terre natale qui habite la littérature des exilés.

Le réseau des filiations

Les liens intergénérationnels hantent l'œuvre hustonienne, au point qu'il est possible de moduler différents modes de représentation selon l'importance que la narration confère aux deux thèmes principaux qui la composent: les liens familiaux et un contexte historiquement connoté. Les vicissitudes familiales décrites dans les romans hustoniens sont situées dans un cadre concret, qui touche aux grands et petits moments de l'Histoire: dans *Cantique de plaines* (1993) le récit de la construction de la nation canadienne moderne va de pair avec celle de son héros, Paddon, se déployant tout au long du XX^e siècle. Le Canada est au centre de cette fiction. Paddon, en mourant, a laissé inachevé un roman historique sur son pays; sa petite-fille Paula a la tâche de le compléter. Elle se met à l'œuvre, mais comprenant qu'elle n'y arriverait pas, elle se replie sur la biographie de son grand-père. L'histoire de Paddon et celle de la province de l'Alberta coïncident, le roman peint les colonisateurs blancs dans leur puritanisme excessif. Dans *Danse noire* (2013), le récit suit les lignes de vie des trois protagonistes, oscillant constamment entre le vieux et le nouveau monde, notamment l'Irlande et le Canada. Le destin des deux frères jumeaux dans *Instruments des ténèbres* (1996) est profondément ancré dans l'histoire économique et sociale du monde paysan berrichon au XVI^e siècle, tout comme celui des quatre héros de *Lignes de faille* (2006) est affecté par la Deuxième guerre mondiale et la Shoah. Par contre, dans *La Virevolte* (1994), *Prodige* (1999) et *Une Adoration* (2003) l'histoire familiale – souvent marquée par des enfantements difficiles – est au cœur du récit, l'Histoire demeurant une toile de fond secondaire. Dans l'œuvre romanesque de l'écrivaine, l'Histoire est le terme moyen entre la mémoire et l'identité, grâce au thème de la filiation: il est intéressant d'analyser la fonction de ces éléments dans les écrits autobiographiques.

Une présence importante d'éléments autobiographiques ponctue les essais, témoignant de sa volonté d'inscrire sa production dans une lignée symbolique ou concrète. Cette inscription peut être intertextuelle ou autobiographique. Dans le

premier cas, son écriture entretient un rapport mimétique avec certains auteurs d'élection, allant jusqu'à l'imitation stylistique pour signaler ses affinités et sa reconnaissance. Samuel Beckett et Romain Gary sont incontestablement des modèles, que son écriture empathique sonde, confondant tour à tour sa voix avec la leur dans *Tombeau de Romain Gary* (1995) et plus tard dans *Limbes/Limbo* (2000). Par cet enchevêtrement entre observation critique et mimétisme fictionnel et par «le mouvement d'identification à [c]es modèles littéraires, l'écrivaine élabore une approche critique tout à fait originale» (Sperti. "Nancy Huston entre essai et fiction": 218).

Le second cas est celui des essais à connotation autobiographique qui parcourent l'entre-deux de l'écrivaine avec lequel son rapport au Canada a partie liée. Dans le réseau de filiation que je viens de décrire, *Bad Girl* occupe une place à part parce qu'il met en récit l'histoire personnelle de Nancy Huston, que le lecteur n'avait connu jusque-là qu'à travers l'écriture essayistique au deuxième degré et les autobiographèmes discrètement présents dans ses romans. De plus, la déclinaison autobiographique de *Bad Girl* est intéressante pour son modèle intertextuel – en ce cas le journal d'artiste⁵ – et parce qu'elle met au centre de l'écriture la relation intergénérationnelle et l'histoire familiale.

***Bad Girl* ou les origines du roman⁶**

Cantique des plaines (1993), que Nancy Huston a composé loin de son pays d'origine, est le plus connu et reconnu parmi ses romans. Le français et ses contaminations argotiques abandonnés, Paula retrace la vie de son grand-père: écrivant de son appartement montréalais, elle emploie la langue anglaise et s'adresse à son grand-père par ce tutoiement qui est l'emblème des œuvres les plus puissantes de l'écrivaine. Ce «tu» ponctue son récit d'hésitations et d'interrogations quant à la légitimité à raconter l'autre, déconstruisant l'histoire du Canada comme récit cohérent et édifiant. Huston cherche à dévoiler une autre histoire que celle écrite par les dominants, celle de la violence faite aux Amérindiens dans l'Ouest du Pays et celle des femmes oubliées dans les prairies (Gillet-Gelly). *Last but not least*, il marque le début de l'autotraduction comme geste scriptural réfléchi sur le passage d'une langue à l'autre; ce geste est sans doute reconfiguré à la suite de la polémique opposant canadiens anglophones

⁵ Il s'agit du journal de la création tenu par la sculpteure américaine Anne Truitt.

⁶ Puisque *Bad Girl* représente le retour aux sources intimes de la romancière, enfin le roman originel de sa création littéraire, j'ai emprunté ce titre de paragraphe à l'ouvrage de Marthe Robert, *Origines du roman...*: 1972.

et francophones en 1993, polémique suscitée par l'attribution, en 1993, du prix littéraire du Gouverneur général à la version française du roman.

Sur cet horizon Nancy Huston étale une narration copieuse, où le Canada joue un rôle accessoire, jusqu'à *Bad Girl, Classes de littérature*, véritable récit des origines. D'emblée, le titre bilingue se pose du côté d'un langage pluriel, enrichi, et l'entre-deux générique, empruntant à la confession autobiographique et au didactisme littéraire, révèle une nouvelle posture de l'écrivaine, pactisant avec ses langues et ses ancêtres, comme le souligne bien la quatrième de couverture du livre. Ses fidèles lecteurs ne manqueront pas d'être surpris par le sujet, ouvertement autobiographique: *Bad Girl* raconte la vie des parents de l'auteure, appartenant à la classe moyenne canadienne anglaise du milieu des années Cinquante. Mais le point de vue narratif choisi est surprenant: l'histoire est racontée par la narratrice à Dorrit⁷, le fœtus que Nancy Huston a été et qu'elle interpelle, comme un double d'elle-même. Souscrivant en principe au pacte autobiographie lejeunien, l'écrivaine accompagne son fœtus pendant les neuf mois de son développement, lui racontant sa chronique familiale et généalogique dans le but de sonder «les facteurs improbables qui transforment une enfant née dans l'Ouest du Canada au milieu du XX^e siècle, en une romancière et essayiste bilingue et parisienne» (Gillet-Gelly 62).

Ce mode introspectif original renoue les liens entre filiation et écriture: la classe de littérature y ajoute une réflexion sur sa vocation littéraire. L'autobiographie hustonienne retrace aussi les origines du roman, sous les auspices d'Ann Truitt:

Ce n'est pas une autobiographie au sens habituel, mais une classe de littérature, c'est-à-dire une réflexion précise sur ce qui m'a fait écrire; jusque-là je n'avais pas pratiqué le genre autobiographique, hormis dans mes essais, où dans de petits paragraphes personnels je raconte ce que j'ai vu, lu ou vécu, pour réfléchir de là sur le désespoir, la séduction, etc. L'année dernière, j'ai déménagé et c'est alors que j'ai vu ma vie défiler (Massoutre).

Elle choisit le prisme de l'autobiographie intra-utérine pour aller à la source de l'empreinte génétique et culturelle que chaque famille exerce sur ses enfants. Les histoires qui y sont racontées ont pour but de consolider la culture familiale, renforçant et élargissant les sentiments d'appartenance aux traditions spécifiques du pays natal, le Canada. «Être ou ne pas naître» (Aribit), telle est la question qui rejaillit à travers le dialogue avec de nombreux auteurs qui jalonnent le texte, comme autant de liaisons ombilicales, Samuel Beckett, Roland Barthes, Anaïs Nin

⁷ Ce prénom est naturellement évocateur: *Little Dorrit* est le titre d'un roman de Dickens (1957), dont l'héroïne est une orpheline. Dans les interviews, Nancy Huston affirme ne pas l'avoir lu, mais qu'elle avait été fascinée par les âpres sonorités de ce prénom.

et Romain Gary qui accompagnent les événements ordinaires de cette famille tiraillée entre morale protestante, déchirements amoureux et ambitions entravées, jouant sur les parallélismes entre la maternité et la création littéraire et artistique.

Bad Girl se compose de deux-cents chapitres courts, qui font rarement plus d'une page. D'un point de vue formel, cette technique d'écriture fragmentaire allie au rythme proche du journal intime, celui du blog, du chat, composé de brèves notations d'instant de vie, où l'on s'ausculte et où l'on se révèle. Débutant avec les liquides essentiels à la rencontre des gamètes pour la conception de Dorrit, cette autobiographie intra-utérine suit son développement de l'embryon au fœtus, jusqu'au nouveau-né. L'utérus d'Alison, la mère, est le catalyseur de tous les événements analeptiques ou proleptiques qui sont racontés à Dorrit par la narratrice.

Le choix du fœtus est significatif car c'est un lieu de passage, d'expérience et de transformations incessantes (Trapenard). Il n'est pas un personnage en soi, mais un amas de cellules, un être *in fieri* qui grandit dans un autre corps dont il hérite les émotions, les histoires, les souvenirs et auquel s'adresse la narratrice pour sonder cette matière formée par les espoirs, les drames et les aventures de ses ancêtres.

Le ventre maternel: écrin et écran

Pareil à un écrin, le ventre maternel s'individualise dans la représentation, devenant une chambre obscure où sont projetés les événements passés et futurs, ceux de Nancy Huston elle-même et de ses aïeux maternels et paternels. Ainsi, le ventre devient-il une métaphore du monde familial de l'écrivaine, de son entourage et de l'Alberta de son enfance; par ce chronotope⁸ la narratrice évoque ses origines biologiques et généalogiques, dont elle ne peut avoir aucun souvenir personnel, et ses origines familiales⁹. Dorrit capte les échos du monde extérieur, résonnant dans le liquide amniotique:

Parfois, Dorrit, tu te feras naïve, légère, rêveuse [...] Mais tu sais que [...] l'amour n'est pas qu'une affaire privée. Chacun de nous descend et dépend d'autres membres de notre espèce [...] Nous ne tombons pas du ciel, mais nous poussons sur un arbre généalogique (Huston. *Bad Girl*... : 48).

⁸ Sur la notion de chronotope, en tant que corrélation essentielle des rapports spatio-temporels, cf. Bakhtine. *Esthétique et théorie*... : 1978.

⁹ Robert Lepage reprend dans sa pièce autobiographique 887 la même idée, réduisant l'immeuble de son enfance à une maquette posée sur une plaque tournante qu'il peut manipuler à sa guise sur scène.

Nancy Huston nous raconte une histoire convaincante, qui explique ce qu'elle est devenue en tant qu'artiste et en tant qu'être social. Cette posture autobiographique se caractérise par sa dérive vers une histoire collective qui est le résultat d'une histoire unique, celle de chacun de nous.

Cette mise en récit de l'existence par une écriture hors de soi, mais en même temps profondément impliquée, comme l'indique l'usage illocutoire du «tu», me semble participer d'un «nouveau mode d'individuation où l'écriture de soi» (Salmon 225), ne peut faire abstraction de tout un pan d'histoire sociale qui est créée à partir de représentations d'événements réels et inventés, c'est-à-dire factuels et fictionnels.

En particulier, l'intérêt de *Bad Girl* réside dans le fait qu'il représente aussi bien ce qui n'appartient pas à l'expérience personnelle de son auteure: les conflits sociaux, l'incessant travail d'intégration mené par les classes les plus défavorisées, ainsi que les difficultés matérielles pour trouver une place dans la société canadienne de l'Ouest à l'époque. En ce sens il retrace la construction du couple parental de la narratrice dans la mouvance d'une histoire collective. À son intérieur, le trajet personnel accidenté de l'écrivaine, l'être qui faillit ne pas naître et qui aura en sort le départ, le changement de langue et la migration. Cet usage cognitif du récit autobiographique repose sur une dialectique entre ce que l'on est et ce qu'on aurait pu devenir, en recherchant dans les jalons de ce parcours la cohérence qui répare aux ruptures, aux trahisons et aux mensonges inévitables dans la vie de tout un chacun. Le liquide amniotique agit comme un liquide révélateur de «tous ces jolis débris, lettres, photos et souvenirs qui flottent [...] avec toi, petite Dorrit» (Huston. *Bad Girl...*: 62).

«You, you, you et tu, tu, tu...»

L'élément stylistique le plus intrigant dans *Bad Girl* est l'usage de la deuxième personne du singulier, transformant l'autobiographie en un pseudo-dialogue entre la narratrice et la petite fille *in fieri*, destinée à devenir écrivaine. Ce «tu» se situe à une distance intermédiaire entre l'intimité de la première personne et l'éloignement de la troisième. Les interpellations avec lesquelles la narratrice apostrophe Dorrit se chargent de toutes les nuances, de la gravité – «Tu vois comment tu es, Dorrit?» (51) – au maternage tranquillisant – «On a tout notre temps, Dorrit. Rien ne presse, on arrivera bien au but» (86) – jusqu'à l'incitation finale: «Allez, ouste, petite. Sors-toi de là!» qui clôt le texte (257). Ce fœtus auditeur, muet par la force des choses, reste le sujet principal de l'énoncé. Alors que le «tu» de Gary dans *Tombeau de Romain Gary*, celui de Paddon dans *Cantique des plaines* et celui de Beckett dans *Limbes/Limbo* sont l'indice d'une

appartenance à une même famille intellectuelle dont témoignent les hypotextes et les intertextes cités et imités qui 'répondent' aux questionnements de l'écriture houstonienne, le «tu» de *Bad Girl* représente, par son décalage identitaire, l'autre près de soi, ce dédoublement probablement encore nécessaire à l'autobiographie. Par ce «tu», Nancy Huston se fait personnage, comme l'indique l'exergue de Roland Barthes (2)¹⁰, posée à la fin du texte: «Tout ceci doit-être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman» (259). Et encore, dans les entretiens elle ne cesse d'affirmer sa prédilection pour la deuxième personne:

Le «tu» est ma personne préférée. J'ai l'habitude de me tutoyer. [...] Le tutoiement vient aussi de cette importance des lettres de ma mère depuis toujours. C'est une technique qui me libère. [...] J'avais vraiment peur de m'enliser si je disais «je». C'est un truc gluant. Beaucoup d'artistes de la scène savent que vous parlez mieux de vous-mêmes si vous êtes masqué (Huston dans Cloutier).

Par la forme vocative, l'écrivaine s'interroge pour comprendre tout, même ce qui a été douloureux, poussée par le besoin de savoir d'où elle vient. La filiation de Dorrit, ainsi racontée, est une forme et un fantasme qui se libère de la contrainte du temps, qui conjugue le conditionnel au présent et le futur à l'imparfait, modulant ainsi les trois temps qui donnent le caractère au récit: le passé des ascendants, le présent du fœtus et le futur de l'écrivaine. Ce dernier temps, principalement un futur de prédiction, imprime une autre perspective au récit. Et ceci notamment en relation à l'abandon maternel, longuement décrit dans *Bad Girl*, lorsque le lien mère-fille se tisse des longues lettres que celle-ci lui envoie et que l'écrivaine représente ainsi:

Dorrit, ma douce petite Dorrit, comment vas-tu ma gentille Dorrit adorée? Ses lettres t'aideront à rester en vie et quand, plus tard, tu te mettras à écrire des livres, la deuxième personne sera toujours celle que tu préfères, étant donné que [...] il et elle mettraient trop de distance entre toi et tes personnages bien-aimés, tu veux leur parler tout le temps [...] c'est pourquoi, livre après livre, tu diras *you, you, you* et *tu, tu, tu*, et il en ira de même, Dorrit, pour ce livre-ci, où ta vie elle-même sera transformée en lettre, et toi, veux, veux pas, [...] en femme de lettres (254).

Le temps du récit est le temps de cette collection compulsive de faits – bribes de vie de ses ascendants paternels et maternels, souvenirs des autres et mémoires personnelles – qui compose le cadre spatio-temporel de l'autobiographie. En ce sens, l'écriture de *Bad Girl* est redevable du projet auto-socio-

¹⁰ Nancy Huston avait fréquenté les séminaires de Roland Barthes: sous sa direction, elle analyse l'interdiction linguistique (cf. Huston. *Dire et interdire...*: 1980).

biographique mené par Annie Ernaux: l'ambition impudique d'écrire hors de soi, en se considérant un lieu de passage, reprend ce dessein central dans l'œuvre de l'écrivaine française. Le choix de l'énonciation à la deuxième personne et celui de se représenter en un lieu situé entre l'être et le non-être, symbolisent la difficulté pour Nancy Huston de s'assigner une place véritable, en dehors des «classes de littérature». En ce sens, ce texte est, dans la production de l'écrivaine, le plus proche de l'autofiction française contemporaine¹¹.

Le choix maternel de l'abandon a favorisé chez Nancy Huston l'expatriation, l'acquisition d'autres langues, les voyages et la culture. Blessure et ressentiment n'occulent pas la douleur, et le lien entre la mère et la fille tient bon: à travers la représentation des conséquences néfastes que sa mère a dû essuyer, privée douloureusement de sa maternité, le texte traite aussi des difficultés relatives à l'émancipation féminine de cette époque. Quant à la petite Dorrit, elle respire le sentiment de culpabilité d'être mauvaise fille, une *bad girl*, mais en même temps elle crie la joie d'écrire, d'interrompre le silence sidéral des femmes (Lalonde).

Bad Girl se caractérise par cette alternance entre récit des autres et récit de soi, par son projet d'auto-sociobiographie collective, à l'instar d'Annie Ernaux, et par son mélange de discours critique et de discours littéraire, qui caractérise la littérature canadienne (Godard). Nancy Huston a écrit une autobiographie intersubjective et intergénérationnelle, où le «je» est les autres, et les autres font «je» (Marpeau). Puisant dans le mythe psychanalytique de la famille comme explication et prédestination de l'individu, l'écrivaine reconstruit ainsi sa filiation personnelle et spirituelle. *Bad Girl* est une pierre angulaire dans l'œuvre de l'écrivaine qui fait un pacte, dans la force de l'âge, entre une nouvelle vie, ses racines anciennes et ses pays, le Canada et la France.

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¹¹ Cf., à ce propos, Annie Ernaux. *L'écriture comme un couteau...*: 2011.

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UNE RELATION DE SANG ET DE FOI AU XVII^e SIECLE: LA CORRESPONDANCE DE MARIE DE L'INCARNATION A SON FILS CLAUDE MARTIN

Amandine Bonesso*

Abstract

La contribution examine la correspondance que Marie de l'Incarnation (1599-1672), missionnaire en Nouvelle-France, adressa à son fils qui, demeuré en France, devint bénédictin. Les lettres révèlent que l'amour pour Dieu, cause de l'abandon de Claude, est à l'origine d'une réunion qui redéfinit les correspondants dans leurs rôles. C'est en nous focalisant sur quelques aspects thématiques et discursifs de la correspondance que nous mettons en lumière la singularité de la relation, due au croisement du lien biologique avec le lien religieux.

A Blood and Faith Relationship in Seventeenth Century: Letters from Marie de l'Incarnation to his Son Claude Martin

The contribution examines the correspondence that Marie de l'Incarnation (1599-1672), missionary in New France, addressed to her son who, remained in France, became a Benedictine. The letters reveal that love for God, cause of Claude's desertion, originates a reconciliation redefining the letter-writers' in their own roles of mother and son. Focusing our attention on thematic and discursive aspects, we point out the relationship's singularity, determined by the crossing of blood and religious ties.

Una relazione di sangue e di fede nel XVII secolo: le lettere di Marie de l'Incarnation a suo figlio Claude Martin

Il contributo prende in esame la corrispondenza che Marie de l'Incarnation (1599-1672), missionaria in Nuova Francia, indirizzò al figlio che, rimasto in Francia, divenne benedettino. Le lettere rivelano che l'amore per Dio, causa dell'abbandono di Claude, è all'origine di una riconciliazione che ridefinisce i corrispondenti nei rispettivi ruoli di madre e figlio. La focalizzazione su alcuni aspetti tematici e discorsivi permette di mettere in luce la singolarità della relazione, data dall'incrocio del legame biologico con quello religioso.

Relation mère-fils: fusion du lien biologique avec un lien religieux

Pour contribuer à l'étude des rapports intergénérationnels et du vieillissement dans la culture canadienne, nous allons plonger au cœur du XVII^e siècle, au temps de la

* Università di Udine.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

colonisation française de l'Amérique du Nord, en nous penchant sur la relation qui se tissa entre Marie de l'Incarnation et son fils Claude Martin à partir de 1639, lorsque l'ursuline de Tours quitta la France pour fonder à Québec le premier monastère d'Ursulines du Nouveau Monde et le premier institut consacré à l'instruction et à l'éducation des filles des colons et des Amérindiens. Si aujourd'hui nous pouvons retracer cette relation, c'est grâce à la correspondance que la religieuse adressa à son fils dès son arrivée en Nouvelle-France jusqu'en 1671, quelques mois avant son décès¹. Tout en ne disposant que de la correspondance active, étant donné la disparition des missives de Claude, nous examinerons la relation mère-fils dont la singularité tient à la fusion du lien biologique avec un lien religieux, car Claude entra dans l'ordre de Saint-Benoît, au sein de la congrégation érudite de Saint-Maur, après le départ définitif de sa mère pour la Nouvelle-France.

La critique littéraire, historique et psychanalytique sur les écrits autobiographiques de la moniale (Bruneau, Dunn, Ferraro, Houdard, Landy-Houillon, Maître, Théry, Verciani) a souvent mis en relief un événement douloureux de la biographie des deux correspondants en le posant comme le nœud fondamental de leur relation: il s'agit du double abandon subi par Claude au nom de la vocation religieuse et apostolique de sa mère. Le premier abandon, le plus blâmable au point de vue moral selon la perspective actuelle du sentiment de l'enfance, se réalisa en 1631, lorsque Marie prit le voile chez les Ursulines de Tours pour assouvir un désir qui remontait à son adolescence. Les parents de Marie avaient refusé son entrée en religion en préférant qu'elle se marie, ce qu'elle fit vers dix-sept ans. Deux années plus tard, puisqu'elle était veuve, elle aurait pu réaliser sa vocation si elle n'avait pas eu un enfant à élever. La jeune femme se mit au service dans la demeure-entreprise de sa sœur aînée Claude et de son mari Paul Buisson en attendant que la volonté de Dieu se manifeste. Celle-ci apparut une dizaine d'années plus tard, lorsque Marie avait trente et un ans, tandis que son fils allait avoir douze ans. Vers 1634, la religieuse fut inspirée d'une vocation apostolique qui se fortifia dans les années jusqu'à s'accomplir outre-Atlantique pour seconder l'œuvre missionnaire des Jésuites. Ainsi Marie de l'Incarnation se sépara-t-elle une deuxième fois et à jamais de son fils.

L'abandon filial

Au fil de la correspondance, le thème de l'abandon filial devient un *leitmotiv* qui relance le thème justificatif. Sa réitération indique que le sentiment de

¹ Nous nous référerons dorénavant à la *Correspondance* éditée par Dom Guy Oury à travers le sigle C suivi du numéro des pages.

culpabilité ne quitta jamais la religieuse. De son côté, Claude ne l'aida pas à s'en défaire. D'ailleurs, il fit de l'abandon, comme on le lit dans la lettre du 9 août 1654 (C 525), l'un des arguments pour essayer de convaincre sa mère à lui envoyer ses papiers de conscience dans la perspective d'écrire sa biographie à son insu. C'est donc en représentant à sa mère la souffrance dont elle avait été la cause que Claude obtint son autobiographie spirituelle, source qu'il puisa pour rédiger *La Vie de la Vénérable Mère Marie de l'Incarnation* qui parut en 1677. Le texte, où la religieuse reconstruit son expérience extérieure et intérieure, visait à se justifier aux yeux de son fils, à contribuer à son édification religieuse, étant donné que Claude avait été initié à la vie mystique à cette époque-là (C 515). La moniale témoigne de l'évolution de la grâce dans son âme, mais aussi du déchirement que provoque chez elle l'abandon de son fils. Ce moment apparaît ainsi dans sa vie comme une tentative d'apaiser son tourment intérieur. On ne saura oublier qu'en 1654, l'année où elle envoie son autobiographie à Claude, celui-ci a déjà plus de trente ans. La question de l'abandon n'est cependant pas résolue pour Marie de l'Incarnation; elle y revient en effet quinze ans après, en 1669: elle consacre une lettre entière, celle du 30 juillet (C 836-838), aux épisodes dramatiques du début des années 1630.

Par ses nombreuses récurrences textuelles, le geste qui engendra chez Marie de l'Incarnation le tourment d'être «la plus cruelle de toutes les mères» (C 316) apparaît un thème récurrent. Or, le discours épistolaire cherche paradoxalement à l'effacer en le justifiant par les effets positifs de cet abandon. Nous avons constaté que la religieuse évoque l'abandon à chaque fois que son fils lui fait part de ses progrès dans les charges ecclésiastiques et de son talent dans ses fonctions, en d'autres mots elle exploite les succès de Claude pour le convaincre du bien-fondé de la perte mutuelle. Cette stratégie poursuit une visée persuasive et pédagogique cherchant à transformer et à redéfinir la relation entre une mère et son fils. Si Marie de l'Incarnation ne peut pas remédier à la douleur due à la perte que son fils subit pendant son adolescence, elle essaie cependant d'y apporter une consolation à travers l'écriture: l'écriture épistolaire, ce «mince cordon ombilical» (Ferraro 56), renoue les correspondants, restaure le dialogue entre eux, essaie de combler le vide de l'autre. Nous nous proposons de relire la correspondance de Marie de l'Incarnation pour examiner les stratégies discursives que la mystique adopte pour créer des alternatives à l'absence.

Marie de l'Incarnation essaie de faire accepter à son fils leur séparation en lui rappelant qu'il avait lui aussi embrassé la vie religieuse: il peut ainsi comprendre la force de l'appel divin et l'intensité du sentiment qui unit tout religieux et, en particulier, tout mystique à Dieu. L'amour divin est en effet un sentiment qui ne trouve aucun équivalent dans les relations humaines. C'est pourquoi Marie de l'Incarnation n'employa généralement le terme «amour» que pour désigner le

Père Éternel et les opérations de celui-ci dans son âme. La religieuse évitait l'expression de ses sentiments pour Claude en termes d'amour en raison de la séparation qu'elle percevait entre la vie extérieure et la vie mystique. Même si l'ursuline témoigna, tout au long de la correspondance, de la place privilégiée que Claude occupait dans son cœur, tel que le mettent en relief les variations sur la formule «la personne qui m'est la plus chère dans le monde» (C 572, 647, 790, 797), le sentiment qui la liait à son fils ne soutenait pas la comparaison avec celui qui l'unissait à Dieu. Ainsi, pour elle, Claude était l'objet d'une profonde «affection» constamment réitérée et d'une «sincère amitié» (C 797), conformément aux préceptes de la bienséance de l'époque qui visaient à contenir tout débordement des passions (Gélis 323-324). La religieuse n'hésitait pas cependant à montrer au début de ses lettres son amour pour Claude, lorsqu'elle s'adressait à lui à travers la tournure «Mon très cher et bien-aimé fils». Claude, néanmoins, ne devait pas s'y méprendre. L'amour que sa mère lui vouait était moins de nature maternelle que spirituelle, comme l'ursuline le précisa en 1668: «Tout ce que je souhaite à votre égard n'est point pour vous-même, ny à cause de ce que vous m'êtes selon le sang, mais que vous soyez, autant qu'il est en vous, un digne instrument de la gloire de Dieu» (C 823). La moniale poussait son fils à se détacher d'elle en ne cessant de lui rappeler que l'affection qu'elle éprouvait pour lui n'avait plus rien à voir avec leur lien de sang.

La dissimulation de la famille naturelle

Nourrie du verset évangélique «Qui aime son père et sa mère plus que moi n'est pas digne de moi» (Mathieu X, 37), Marie de l'Incarnation concevait toute relation familiale, ses implications sentimentales et matérielles, comme une entrave à l'amour divin. Pour amener son fils à l'anéantissement de son amour filial, la religieuse neutralisa toute marque d'affection réciproque en mettant l'accent sur la vie religieuse qu'ils avaient adoptée tous les deux. En prononçant leurs vœux, ils avaient officiellement abandonné leurs liens familiaux pour entrer dans une nouvelle famille: celle qui se met au service de Dieu et, en particulier, celle qui anime leurs maisons monastiques.

Cette nouvelle appartenance familiale prend le pas sur la famille de naissance. Tout en entretenant une relation épistolaire avec ses frères et sœurs, ses belles-sœurs et ses neveux, Marie de l'Incarnation ne les évoque presque jamais dans les lettres à Claude. Dans la toute première lettre qu'elle écrit à son fils, en se congédiant de lui, le 10 septembre 1640, elle lui demanda d'être reconnaissant envers ses oncles et ses tantes (C 116). Il s'agit du seul passage de la correspondance où la religieuse souhaite que Claude maintienne des liens avec

sa famille. Il faut préciser qu'en 1640 son fils était en effet encore séculier, car on venait de refuser son entrée chez les Jésuites et ses oncles et ses tantes représentaient son seul appui.

À partir de 1641, l'année où Claude effectue son noviciat, les membres de la famille biologique disparaissent du texte épistolaire à moins qu'il n'aient quelques liens avec la foi. C'est le cas de la nièce de Marie de l'Incarnation, Marie Buisson, la fille de sa sœur Claude. En 1644, on informa l'ursuline que celle qu'elle considérait comme une fille (C 230) – puisqu'elle l'avait vue grandir au temps de l'emploi chez ses parents – avait pris l'habit chez les Ursulines de Tours. En écrivant à son fils le 2 août, Marie de l'Incarnation se réjouit du salut que la jeune fille avait recouvré en s'éloignant de la corruption qu'elle avait connue dans le monde (C 206). Ensuite, elle donna plusieurs fois des nouvelles de sa nièce à Claude: elle rapporta ses progrès en religion, apprécia ses qualités comme elle jugea ses défauts en «fond de vertu et de sainteté» (C 921). La religieuse ne cacha pas non plus ses craintes et ses doutes quant à l'authenticité de la vocation apostolique de sa nièce, lorsque celle-ci exprima son désir de la rejoindre au Canada (C 230, 484-485), à tel point qu'elle demanda à son fils de vérifier la solidité de cette disposition en 1656 (C 586).

C'est encore dans la lettre du 2 août 1644 que l'ursuline parle d'un autre membre de la famille soustrait à la tentation du monde: «un déterminé, coureur de nuit, addonné à tout mal» (C 207) qui s'était converti en entrant chez les Minimes. Si ce dernier est mentionné par l'ursuline, c'est parce qu'il témoigne du triomphe de Dieu dans son âme et que ce trait le lie d'une parenté spirituelle aux deux correspondants, une union qui dépasse tout lien de sang.

De plus, la famille biologique comptait un ancêtre qui avait été auprès de saint François de Paule. Pour répondre aux interrogations de son fils sur ses dévotions, le 16 septembre 1661, Marie de l'Incarnation relata la genèse de sa vénération pour ce saint:

Je vous ay autrefois parlé de la dévotion à saint François de Paule: car je croy que vous n'ignorez pas que ce fut notre bisayeul qui fut envoyé par le Roy Louis, pour le demander au Pape et pour l'amener en France². J'en ay bien entendu parler à mon grand père; et même ma Tante qui est morte lors que j'avois quinze ans, avoit veu sa grande mère, fille de ce bisayeul, qui la menoit souvent au Plessis pour visiter ce saint homme, qui par une pieuse affection faisoit le signe de la croix sur le visage

² François de Paule (1416-1507), mystique italien renommé pour ses miracles, fut le fondateur des Minimes. À la fin du XV^e siècle, le roi Louis XI, qui était gravement malade, fit appeler le saint homme dans l'espoir d'une guérison. Parmi les ambassadeurs de la cour de Plessis-lès-Tours que le roi avait envoyés en Italie pour aller quérir François de Paule figurait l'ancêtre de Marie de l'Incarnation.

de cette petite en la bénissant. C'est ce qui a toujours donné une grande dévotion à notre famille envers ce grand Saint. Mon grand Père nous racontait cela fort souvent, afin d'en perpétuer après luy la mémoire et la dévotion, comme il l'avoit reçue de son ayeul (C 661).

À travers cette anecdote concernant l'histoire de sa famille, Marie de l'Incarnation revalorise en quelque sorte les liens de parenté qu'elle ignore habituellement. Elle lègue à son fils ce qu'elle a hérité elle-même de son grand-père: un détail qui rend honneur à la famille d'appartenance, car l'ancêtre garantit une bienveillance sur toute sa descendance par la pratique de l'invocation du saint que l'on transmet d'une génération à l'autre.

Une nouvelle famille

Dès que Claude accède au noviciat, le discours épistolaire met sous silence toute relation de parenté n'ayant aucun rapport avec l'état religieux ou avec la sainteté. Pour compenser cet effacement, Marie de l'Incarnation insista sur l'appartenance des deux correspondants à la famille terrestre et céleste de Dieu. Pour commencer, l'ursuline substitua les parents de sang par les membres de chacune des communautés religieuses, elle mit l'accent sur son lien religieux avec Claude en favorisant l'échange d'informations, de confidences et d'opinions sur leur vie conventuelle. Ce sujet conversationnel s'avérait agréable à tous les deux, d'autant plus qu'ils partageaient la condition de se trouver au sein d'une congrégation en transformation: alors que les Ursulines de Québec étaient aux prises avec leur constitution, un processus ralenti par le manque de direction d'un évêché, les Mauristes étaient en pleine réforme. Dans cette perspective, par exemple, Claude demanda à sa mère son avis sur la réforme bénédictine dont il lui avait fait part en 1644 (C 228). La religieuse exprima sa reconnaissance lorsque Claude lui rendit compte de l'évolution de sa communauté (C 294) non seulement parce que l'appartenance de son fils à cette congrégation suscitait une grande attention, mais aussi parce que l'exemple mauriste lui était utile pour les affaires de sa communauté (C 344).

Si l'estime pour la congrégation bénédictine est évidente chez la religieuse, il n'en va pas de même de la considération de son fils pour les Ursulines de Québec. D'après la lettre du 9 septembre 1652 (C 482-486), il est clair que Claude avait essayé de convaincre sa mère de songer au retour des religieuses en France en lui représentant la pauvreté de la communauté causée par l'incendie du monastère en 1650, la précarité institutionnelle de la congrégation qui attendait encore les bulles papales pour officialiser sa constitution et l'hostilité

des Iroquois contre les missionnaires et les néophytes amérindiens. Même si Claude ne l'avoua pas ouvertement, le rapatriement des Ursulines constituait le seul moyen de faire revenir sa mère près de lui, selon le désir de réunion qu'il lui témoigna maintes fois, en plus de lui reprocher l'abandon de 1631. Marie de l'Incarnation se montra inébranlable aussi bien pour les protestations personnelles que pour celles qui touchaient à sa communauté en substituant la réunion des correspondants par des rencontres spirituelles et en affirmant que le rétablissement et la permanence des Ursulines en Nouvelle-France venait d'un ordre de Dieu (C 499). Seulement lorsqu'il reçut l'autobiographie de sa mère, le religieux cessa de la culpabiliser pour la séparation³, il finit même par approuver, en 1656, la «demeure en Canada» (C 572) des Ursulines.

En plus d'engager un dialogue sur la vie monastique, Marie de l'Incarnation chercha à établir un lien plus profond avec son fils à travers la représentation respective de chacun d'eux dans la communauté de l'autre. Cette démarche se réalise en particulier dans la conclusion de ses lettres comme, par exemple, dans la missive du 15 septembre 1644: «Ne vous laissez point de prier pour moy et de me recommander aux saintes prières et saints sacrifices de tous mes Rds Pères. Je les tiens pour miens puisque ce sont les vôtres» (C 241). À travers les possessifs, la religieuse souligne son appartenance aux Bénédictins, ce qu'elle partage avec Claude au point de solliciter des prières auprès de ses confrères. En plus, la moniale ne manqua pas d'évoquer l'affection que les Ursulines et leur entourage de Québec vouaient à son fils. À ce propos, nous lisons ceci dans la lettre du 30 août 1644: «Nous prions toutes pour vous. Nos Rds Pères vous aiment. Le Père Poncet vous écrit. La Mère Marie et Madame notre fondatrice [...] vous saluent» (C 230). Un autre jour, l'ursuline évoque la satisfaction de ses amis et de ses proches demeurés en France pour le noviciat de Claude (C 133).

Marie de l'Incarnation parlait de Claude à ses amis, aux saints et à Dieu, la famille céleste qu'elle procura à son fils après l'avoir abandonné. Lorsqu'elle s'explique sur ces événements, la religieuse met en évidence qu'elle avait eu le soin de confier son rôle parental à la Vierge (C 131) et à Dieu (C 527, 725). Le 4 septembre 1641, en avouant à son fils «je vous visite plusieurs fois le jour; je parle de vous sans cesse à Jésus, Marie et Joseph» (C 133), la religieuse comble par une présence spirituelle, exprimée par le verbe “visiter”, la distance physique qui les sépare. C'est dans ses nombreuses prières quotidiennes, dans ses moments de recueillement, qu'elle franchit les barrières spatio-temporelles pour rendre présent dans son esprit celui qui est à l'autre bout du monde et

³ La disparition, à partir de la correspondance de 1654, de toute trace des reproches pour la séparation de la part de Claude prouve que ceux-ci avaient servi de stratégie persuasive seulement pour forcer sa mère à lui livrer ses confidences spirituelles.

pour le placer sous la protection de la Sainte famille. Dans la missive du 1^{er} septembre 1643, l'ursuline détourne le désir de proximité manifesté par Claude («Vous me demandez si nous nous verrons encore en ce monde?», C 187): elle lui signale que, tout en le souhaitant autant que lui, elle se remet à la volonté de Dieu; et que, de toute façon, elle s'unit à lui spirituellement, journallement par la coïncidence des heures canoniales de l'un et de l'autre, malgré le décalage horaire entre l'Amérique et l'Europe. La séparation que Claude accuse n'est qu'illusoire parce que, tout en étant à l'autre bout de l'océan, ils peuvent constamment se rencontrer devant Dieu, à travers la prière. Grâce à ces rendez-vous spirituels, évoqués par des énoncés tels que «Je vous voy en luy. Cherchez-y moy», Marie de l'Incarnation invite Claude à une redéfinition mystique de leur relation. Muée en directrice spirituelle, elle guide son fils dans son parcours intérieur, dans l'anéantissement des résistances humaines qui conduit à la sanctification. Elle suggère qu'en subordonnant leur relation à la primauté des desseins de Dieu pour chacun d'eux, ils atteindront un état de vertu qui leur permettra de se retrouver dans le séjour des bienheureux: «Il [Jésus] sçait ce qu'il veut faire de nous, prenons plaisir à le laisser faire, et si nous luy sommes fidèles, notre réunion sera d'autant plus parfaite dans le Ciel, que nous aurons rompus nos liens en ce monde pour obéir aux maximes de son Euan-gile» (C 485). Ainsi la religieuse réoriente-t-elle le désir de réunion de son fils vers la vie immortelle qui les attend où, comme elle l'écrit, «Nous aurons alors l'Éternité pour nous voir et nous entretenir» (C 314).

Le renversement du sentiment de la fin

Même si Marie de l'Incarnation essaie d'échapper aux plaintes d'absence de Claude et si elle substitue au rapport mère-fils une relation religieuse et mystique, elle ne parvient pas à atteindre infailliblement son but comme l'atteste un ébranlement inattendu pour une mystique. Apparaît alors une contradiction entre la fermeté lucide qu'elle essaie d'adopter à l'égard de Claude, la distance qu'elle vise à instaurer par sa stratégie persuasive, et le besoin de se rapprocher de lui. Aux alentours des années 1660, en effet, quelques propos de la religieuse dénotent le désir de revoir son fils. Ce changement d'attitude est sans doute lié à ses conditions physiques et psychologiques.

Tout d'abord, Marie de l'Incarnation accuse un sentiment de plus en plus vif du vieillissement et de l'imminence de la mort. Toutes les fois qu'elle met l'accent sur l'avancement de son âge – ses soixante ans (C 632), ses soixante-quatre ans (C 714) et ses soixante-dix ans (C 826) – la moniale exprime le bonheur d'atteindre la fin de sa vie et souligne son épuisement dû à plus de

vingt ans de vie missionnaire. Ensuite, dans une lettre de 1657, il lui arrive de signaler, sans trop de détails, une maladie qui l'avait «mise à deux doigts de la mort» (C 589). Quelques années après, en 1665, elle s'attarde dans la description minutieuse des symptômes que provoque un dérèglement hépatique et rénal (C 744-745) et de ses séquelles pendant les deux années successives (C 765-766, 790-791). Enfin, on peut saisir un découragement dans son œuvre missionnaire à cause des difficultés que comporte son projet d'évangélisation dans ce «païs flottant et incertain» (C 659) qu'était la Nouvelle-France, en raison des rétractations dans les accords de paix, de la violence qui accompagnait les incursions des Iroquois pendant les années 1650 et de son échec dans la 'francisation' des pensionnaires amérindiennes (C 828).

Profondément affligée et minée par l'âge, la fatigue et la maladie, Marie de l'Incarnation laisse échapper de sa plume le réconfort qu'elle reçoit de la relation épistolaire avec son fils: «Dans le peu de temps qui me reste de vie rien ne me contente comme de m'entretenir avec vous» (C 795). La correspondance avec Claude apparaît comme le palliatif d'une présence concrète imaginée et enfermée dans une série d'énoncés hypothétiques. En recevant une version écrite d'un sermon de son fils en 1661, la religieuse se plaint de ne pas avoir le don d'une ouïe surnaturelle pour entendre ses prédications: «Si j'étois comme ces Saints qui entendoient prêcher de loin, je prendrais plaisir à vous entendre» (C 659). Quelques lignes plus loin, la moniale abandonne la représentation vocale de l'autre pour se rapprocher intérieurement de son fils: «Si j'avois une chose à souhaiter en ce monde, ce seroit d'être auprès de vous afin de verser mon cœur dans le vôtre» (C 659). Comme une litanie, certains désirs réapparaissent en 1665 (C 751) et en 1671 (C 931). En rêvant d'entretiens intimes à la manière d'une direction de conscience, la religieuse suggère, sans tomber dans un sentimentalisme déplacé, que dans son compte à rebours elle désirerait, plus que tout, jouir de la compagnie de son fils pour échanger leurs confidences spirituelles.

À côté de ces élans affectifs, l'ursuline réactualise le thème de la réunion éternelle avec son fils en se fixant cette fois-ci sur sa mort prochaine et en accusant le poids des années. Si elle ne cesse de penser à la vie éternelle, elle est quand même profondément affectée par le sentiment de sa disparition prochaine, par la séparation définitive de son fils ici-bas. Dans la lettre du 16 septembre 1661, elle évoque dans un énoncé teinté de résignation le plaisir qu'elle prendrait à écouter les sermons de Claude. En écrivant «Il est à croire que nous nous verrons plutôt en l'autre monde qu'en celui-cy» (C 659), Marie de l'Incarnation révèle qu'elle avait gardé et surtout caché l'espoir de revoir, ne fût-ce que pour un instant, son fils sur cette terre. Ici, le message semble s'adresser plus à elle-même qu'à Claude. À une époque où ce dernier avait cessé de lui transmettre ses reproches, la religieuse ne devait plus craindre d'aviver ses

peines en lui dévoilant le vide que causait leur séparation. En affirmant l'impossibilité de se revoir dans ce monde, elle en révèle le besoin. En fonction de ce sentiment, Marie de l'Incarnation va jusqu'à imaginer la nécessité d'une rencontre prochaine dans un lieu assez difficile à définir: «Quand j'ay appris que vous étiez malade et si affoibli, j'ay pensé que nous pourrions bien nous rencontrer dans le chemin de l'éternité» (C 791-792). Cependant, le bonheur commun des retrouvailles célestes («Ah! que nous serons contents quand nous nous verrons dans cet employ!», C 797) demeurait tout de même un soulagement plus propre à la religieuse âgée qu'à son fils: Marie de l'Incarnation était consciente que Claude lui survivrait, c'est pourquoi elle lui demanda de faire dire le plus de messes possible à la nouvelle de son décès (C 797). À lumière de cette requête, les évocations de la mort de la moniale et de la réunion éternelle avec son fils servent à préparer Claude à la dernière séparation d'avec sa mère.

Pour conclure, la variation des attitudes de la religieuse à l'égard de son fils révèle que la relation mère-fils évolue dans le temps en fonction de leur parcours intérieur et de leur âge. Dans les lettres qu'elle écrit pendant sa vieillesse, Marie de l'Incarnation révèle que son projet d'instaurer une relation mystique avec son fils, ce qu'elle avait nourri en prenant la résolution de le quitter, procède d'une intention qui se heurte, à ce moment-là, au besoin qu'éprouve une mère de revoir son fils alors qu'elle est entrée dans sa vieillesse. Apparaît le visage d'une mystique tiraillée entre son désir de vie éternelle et ses élans de mère, Marie de l'Incarnation, ou la 'noche oscura del alma'.

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MEMORIA E GENERAZIONI IN QUÉBEC: SPUNTI BIBLIOGRAFICI

Maura Felice*

Abstract

La ricerca bibliografia intende elencare i saggi critici relativi ai temi affrontati in questo numero di *Oltreoceano*: filiazione, conflitti intergenerazionali, memoria e invecchiamento, inerenti al panorama culturale e letterario del Québec.

Memory and Generations in Quebec: a Bibliographical Starting Point

This literature review is intended to list the critical essays on the topics addressed in this issue of *Oltreoceano*: filiation, intergenerational conflicts, memory and ageing, related to the cultural and literary contest of Quebec.

La seguente ricerca bibliografica intende elencare i saggi critici sui temi affrontati e messi in relazione in questo numero di *Oltreoceano*: filiazione, conflitti intergenerazionali, memoria e invecchiamento, inerenti al panorama culturale e letterario del Québec.

Si sono consultati, inserendo delle parole chiave – quali “*génération Québec*”, “*mémoire Québec*” –, la piattaforma *Érudit.org*, che raccoglie i contributi scientifici sulla cultura francofona nordamericana in scienze umane e sociali, e *Amicus*, catalogo nazionale della biblioteca e degli archivi del Canada. Abbiamo limitato l'indagine ai documenti scritti rivolti ad un pubblico specialistico e agli ambiti della storia e della critica, escludendo gli studi statistici e demografici di carattere divulgativo che non rientrano nella nostra area di interesse.

Da ciò è risultato predominante l'ambito sociologico, dovuto al contributo scientifico di specialisti di scienze umane quebecchesi, rispetto agli studi critico-letterari dedicati alle stesse tematiche, proprio perché la questione generazionale permane uno dei temi prediletti su cui si fondano le investigazioni socio-antropologiche. In particolare, testimonianza di un forte interesse socio-culturale per le problematiche prese in esame, sono le opere dedicate alla storia

* Università di Bologna.

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delle generazioni dei popoli canadesi, che focalizzano l'attenzione sui rapporti intergenerazionali all'interno delle varie comunità etniche¹.

La piattaforma *Érudit* ha inoltre individuato alcune riviste quebecchesi dedicate agli argomenti in questione, accumulate ancora una volta da un approccio soprattutto sociologico e antropologico. Alcune di queste riviste, più o meno specializzate sull'incontro/scontro intergenerazionale in Québec, sulla formazione e sul trascorrere delle generazioni sono: *Comprendre la famille; Enfances, familles, générations; Nouvelles pratiques sociales; Économie et solidarité; Recherches sociographiques; Recherches féministes*.

Volendo approfondire il taglio storico-letterario, abbiamo notato che soltanto un esiguo numero di saggi è stato pubblicato da specialisti di letteratura. In risposta agli studi teorici europei (Claudine Attias-Donfut, Karl Mannheim, Gérard Mendel e Pierre Nora), le problematiche della generazione, filiazione e invecchiamento vengono affrontate soprattutto nell'ambito di ricerche dottorali. Proprio queste ultime hanno permesso di svolgere analisi comparative sulle rappresentazioni della generazione in *corpora* composti spesso da romanzi quebecchesi, fornendo importanti dati da poter confrontare e raccogliere nella bibliografia proposta.

La suddivisione che suggeriamo permette di distinguere i contributi scientifico-informativi da quelli di critica letteraria. L'ordine è cronologico crescente. All'interno dello stesso anno si ricorre alla progressione alfabetica. Unica eccezione è data dalla serie "Generations: a History of Canada's Peoples", posta in apertura del paragrafo seguente, nonostante comprenda opere pubblicate tra il 1976 e il 1988, per presentarla nella sua interezza.

Approccio sociologico o storico-politico

La serie "Generations: a History of Canada's Peoples", comprende i seguenti volumi:

- Anderson, Grace M. *A future to inherit: Portuguese Communities in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1976.
- Radecki, Henry and Heydenkorn Benedykt. *A Member of a Distinguished Family: the Polish Group in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart. 1976.
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¹ Vedi la serie "Generations: a History of Canada's Peoples".

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ISPANO-AMERICA NELLA SOCIETÀ CANADESE



THE APOSTLES REVIEW Y LA CONDICIÓN HETEROGÉNEA DE LA LITERATURA HISPANOCANADIENSE

Pablo Salinas*

Abstract

La literatura hispanocanadiense se caracterizó inicialmente por las temáticas de exilio y nostalgia como rito de paso en el proceso de migración. Sin embargo, la revista montrealés en español *The Apostles Review* entra en conflicto con esta primera forma de creación originando que la propia formación identitaria de lo hispanocanadiense se abra a posibilidades frecuentemente relacionadas con su condición desarraigada y heterogénea. Un análisis de los prólogos en disenso nos permite observar discursos a menudo irreconciliables yuxtapuestos en un mismo paratexto.

The Apostles Review and the Heterogeneous Status of Hispanic Canadian Literature

In its beginnings, Latino-Canadian literature was characterized by themes such as exile and nostalgia as immigration rites of passage. However, the Montreal-based Spanish language magazine *The Apostles Review* challenges this initial form of creation. As a result, the formation of Latino-Canadian identity opens itself towards possibilities often related to its rootless, heterogeneous status. An analysis of the prologues reveals the juxtaposition of frequently irreconcilable discourses in the same paratext.

The Apostles Review e la condizione eterogenea della letteratura ispano-canadese

La letteratura latino-canadese prese inizialmente consistenza attraverso le tematiche dell'esilio e della nostalgia come rito di passaggio nel processo migratorio. Tuttavia, la rivista montrealés in spagnolo *The Apostles Review* entra in conflitto con questa prima forma di creazione. Di conseguenza, la formazione identitaria dei latino-canadesi si apre ad infinite possibilità relazionate frequentemente alla condizione di sradicamento e di eterogeneità. L'analisi dei prologhi in dissenso permette di osservare discorsi inconciliabili spesso giustapposti nel medesimo paratesto.

La denominada literatura hispanocanadiense se caracterizó en sus inicios por las temáticas de soledad en el exilio y la nostalgia como «rites of passage of immigration» (Hazelton 20). Los primeros escritores hispanos en Canadá mostraron una constante preocupación por expresar un contenido ideológico,

* Shawnee State University.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

manifestado artísticamente en narrativas relacionadas directamente con sus países de origen. Las editoriales pioneras hispanocanadienses escogieron la solidaridad y el compromiso con movimientos sociopolíticos que habían surgido al sur del continente. Naciones con fuerte tradición de reivindicaciones sociales como Chile¹ o ciudades gubernamentales anfitrionas conocidas por ser tranquilas y seguras como Ottawa son un claro ejemplo de este proceso².

En este artículo, y mediante un acercamiento a los prólogos en disenso de la revista hispanocanadiense *The Apostles Review*, sostengo que la propia formación identitaria de lo hispanocanadiense se abre, esta vez desde Montreal, a posibilidades menos comprometidas con los proyectos políticos del siglo XX y frecuentemente relacionadas con su condición desarraigada y heterogénea. Mediante la elección de una intratextualidad conflictiva en uno de los elementos paratextuales³, en este caso el prólogo, *The Apostles Review* reusa otorgarse una identidad sólida en términos discursivos.

Para comprender la trascendencia del prólogo en el texto y la discordancia discursiva de la revista, a veces comprometida con proyectos nativos de la denominada posmodernidad y otras fiel a ideologías que vieron sus mejores momentos durante los siglos XIX y XX como el nacionalismo lingüístico, es importante un acercamiento a la noción de heterogeneidad y sujeto migrante desarrollados por el crítico peruano Antonio Cornejo Polar. Si bien es cierto estos conceptos fueron establecidos teniendo en cuenta principalmente los procesos de migración interna en los Andes, resultan muy útiles en la comprensión de la producción variopinta y en gran medida contradictoria o a contracorriente producida en *The Apostles Review*. Para esto me apoyo también en la comprensión y extensión de la ideas sobre sujeto migrante que realiza el crítico Raúl Bueno. Antes de entrar en el análisis, paso a recordar brevemente los orígenes de esta publicación.

Aunque el nombre del colectivo *The Apostles Review* tiene su más lejano ori-

¹ Jorge Etcheverry en “La literatura chilena en Ottawa, una breve introducción” realiza un importante recuento de la fecunda labor de autores chilenos en los primeros momentos de su llegada a tierras canadienses. Etcheverry recuerda, entre otras, editoriales que marcaron época en esos años, entre otras: Cordillera, Split Quotation / La cita trunca y Verbum Veritas.

² La importancia de Ottawa se revela en publicaciones como *Symbiosis in Prose* (1999), un conjunto de cuentos donde la mayoría de autores proviene de esta ciudad. Trish Van Bolderen en “The Evolution of Hispanic-Canadian Literature” nos recuerda que esta ciudad ha albergado tradicionalmente a la mitad de autores hispanocanadienses (68).

³ Como afirma Gérard Genette en *Umbrales*, el texto nunca llega a nuestras manos ‘desnudo’ en tanto colección de palabras escritas, sino acompañado de elementos que lo rodean y prolongan. A esto lo denomina paratexto y lo comprende por «aquello por lo cual un texto se hace libro y se propone como tal a sus lectores» (7). Para definir su posición entre el texto y la recepción, Genette usa el término “umbral”.

gen en el Río de la Plata, la revista se forjó como tal en los alrededores de la plaza Émilie-Gamelin con un fuerte sello montrealés. Ramón de Elía, periodista argentino y gestor del nombre, contaba ya con un grupo de amigos de letras autorreferenciados irónicamente como “Los apóstoles” cuando se juntó por primera vez con Rufo Valencia, Diego Creimer y Magdalena Ferreiro para producir la primera versión impresa de la revista en el año 2007⁴. Durante ese otoño, el centro de operaciones privilegiado fue “l’Utopik”, un bar restaurante y café con un ambiente internacional muy particular cuya personalidad describe en gran parte la orientación que la revista se iba forjando. Este primer cuarteto recibió el valioso apoyo de Hugh Hazelton, poeta, traductor y profesor en Concordia University.

La primera edición impresa vio la luz en diciembre de 2007 y es todavía motivo de gran recordación entre los pioneros de la publicación. En entrevista personal, Diego Creimer rememoró la titánica tarea de llevar las cajas con los nuevos ejemplares desde el local de la Maison de Radio-Canada en la calle René Lévesque hasta el improvisado centro de operaciones en el bar “l’Utopik”. El trayecto de más o menos un kilómetro no parecería particularmente retador si no se tiene en cuenta la especificidad del invierno canadiense, de manera que no es imposible imaginar a Diego y Rufo⁵ tambaleando con las cajas sobre los hombros, esquivando peatones y conductores en gran parte procedentes de países tropicales o de regiones completamente ajenas a las brutales tormentas de nieve montrealesas. Habiendo sido yo mismo testigo, tanto del rigor climático, como del ambiente de esa parte de la ciudad, puedo también darme una idea de ambos entrando completamente congelados a este heterotópico bar hoy desaparecido, pasar junto a pequeños grupos concentrados en una especie de mini mundial silencioso de ajedrez, deslizarse entre sillones ya acostumbrados a la silueta de acérrimos lectores, hasta llegar finalmente a una mesa no muy lejos del altillo donde se prepara la función gratuita nocturna de un grupo de jazz panafricano o de la última metamorfosis de una banda folklórica latinoamericana liderada por un guitarrista de Chicoutimi. En resumen, la revista se empapó desde la propia gestación, tanto de la nieve Montrealesa como de alguna *Maudite* o *Blonde de Chambly*⁶, al tiempo que fue cubierta y guarecida por la pasión de una novísima intelectualidad orgánica proveniente desde los más lejanos parajes al sur del paralelo cuarenta y nueve.

Después de esa primera edición, que lleva prefacio y no prólogo, otros colaboradores se asociaron al proyecto. Entre ellos es posible destacar a María José Gi-

⁴ Es importante resaltar que tres de los cuatro primeros miembros, Rufo, Magdalena y Diego, eran periodistas de Radio Canadá Internacional en ese momento.

⁵ Rufo Valencia usa su *alias* literario Alejandro Saravia para firmar sus colaboraciones.

⁶ Quebec tiene una importante tradición de cervecería local en América del Norte. *Maudite* y *Blonde de Chambly* son marcas emblemáticas de la cervecería local Unibroue.

ménez y Flavia García⁷. Por otro lado el colectivo, sin perder su carácter itinerante, se agenció un *pied à terre* en el corazón de la ciudad dentro de los acogedores ambientes de la librería Las Américas, gracias al apoyo de Francisco Herмосín, director de la misma. Las Américas también comenzó a vender los ejemplares de *The Apostles Review* y a servir de sede de algunas presentaciones literarias. Estos primeros momentos son cruciales para comprender la simbiosis entre el ‘espíritu’ de la ciudad y sus protagonistas, en este caso los miembros del colectivo. La plaza Émilie Gamelin, en el corazón del denominado “Quartier des spectacles”, con sus vendedores empeñados en ofrecer productos equitables hasta bien entrado el otoño, con sus multitudes de indignados que al grito de *manif ce soir* se enfrentan de tiempo en tiempo a las bombas lacrimógenas y los bastones de la policía; esta plaza y sus alrededores se muestran como el lugar ideal para la confluencia de este colectivo inmigrante. Me refiero a propuestas incapaces de articular un discurso homogéneo y una construcción discursiva sólida en cuanto a su uniformidad. En su lugar, el colectivo produce una multiformidad abarcable dentro de conceptos como el del sujeto migrante, cuya pertinencia paso a explicar.

La heterogeneidad del sujeto migrante

La noción de sujeto migrante refiere a una condición producto de un acto de desplazamiento donde todas las culturas que se dejan y las que se intentan incorporar no generan una síntesis armónica, que podría entenderse a la larga como un mestizaje, sino que se yuxtaponen dentro de una heterogeneidad radical. En este caso, como sostiene Cornejo Polar, en “Una heterogeneidad no dialéctica”, el migrante no puede resolver dialécticamente sus contradicciones sino que produce un discurso «radicalmente descentrado, en cuanto se construye alrededor de ejes varios y asimétricos, de alguna manera incompatibles y contradictorios de un modo no dialécticos» (841).

En el caso que nos interesa, siendo América Latina una región pluricultural y profundamente heterogénea, al producirse el primer contacto cultural de sus migrantes en la zona de contacto montrealés, estos responden produciendo no solamente signos referentes a sus propias sociedades de base, sino también, se produce un choque múltiple de varias culturas y mecánicas sociopolíticas. Frente a esto, como sostiene Raúl Bueno, el migrante muestra la necesidad de «fagocitar culturas y lenguas sin diluir sus diferencias y problemas, sino más bien acentuándolos» (38). Los prólogos en disenso muestran esta característi-

⁷ María José Giménez firma todas sus participaciones como María Sáliz.

ca, no necesariamente reflejo de la intención autorial, sino tributaria de la condición heterogénea de la producción discursiva en *The Apostles Review*.

Es en el acercamiento crítico a los prólogos donde se hace evidente la condición heterogénea del sujeto migrante montrealés. Me gustaría aclarar que para la mejor rentabilidad de estas ideas en mi análisis es necesario extender la comprensión del término sujeto migrante, inicialmente perteneciente al mundo de la crítica literaria o los análisis de los productos culturales, pero cuyo uso es factible de ser utilizado de manera más amplia, como demostraré, apoyado en las ideas de Raúl Bueno en *Antonio Cornejo Polar y los avatares de la cultura latinoamericana*.

Liberados de las políticas dictatoriales homogeneizantes de los países de donde partieron⁸, el ejercicio crítico de los individuos participantes en la revista se entrega a una titánica tarea de reconstruirse ellos mismos como ciudadanos del mundo, sin olvidar, pero dejando atrás el compromiso directo con las sociedades de las que se alejaron. En esa autorreconstrucción los signos constitutivos de identidad, los que dejan y los que se ofrecen en la sociedad anfitriona se confrontan de manera tan radical que se hace imposible la creación de un discurso con un mínimo de uniformidad. Cuando me refiero a la heterogeneidad que marca la revista no intento señalar solamente la diversidad de colaboradores y colaboraciones anunciada también en cada prólogo, sino que incluyo la incapacidad del prólogo de cumplir su función explicativa o introductoria del discurso del texto, limitándose a la descriptiva.

Considero que si bien es cierto el término sujeto migrante cornejiano se establece sobre todo como categoría literaria, es posible, siguiendo a Raúl Bueno, buscar también su rentabilidad entendiéndolo como «un sujeto performativo, capaz de representar por sí mismo, incluso sin necesidad de mediaciones literarias, su propia problemática y las salidas que para ella, o partes de ella, imagina y plasma» (61). Tan importante como la primera comprensión, es el estudio de este sujeto, siempre siguiendo a Bueno, no solamente como heterogéneo, sino heterogeneizante, «porque impulsa las distintas heterogeneidades periféricas hacia los centros de América Latina» (62), o en este caso hasta los centros Norteamericanos como Montreal. Esta prolongación hacia la América septentrional estaría refrendada por el mismo reconocimiento autobiográfico de Cornejo Polar al admitir: «desde que el azar me puso por algunos años en el Primer Mundo, lo mejor que he descubierto es que yo también soy irremediablemente (¿y felizmente?) un confuso y entreverado hombre heterogéneo» (*Escribir en el aire*: 24).

Dentro de esta extendida comprensión de sujeto migrante, planteo un breve paralelismo entre el caso del Inca Garcilaso estudiado en *Escribir en el aire*

⁸ Conocida es la frase de Pinochet, registrada por Mario Eastman, sobre la diversidad y el reconocimiento de lo diferente: «Pluralismo, ¿Sabe cómo yo llamo a eso? Beatería política» (147).

dentro del capítulo “Garcilaso, la armonía desgarrada” y la producción paratextual de la revista canadiense. Soy consciente de que esta comparación, por más que sea dentro de parámetros bastantes amplios, puede sonar sacrílega o forzada, pero pienso que el mismo Cornejo Polar, hubiera aprobado que otros intentaran comprender sus planteamientos aplicándolos a nuevos contextos que se crean con el acto de andar y desplazarse por el mundo.

Una primera pista para confirmar la totalidad conflictiva que se presenta en los prólogos la tenemos al observar el ensayo de diversas posiciones discursivas de los creadores culturales usando diferentes maneras de autodefinirse. En el caso de Garcilaso, Cornejo señala que el sujeto de enunciación realiza este intento a través de los diversos nombres que fue usando el Inca:

Garcilaso habla a veces como servidor fiel de su Majestad, a veces como mestizo doblemente noble, a veces simplemente como indio. Son figuraciones de la persona que admiten variantes interiores y que, por cierto, no son siempre ni necesariamente excluyentes. Al revés, el impulso primario de Garcilaso es sumarlas en una vasta unidad que a todas cobija (84).

En el caso de la revista montrealés, es notorio observar, especialmente en los primeros prólogos una serie de autodefiniciones, a veces contradictorias, otras inclusive hiperbólicas. Todas estas referencias cruzadas parecen también una advertencia al potencial lector que va a leer un discurso desgarrado, multiforme, pero que lucha por incorporar todas las definiciones en una vasta unidad: una reinención de lo hispanocanadiense a través de una producción heterogénea, rompiendo con todo compromiso con las matrices nacionales, pero sin acogerse a los discursos multiculturales que le ofrece la sociedad anfítrona. Se trata de una producción con pretensiones cosmopolitas, sin dejar de lado la situación de ‘provincianos del mundo’ de sus productores⁹.

De provincianos del mundo a “Plurisignificantes”

La primera autorreferencia en los prólogos es la de “Hispanoparlantes de la periferia”. En este caso, siendo la América hispana una región donde el español y toda

⁹ Debo esta frase a la conocida polémica entre José María Arguedas y Julio Cortázar. En una de sus réplicas, desde el tercer diario de *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*, Arguedas confirma su condición de provinciano de este mundo (174). Por su parte, Anne Lambright, en *Creating the Hybrid Intellectual. Subject, Space and the Feminine in the Narrative of José María Arguedas*, señala el denominado ‘unhomely status’ de Arguedas, sosteniendo que dentro de esta condición de provinciano del mundo, «[f]or a Latin American writer is almost impossible not to be provincial, not to be marginalized» (225).

su carga cultural hispana es sinónimo de centralidad con relación a las lenguas nativas, esta nueva condición periférica impuesta por el acto de emigrar les resulta contradictoria. La herramienta cultural que utilizan para expresarse: la lengua que en sus países se denomina comúnmente castellano y que en Norteamérica comienzan a comprenderla como el significante ‘español’, vehiculador de una idea mucho más global, resulta periférica y exótica en el nuevo hábitat cultural. Sin embargo, tal como Garcilaso, quien no ocultaba su autorreferencia como mestizo cuando este término cumplía los contenidos discursivos que él le proponía, la revista, al usar Hispanoparlantes de la periferia, se ‘lo llama a boca llena y se honra con él’ en la primera construcción de sentido de toda su producción.

La segunda autodefinición “escritores en exilio”, mucho menos poética, pero más directa, parece reivindicar el deseo de armonía con la tradición literaria hispanocanadiense, alineándose con la temáticas de soledad en el exilio y la nostalgia como rito de pasaje en el proceso migratorio que señala Hazelton. Esta descripción abre las puertas para la identificación con la primera generación de escritores hispanocanadienses, identificados expresamente con los proyectos nacionales de las izquierdas latinoamericanas. Es importante recordar que Magdalena Ferreiro, una de las fundadoras del grupo, había formado parte del grupo literario Eldorado fundado en Ottawa en los años y que Ramón Sepúlveda, uno de los fundadores de Ediciones Cordillera, también con base en Ottawa, ha sido también un frecuente colaborador.

Sin embargo, la particularidad multifronte de la revista nos entrega la más hiperbólica definición “plurisignificantes teclantes en el ombligo de Polifemo”. Aquí se presenta en toda su magnitud la heterogeneidad del sujeto colectivo en *The Apostles Review*. La subjetividad migrante se muestra a través de su impulso por admitir variaciones interiores. Esta propiedad plurisignificante enlaza nuestro análisis con la inevitable iniciativa de presentar prólogos en disenso para poder abarcar posiciones a menudo irreconciliables en una vasta unidad.

La característica disensual muestra en toda su magnitud un rechazo hacia hibridar su contenido, permitiendo a todas las voces, múltiples, enfrentadas, pero no excluyentes, mostrarse con libertad. La imposibilidad de unir las voces editoriales en un centro sólido de enunciación se muestra desde el primero de ellos, denominado aquí prefacio. En este primer mostrarse al mundo, el paratexto anuncia de la siguiente manera su incapacidad de autodefinirse: «El castellano, que fue la paja de mi cuna y manta de mis noches, se vio poca ante el rigor de los inviernos canadienses. Tuve que buscar más paja, ya francesa, ya inglesa o italiana. Y si puedo, quechua, aymara y mandarina» (3).

Como vemos, el intento de autodefinición es reemplazado por el deseo de explicar la condición migrante. Dentro del ir y venir por las culturas, el migrante apela a las nuevas incorporaciones sin renunciar a una matriz anterior a su

identificación hispánica. Este intento se muestra como el fracasado intento de definir un 'yo' fuera del lugar de origen, resultando una emergencia que en lugar de amalgamar identidades, las va abarcando sin mezclarlas. Aquí es posible inclusive asociar la característica de prólogo en disenso que muestra la revista con el deseo imposible de armonía que representa el trabajo de Garcilaso de la Vega para Cornejo Polar.

Sostiene el crítico que la élite letrada construyó la imagen del Inca como «primer peruano, portador cimero del símbolo mayor de una nación que, siquiera en las intenciones, necesitaba reconciliar sus dos vertientes en la figura de un mestizo excepcional» (89). Siendo la revista, al menos inicialmente, una autopublicación que quiere extender sus fronteras a la comunidad hispanoamericana letrada, es posible afirmar que el paratexto se presenta como una oportunidad para reforzar un símbolo de identidad latinoamericana que reconcilie todas sus vertientes. Sin embargo, la característica de disenso traiciona esta intención.

Esto se muestra ya en el segundo prólogo donde el disenso se ocupa afanosamente de explicar el título narrando una lejana anécdota escolar de uno de los participantes y comparándolo con lo que denomina «variadas agrupaciones» que históricamente han publicado con el mismo nombre (5), ninguna de las cuales proviene del ejercicio de escapar, partir, ser expulsado o impulsado a caminar por el mundo como es el caso de la revista canadiense. No es sino en el tercero cuando se pone fin al deseo de autodefinición, preocupándose en su lugar por saludar a gente de «cabellos en todas las cantidades y tonos» (5) y anunciando su gran placer por «servir de excusa para desarrollar lazos entre gente con experiencias tan diversas [...]» (5). De la explicación del nombre, se pasa entonces a la explicación de la función de la revista, lo cual parece abrir las puertas para una inclusión armoniosa de todas las vertientes de la variopinta migración hispanocanadiense.

De esta misma forma, el cuarto prólogo se complace en «darle la bienvenida a nuevas plumas» (4) y destaca el crecimiento en número y en entusiasmo de los receptores. Esta es la constante hasta el octavo, donde se procede a un amargo recuento de la negativa del Consejo de Artes y Letras de Quebec a apoyar una edición bilingüe español-francés. El carácter heterogéneo del sujeto migrante de la enunciación se pone en evidencia una vez más al adentrarnos en los detalles y enterarnos de que esta revista hispanófona envió una carta en francés al organismo quebequense para adecuarse a sus estrictas y celosas normas lingüísticas, recibiendo la negativa en la forma de una carta en inglés.

El hecho anecdótico representa muy bien el estatus indefinido y a la vez contradictorio de la revista, no solamente dentro de la sociedad anfitriona canadiense, sino dentro de la particularidad de su inserción en la Babilonia boreal que es la ciudad de Montreal. A pesar del duro golpe representado por la negación del pedido de fondos para el proyecto bilingüe, la revista continuó in-

sistiendo en irrigar una «rama que brota en medio de dos literaturas más, la quebequense y la anglocanadiense, se enriquece y se proyecta así de manera triple» (5). Nos encontramos entonces frente a una declaratoria conflictiva y a la vez bastante descriptiva del intento por enriquecerse sin renunciar a todas las culturas que la habitan desde el primer momento.

Hacia una nueva categoría del discurso migrante hispanocanadiense

El conflicto que encierra una tal iniciativa se hace evidente cuando las múltiples agendas se confrontan en el undécimo prólogo. Aquí se muestra ya una múltiple personalidad no dialéctica cuando el primero en disenso utiliza casi literalmente un razonamiento de índole teológica para postular un mayor acercamiento francófilo de la revista en particular y de la comunidad hispanófona en general. «Lengua, pueblo, lugar: tres palabras que definen la identidad de cada individuo» (5), sostiene el paratexto en contradicción con un conjunto de textos que hasta ese momento habían izado las banderas del multilingüismo, lo cosmopolita y la idea de flujo y desplazamiento en contraposición a la de emplazamiento. Considero que un tal discurso pinta de cuerpo entero, una vez más, la incapacidad o el desinterés de la revista por organizar un cuerpo homogéneo que la defina. Esta nueva voz interior, un urgente llamado a la homogeneidad, muestra la armonía desgarrada por la presencia de desenraizados que «siguen soñando con la imposible y tentadora idea [del] multiculturalismo y por ende el multilingüismo» (5), es decir vivir todas las patrias, todas las culturas que la revista ha estado habitando hasta ese momento.

Más allá del nacionalismo lingüístico en favor del monolingüismo francés de este prólogo, me interesa resaltar la radical contradicción interna en este discurso migrante. El conflictivo paratexto se enriquece con el disenso, escrito irónicamente en francés y anunciando la desaparición de esta misma lengua en Quebec. Alejando lo que denomina angustias existenciales, el disenso anuncia que su propio Quebec, el Quebec del sujeto migrante «non est unum membrum sed mult» (6)¹⁰. La cita representa un irónico acercamiento del discurso de la revista con la hagiografía de su título y a su vez confirma la misma imposibilidad de realizar, en la transición del paratexto al texto, el descargue cultural de manera homogénea. Cabe la cita de Raúl Bueno en torno al concepto de heterogeneidad en este punto: «Y es que las culturas [...] no son recipientes llenos, a los que hay que descargarles algo para introducirles nuevos elementos» (27).

¹⁰ Esta referencia en el paratexto proviene de la *Biblia* en latín (*Vulgata*) en “Corintios” 1, 12.14.

En conclusión es posible comprender el carácter radicalmente heterogéneo de *The Apostles Review* que no cesa de contradecirse en la búsqueda de autodefinición, terminando por inventar en el extremo boreal del continente una nueva categoría, la del discurso migrante, contrapuesta a los primeros discursos de la literatura del exilio, marcados por la nostalgia y con los ojos decididamente puestos en las sociedades desde donde partían. Si bien es cierto la intención autorial, como señalé, parece reclamar al estilo de Arguedas que «cualquier hombre no engrilletado y embrutecido por el egoísmo puede vivir, feliz, todas las patrias» (245), los prólogos en disenso muestran que dentro de esa generosidad y el deseo de no engrilletarse, se esconde un discurso que se atrae y se rechaza, complementándose dentro de su multiformidad. Cada prólogo lleva la marca de su condición migrante y heterogénea, frecuentemente socavado por el disenso, que lo va a complementar sin sintetizarlo. Esta ha sido la condición de la revista hasta el momento y la enunciación en el intento de crear un vínculo más universal con sus lectores no ha dejado de juxtaponer discursos a menudo contradictorios.

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MÁS ALLÁ DE LAS FRONTERAS. DESPLAZAMIENTOS POÉTICOS EN TERRITORIO HISPANOCANADIENSE

Tatiana Navallo*

Abstract

El espacio de la frontera transparenta sus propios intersticios, donde lo liminal cede paso a nuevas formas relacionales e identitarias que pujan por el derecho a expresarse en términos de una diferenciada igualdad, nacidas, en la mayoría de los casos, en el contexto político de desplazamientos forzosos. En la lectura de *Rojo, amarillo y verde* (2003) del escritor Alejandro Saravia se puede ver de qué manera esta ficción autobiográfica da voz a sujetos violentados en la última dictadura boliviana. Igualmente presentar *Dilater et contracter l'univers* de la artista Constanza Camelo-Suarez pone de relieve que, en sus intervenciones, el desplazamiento no solo físico sino poético de los cuerpos, en espacios fronterizos, sustituye la noción de exilio circunstancial por la de 'desplazamiento circunstancial'.

Beyond Borders: Poetic Displacements in Hispano-Canadian Territory

The space of the frontier reveals its own interstices, where the liminal gives way to new relational and identitarian forms which struggle for the right to "equality in difference", forms which are born, in the greater part of the cases, in the political context of forced displacement. I propose to read the writer Alejandro Saravia's *Rojo, amarillo y verde* in order to see how this autobiographical fiction follow the objective of giving voice to subjects violated during the last Bolivian dictatorship. By the same token, I propose to present *Dilater et contracter l'univers* by the performance artist Constanza Camelo, to emphasize that, in her interventions, the displacement, not only physical but also poetic, of the bodies to frontier spaces substitutes the notion of 'circumstantial displacement' for that of circumstantial exile.

Oltre le frontiere. Spostamenti poetici in territorio ispano-canadese

Nella lettura di *Rojo, amarillo y verde* dello scrittore Alejandro Saravia si può verificare in che modo la finzione autobiografica dia voce a soggetti violentati nell'ultima dittadura boliviana. Ugualmente presentare *Dilater et contracter l'univers* della performer Constanza Camelo, mette in rilievo che, nei suoi interventi, lo spostamento negli spazi di frontiera sia fisico che poetico dei corpi, sostituisce la nozione di esilio circostanziale con quella di "spostamento circostanziale".

* Université de Montréal.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

Trazos de memorias relocalizadas

El performance¹ de la artista colombiana-canadiense Constanza Camelo-Suarez², *Dilater et contracter l'univers III. Satellite*, es un proyecto que se inscribe en Tijuana, ciudad anclada en la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México, enclave que implica al mismo tiempo avance y pérdida territorial, de un lado y de otro³.

En octubre de 2011, durante unos días de estadía en la zona fronteriza, la artista convoca a ciudadanos mexicanos indocumentados que fueron deportados por el Servicio de Emigración Americano. Cinco personas se integran a la propuesta de realizar la acción performativa en un espacio donde está en construcción un puente que, actualmente, permite la conexión entre ambos países. La acción consiste en que estas personas deben atravesar simbólicamente la frontera, impedidas visualmente por los documentos de deportación, siguiendo el trazo de palabras de gran formato, inscritas en el suelo. Los participantes caminan con sus GPS acompañados por un policía municipal y por Constanza Camelo, quien lleva consigo dispositivos electrónicos que permiten a los espectadores asistir, mediante Internet, al transcurso simultáneo de la acción, a distancia, como es el caso del centro *Dare-Dare* en Montreal⁴. Desde el punto de vista técnico, el trayecto es traducido bajo forma de *pixels* en una página web que presenta la transcripción del dibujo de las letras recorridas.

Las palabras transitadas por estos migrantes son elegidas cuidadosamente por ellos mismos, luego de haber compartido con la artista su relato personal. De manera que las valencias negativas albergadas en palabras como *deplacé*, *mal placé*, *replacé* – “desplazado” o “deslocalizado”, “mal localizado” y “relocalizado” – se resignifican, restituyendo la memoria de la experiencia personal de la deportación, al momento de caminar sobre los trazos que determinan el gesto de volver a atravesar la frontera. En este sentido, el performance adquiere un fuerte valor liminal y transgresivo, pues la ‘restitución del yo desplazado’

¹ Conservo el masculino para referirme a esta actividad expresiva, siguiendo la definición del *Diccionario de estudios culturales latinoamericanos* (Prieto Stambaugh en Szurmuk e Irwin 207-211) y la propuesta del *Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics*.

² Nacida en Colombia, es doctora en *Études et pratiques des arts* por la UQÀM. Actualmente es profesora en la Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. Ver el registro fotográfico y documental del performance en el dossier visual de la artista, <http://constanzacamelosuarez.com>

³ *Dilater et contracter l'univers* es una serie de seis performances en territorio canadiense. En particular la acción desarrollada en la estación de metro Berri-Uqàm en la ciudad de Montreal (2008) puede verse en estrecha relación con la realizada en Tijuana.

⁴ El proyecto de Constanza Camelo-Suarez se lleva a cabo en colaboración con el *El Centre de diffusion d'art multidisciplinaire de Montréal*, DARE-DARE. Ver el archivo visual del performance.

se enfrenta, a nivel simbólico, contra las divergentes expresiones dominantes y punitivas de poder, restituyéndose poéticamente lo que Constanza Camelo denomina «desplazamiento circunstancial», en diálogo con la propuesta de «exilio circunstancial» de Tzvetan Todorov⁵.

La acción performativa puede verse así como un ritual de restitución del yo desplazado pues crea, indica Prieto Stambaugh retomando a Victor Turner, «un paréntesis al interior del mundo regido por la estructura social imperante (*The Ritual Process*). Es en ese espacio donde se hace posible la *communitas* (concepto derivado de Durkheim), es decir, el sentimiento de solidaridad entre participantes» (211). En este marco, entiendo que el performance altera el territorio fronterizo transformándolo en un espacio empático, en un lugar simbólico, ajeno a lo intelectual, que deja de ser físico para habilitar un espacio donde lo que se enuncia con la caminata rehistoriza la memoria de los migrantes.

Esta particular manera de dotar de significado la experiencia del ‘desplazamiento circunstancial’ de los migrantes propuesto por Camelo, entra en estrecha relación con otras manifestaciones expresivas. Desde esta línea, asumo la lectura del texto de Alejandro Saravia, pues entiendo que la relación entre lectura y escritura que propone el autor devela su propia dimensión performativa.

⁵ En una entrevista que se le hizo a la artista en la École d'Art de la Université Laval, explicita su propuesta diciendo que «Pour Todorov, l'artiste-intellectuel serait l'individu qui, intéressé par la problématique du beau, accompagnerait cette dernière d'une deuxième problématique, celle du bien. L'artiste intellectuel serait un individu qui se situerait entre deux champs de recherche: celui de l'esthétique, espace de l'imagination, et celui de l'éthique, espace de la conscience. Mon attitude en art s'apparente à cette définition dans le sens où elle explore des relations transdisciplinaires entre le geste poétique, le comportement humain et le contexte – sociopolitique et économique – où ils agissent et réagissent. Si le déplacement consiste à être obligé de migrer dans le cas où sa vie, ou bien sa liberté, aient été menacées à cause de circonstances qui altèrent l'ordre public, alors mon identité correspond à celle d'un être dont les actions, et celles de ses compatriotes, sont constamment déplacées. Ma liberté est déplacée et c'est depuis ce non-lieu que ma pratique s'élabore comme un signe du passage éphémère du corps en déplacement. Mon corps est (en) transit». Por su parte, Tzvetan Todorov reflexiona en *El hombre desplazado* sobre la condición del exiliado, poniendo énfasis en el desarraigo geográfico que vive en su experiencia personal. Me interesa destacar de la primera parte dedicada a Bulgaria, la mirada que el autor propone frente a las circunstancias del exilio que, si bien podrían ser ajenas a lo económico y lo político, se encuentran íntimamente relacionadas con el desapego de lo convenido. Esto último, impone al hombre desarraigado «nuevas formas de interrogación y de asombro» (29). Igualmente, de qué manera Todorov plantea el rol del intelectual en el ámbito del bien público, insistiendo en que «el derecho a la libertad ha de ser equilibrado por un deber de responsabilidad» (187).

Memorias de la bandera tricolor

Rojo, amarillo y verde es la novela de Alejandro Saravia⁶, centrada en la experiencia del migrante ficcionalizado Alfredo Cutipa, quien vive el golpe de estado de 1980 en Bolivia mientras cumple con su servicio militar. Ante las atrocidades vividas durante su conscripción, una vez radicado en Canadá y luego de haber atravesado fronteras territoriales, lingüísticas y simbólicas, mediante un ejercicio consciente de escritura decide denunciar y hacer justicia frente a los actos de violación de derechos humanos, vividos durante el periodo dictatorial. La escritura en sí se impone como un ‘trabajo de la memoria’ en términos de Elizabeth Jelin, quien considera que se trata de una actividad «que implica a sujetos activos que se proponen incidir en la elaboración de sentidos para el pasado, en oposición a su irrupción bajo la forma de silencios o repeticiones» (en Oberti 103)⁷. Al devenir un imperativo, la escritura le permite a la voz de la narración reclamar justicia frente a los crímenes sufridos por Amelia, una conocida, y sus compañeros durante la milicia, en particular el soldado Mamani y el Boxeador, esta última muerte enmascarada bajo la forma de suicidio. Se pregunta Alfredo Cutipa:

¿A quién demonios puede interesarle toda esta historia? A nadie. Absolutamente a nadie. Y sin embargo sentía que debía escribirla. Y si los jóvenes le rechazaban, por lo menos los muertos, aquellos que se fueron esperando en vano la promesa de los días mejores, la promesa de un país independiente, la promesa de poder vivir humanamente, los que fueron baleados pensando en que valía este sacrificio por los demás, por los que vendrán, ellos sabrán que se les recuerda, que su memoria vive. Que algo habremos aprendido [...]. Aunque nadie se acerque nunca a sus escritos, Alfredo pensó que de esta manera, con estas líneas, cumplía con lo que Amelia y el Boxeador le habían pedido entre el horror y el susurro: que aún bajo la forma de personajes de flaca novelilla, ellos querían continuar en este mundo (160).

El cuerpo textual se estructura desde el punto de vista formal como una cinta de *Moebius* puesto que el primero y el último tramo narrativo convergen en la referencia al mismo momento evocado. El relato se abre con el fragmento poético de una carta escrita en francés, que remite al miedo de Alfredo Cutipa de reencontrarse con una mujer, recordando que en su habitación conserva una

⁶ Alejandro Saravia nace en Cochabamba en 1962. Reside y trabaja actualmente como periodista en la ciudad de Montreal.

⁷ La novela de Alejandro Saravia bien podría adscribirse al corpus textual que pone de relieve las diferentes formas de representación de las problemáticas del exilio y de dictadura en Latinoamérica. Lectura crítica que en esta ocasión dejamos de lado, sin desconocer las implicancias de la misma.

bandera, dice, «que sueño con enviártela para que puedas mostrarla desde tu balcón, como un signo de victoria frente a la nostalgia – signo de sed de nosotros mismos – pues mi patria, mi tierra, mis palabras eres tú, tu voz, tus brazos, tus palabras» (5)⁸. Este fragmento nos reenvía a una nota de fin de texto donde se especifica que lo citado anteriormente es un «Mensaje encontrado al interior de un sobre devuelto después de diez años por la Oficina de correos de Canadá a la dirección del Escriba en Montréal. Sobre de papel Manila, manchado, bordes desgastados. Razón de la imposibilidad del envío escrita en caracteres gruesos. «Le Kurdistan n'existe pas comme pays» (207). El contenido del sobre, dirigido a una persona llamada Bolivia, es el siguiente: “Poemas de Alfredo Cutipa”. La devolución de la correspondencia – compilación de poemas – evidencia una doble ausencia para Alfredo Cutipa, hacedor de la escritura: el cuerpo del sujeto amado y el territorio de un país inexistente. Esta peculiar ausencia yuxtapuesta, en tanto falta, no solo invade la sensación de angustia en Alfredo Cutipa sino que se impone como necesidad de poner en palabras su experiencia de vida, dando lugar a la escritura de la novela. Continúa luego una breve descripción de la rutina cotidiana hasta que irrumpe y se interpone un desdoblamiento de la voz de la narración que nos introduce con alternancias en el presente de escritura y en el pasado de la figura de Alfredo Cutipa.

Punteado por esta cadencia, se evoca el terror impuesto por las dictaduras militares de los años setentas y ochentas de los gobiernos de Hugo Bánzer Suárez, Alberto Natuch Busch y Luis García Mesa, parodiados en el texto con los nombres de “Colonolél Banzer y Gonorreál García Mesa”. La voz de la narración del texto, en parte coincidentes con la de Alfredo Cutipa, se presenta como una ficción autobiográfica develando la parcial identificación del narrador con la figura del autor. A estas voces se suma la intervención de una tercera, la de “El Escriba”, que funciona y nos advierte como *alter ego* de Alfredo Cutipa – mediante diálogos entre El Escriba y Alfredo – que los lectores somos convocados a integrarnos a la ‘dimensión performativa’ del quehacer de la escritura, apelando a la recuperación de la memoria histórica del pasado dictatorial boliviano, marcado por la violencia, la consecuente supresión de derechos individuales, junto a la discriminación y pauperización de la vida cotidiana de sus habitantes. Sin embargo, las referencias al pasado histórico político se presentan de manera oblicua, puesto que es a partir del desplazamiento territorial de Alfredo Cutipa que asistimos a un deslizamiento poético que da lugar a un ‘yo’ marginal restituído. Es decir, que se va conformando en la escritura un sujeto migrante a partir de la evocación y resignificaciones de fragmentos de memoria

⁸ La traducción me pertenece.

de la violencia vivida por este sujeto carente de derechos políticos. Momentos de violencia experimentados al formar parte del ejército boliviano, como se apuntó con anterioridad, y obligado como cualquier miembro de rango subalterno del cuerpo militar a participar directa, o indirectamente, tanto en actos de violencia ejercidos en otros cuerpos, en forma de violaciones físicas y allanamientos, como infringidos en el cuerpo propio, bajo una gama de humillaciones que van desde insultos verbales hasta maltratos físicos.

Las secuencias de violencia referidas en la escritura diferida, si se recuerda que Alfredo Cutipa escribe trece años después de haber llegado a Canadá, desestabilizan al tiempo que fundan los lazos identitarios que ligan a Alfredo Cutipa a su patria distante e incluso negada:

La única forma de explicar qué es un boliviano es a través de la violencia. Como si aquel primer golpe de aire con que el mundo andino nos recibe al nacer se transforma con el tiempo en lapo, palo, piedra y bala. ¿De qué otra manera explicar aquella cotidianidad, aquella otra manifestación diaria y brutal de una democracia de virreinato que nunca acaba su representación de caja y papel y se viste igual de bayoneta, cuartel o congreso? Bolivia: colonia de civiles dictatoriales y ranas importantes donde los ejercicios de la violencia invaden hasta el último espacio entre la carne y la uña (30).

El desencantamiento aludido por Alfredo Cutipa lejos está de ser vivido con trazos de idealización de su lugar natal. En todo caso, si hay cierto matiz melancólico en este 'yo – Alfredo' es asumido para restituir el desplazamiento de un 'yo' que se funde en un 'nosotros', que no logra integrarse con plenitud en la cultura plural de acogida, puesto que forma parte de una minoría que no tiene pleno derecho a vivir la igualdad de manera diferenciada. De allí el imperativo de Alfredo de 'hacer presentes' en la memoria, el ya mencionado aparente suicidio de su compañero "El Boxeador", el asesinato del soldado Mamani, junto a la absoluta impunidad vivida por los responsables de estas muertes significativamente individuales, metonímicamente 'colectivas':

Mientras anotaba estas líneas, Alfredo se sorprendió al pensar por primera vez que quizá el Boxeador no se había suicidado, que quizá lo habían matado. Como aquel otro, el soldado Mamani, un indígena cuya muerte no protestó nadie, ni en 1980 ni nunca. Cuando sus padres indígenas supieron la noticia, al pie a la entrada del batallón, ellos bajaron la mirada, musitaron su desgracia en aymara, aceptando esta muerte con un profundo fatalismo y se alejaron del lugar, llevándose con ellos la discreción de sus lágrimas, el silencio de su dolor ante algo que no comprendían en todo su horror, tratando de imaginar la forma, el rostro, la máscara que asume un Estado, una patria que toma la carne de su carne para destrozarla y desaparecerla [...]. Pese al crimen, estos oficiales seguirán adelante con sus vidas tranquilamente,

como si nada hubiera pasado. Nadie les dirá nada. Nadie exigirá una investigación, un juez, un fallo. Nadie ni nunca porque el difunto soldado Mamani era, al fin y al cabo, sólo un pobre indio, un lari, un triste indígena que no existió nunca porque legalmente en Bolivia nadie puede nacer, crecer, recibir justicia o morir oficialmente en lengua aymara (90-91).

Las alusiones a los hechos vividos, que van configurando la memoria, se presentan como formas de distinguir el pasado con relación al presente de escritura y a una obturada proyección de futuro. La memoria no se configura en torno a una cronología de hechos puntuados uno detrás de otro en el pasado, sino más bien en cuanto a las producciones de sentido que convoca en el presente, pues solo en parte es algo dado:

La otra parte es ficción, imaginación, racionalización. Por eso la verdad de la memoria no radica en la exactitud de los hechos (*res factae*) como en el relato y la interpretación de ellos (*res fictae*). La memoria es una relación intersubjetiva, elaborada en comunicación con otros y en determinado entorno social. En consecuencia, sólo existe en plural. La pluralidad de memorias conforman un campo de batalla en que se lucha por el sentido del presente en orden a delimitar los materiales con los que construir el futuro (Lechner y Güell 18-19).

En un ir y venir temporal, en el recorrido textual asistimos a la contracara de la vida cotidiana de Alfredo Cutipa en la ciudad de Montreal, de un Alfredo migrante que busca integrarse a un espacio plural. En su inserción, Alfredo Cutipa reconoce su esfuerzo por hablar las lenguas oficiales del país de acogida e integrarlas a su repertorio lingüístico materno. Leguas estas que, en su propio devenir histórico, develan las marcas de la colonialidad del poder, al legitimar el castellano como lengua oficial y marginalizar el quechua y el aymara que, en Alfredo, persisten con sus rasgos sibilantes de oralidad. Cantando durante un recorrido por la ciudad de Montreal en el transporte público, la voz de la narración expresa la conflictividad de su heterogeneidad lingüística:

Tu voz llama la atención de los pasajeros en el metro. Si no por el timbre, al menos por la lengua: ¡Chunquituy palomitay... kolila! Si no entienden el significado ni comprenden el idioma, al menos se dan cuenta por el tono de la voz que estás llamando a alguien a grito pelado. A alguien que jamás te responderá. De vagón en vagón abriendo los pestillos prohibidos, atravesando puertas mientras cruzas en el fragor del viaje las estaciones de metro de Castelnau, du Parc, Outremont. ¡Chunquituy palomitay... kolila! *Montréal est la première ville nord-américaine avec la plus grande population trilingue* [...] Chunku:s. Hojeas el diccionario buscando desenterrar aquella lengua que te fue negada por la vergüenza y el apellido de tus mayores, ellos que tan bien la utilizaban en sus pláticas por los campos de maíz, cuando no querían ser entendidos. Qeshwa – quechua, quichua, kechua – (8-9).

Luego, en un intento por recuperar ciertos rasgos identitarios la voz narradora nos reenvía al pasado:

¿Con qué palabras la definía aquella ajada edición del “Vademecum del soldado boliviano” en aquel enero de 1980? ¿Bolivia es la suma de sus montañas?, ¿es el aire celeste que respiramos?, ¿es la bandera y el escudo nacional?, ¿es la madre, la hermana, la prima y la sobrina que golpeamos y violamos cuando las radios anuncian a la madrugada el nuevo golpe de estado, las nuevas operaciones militares [...], por la siniestra legitimidad del estado de sitio, imponocráticamente boliviano:

Teniente (un mestizo): ¡Soldado Mamani!

Soldado Mamani (un aymara): ¡Firme me teñente!

Teniente: Diga, soldado: para usted ¿qué es la Patria?

Mamani: ¡La patria, is mi madri, me teñente!

Teniente: ¡Muy bien!, ¡Soldado Condori!, diga: para usted... ¿¡qué es la Patria!?

Condori: ¡La mamá de Mamani, me teñente!

Teniente: ¡Estos laris... indiosbrutosijosdeputa!, ¡Ya... al plantón carrera mar! (13).

Si bien en el pasado se vive con violenta discriminación la heterogeneidad cultural, el presente montrealés impone su contrapunto al presentar el espacio del mercado “Jean-Talón”, dotado de cierto cosmopolitismo local⁹, espacio vital fronterizo de culturas donde:

de manera callada, los inmigrantes llegados de todas las lenguas y latitudes se daban el trabajo de integrar poco a poco a los nativos canadienses el espontáneo cosmopolitismo montrealense construido gota a gota por los recién llegados. La estrategia del encanto digestivo, de la subyugación de los sentidos, de la sutil y placentera llegada a las papilas gustativas de culturas gastronómicas provenientes de otros horizontes funcionaba como un motor eficaz y constante en este propósito. La vida de muchos quebequenses había cambiado de modo irreversible después del primer bocado de una caprichosa chirimoya, después de haber probado la dulzura de las tunas deshaciéndose en la boca; una constelación de semillas que se abre en una minúscula y azucarada explosión cósmica, despertando las imágenes de extrañas geografías, otros ojos para mirar el mundo, recuerdos imaginarios de amantes con pecas en el rostro (129).

Las relaciones y experiencias intersubjetivas son vividas en un tiempo comprimido y transformado en un presente, en el que todos parecieran cohabitar en el mercado en un mismo instante y en el que las diferentes identidades colectivas se autorepresentan en el encuentro entre los unos y los otros. El mercado, en relación metonímica con el conjunto de la novela, se presenta como un ámbito de

⁹ Ver al respecto el artículo de José A. Giménez Micó.

deconstrucción de la(s) identidad(es), propicio para la transformación de las comunidades culturales que frecuentan este espacio, susceptibles de vivir formas de integración y de adaptación¹⁰. De este modo, reflexionaba Alfredo mientras caminaba entre los puestos de venta buscando las mejores berenjenas, «habremos logrado fundar identidades colectivas favorables a todas las diferencias gastronómicas. Vivent les papilles libres! vive le Québec libre!» (130).

La escritura se va entretejiendo así para dar lugar a un gesto o más bien, a un acto que va desde la disconformidad, la denuncia hasta nuevas expresiones y reterritorializaciones de la(s) cultura(s) tanto propias como ajenas, dando forma al ejercicio de mantener una memoria que excede el hecho histórico en sí mismo, pues se trata de una respuesta ética que urge asumir¹¹. El reconocimiento y denuncia del pasado histórico son aquí tomados con entera responsabilidad, independientemente de las contradicciones vividas por el sujeto hacedor de escritura. En ese sentido, la experiencia de lo ambivalente, dirá Homi Bhabha, «resulta también un acicate para el discurso, la necesidad de palabra, una vía para trabajar lo contradictorio y lo que no tiene solución, con el propósito de alcanzar el derecho a narrar» (56).

La experiencia de lo ambivalente, de lo contradictorio vivido por el sujeto de escritura se asienta en una paradoja, pues hay un punto de convergencia y divergencia en los destinos cruzados de una mujer que dice venir de Kurdistán y Alfredo Cutipa. Mujer que es atraída por los colores de los calcetines de Alfredo, colores que ella elige para los de la futura bandera de su patria – ‘rojo, amarillo y verde’ – coincidentes con los colores patrios de Bolivia, el país natal de Alfredo y lo que da nombre al título de la novela. La mujer de Kurdistán, quien se transforma luego en la amante de Alfredo, es una guerrillera urbana que trabaja en el Partido de Trabajadores de Kurdistán (PTK) con el propósito de establecer la

¹⁰ De acuerdo a Hugh Hazelton, el concepto de transculturación, proveniente del estudio de Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar* (1940) es el elemento clave para la lectura de la novela.

¹¹ Este compromiso bien lo ilustra Alfredo Cutipa, retomando la voz de César Vallejo, al enfrentarse a su escritura personal, dice sentir: «[...] una amargura en la boca. “Quizá debería salirme espuma, debería apuntar ‘quiero escribir pero me sale espuma’. Volibia: tierra de la ardiente espuma. ¿Este el triunfo?, ¿Esta la justicia? Quizá lo sea” [...]» (161). Al mismo tiempo, la escritura está destinada a reparar la inacción del pasado y los desagrazos colectivos: «¡No!, gritó Alfredo sorpresivamente alarmando a los demás clientes del café, como si una cucaracha acabara de emerger de una de sus fosas nasales. No quería más seguir viviendo aquello. “¿Por qué no hice algo?, ¿por qué no me amotiné?” [...] Ésta era la tragedia de Alfredo, la de haber vivido sin poder reconocer que su vida individual, sus pensamientos, sus experiencias particulares hacían parte de un inmenso entramado social, qué él hacía parte de la historia colectiva [...]» (158-159).

independencia del país. Con el fin de obtener dinero y comprar armas, fabrica calcetines tricolores en las maquiladoras instaladas en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos. Para la mujer de Kurdistán, su mayor deseo no es solo tener un país sino construirlo, mientras que Alfredo tiene el propósito de deshacerse del suyo. Al deconstruir su pasado histórico y restituir su yo en un nuevo medio, Alfredo Cutipa se despropia de su despreciada Bolivia colonial y neocolonial. En este sentido, indica Norman Cheadle, Bolivia, en el concepto de Cutipa, al pasar a ser una neocolonia del imperio norteamericano, no logra «una independencia que valga. (Se trata, claro, de la Bolivia pre-Evo Morales) [...] Cutipa se esfuerza por deshacerse de su falsa patria siniestra, desbolivianarse» (111)¹². El acto performativo que devela la disconformidad de Alfredo, al tiempo que marca la desapropiación, se manifiesta en la alteración del nombre propio de su país de origen, al que le quita la mayúscula de la B y sustituye la primera consonante por la “v” (volibia). Alfredo revoca el nombre oficial de su patria materna para darle el nombre de BOLIVIA a su amante, la mujer de Kurdistán.

En este juego de desapropiación de la patria, de desvinculación como ciudadano de Bolivia, en tanto Estado-Nación, y apropiación de un cuerpo femenino que crea su propia comunidad ‘imaginada’, en el territorio imaginario de Kurdistán, lo que resuena es la voz de un ‘yo restituido’ que reclama «vivir el derecho a la diferencia en la igualdad» (Balibar en Homi Bhabha 97). Este ‘derecho a la diferencia’, según sugiere Étienne Balibar, no demanda la restauración de una identidad cultural o grupal originaria (o esencialista). El derecho a la diferencia en la igualdad puede articularse, en palabras de Homi Bhabha, desde las perspectivas de las minorías nacionales como de los migrantes globales, y en cada caso este derecho representa un deseo de revisar los componentes consuetudinarios de la ciudadanía (política, legal y social) hasta incluir el ámbito de la «ciudadanía simbólica» (98).

Si el aspecto simbólico es el que plantea cuestiones afectivas y éticas ligadas a las diferencias culturales, es a partir de allí desde donde la lectura de *Rojo, amarillo y verde* junto al performance *Dilater et contracter l'univers* se abren al diálogo con el *corpus* de la ‘escritura migrante quebequense-canadiense’ en su propio proceso de constitución.

¹² Norman Cheadle propone que la novela puede leerse como una «documentación novelizada de la agonía del yo boliviano de Alejandro Saravia, muerte simbólica que más adelante recapitulará el poeta en dos poemas redactados con motivo de su vuelta a Bolivia tras veinte años de ausencia: “Confesiones en el aeropuerto de Montreal” y “Meditación en el aeropuerto de La Paz”. Sin embargo [...] ni Saravia ni su sosías Alfredo Cutipa logra desbolivianizarse del todo. Para ambos la patria natal se simboliza no en la despreciada bandera boliviana sino en el Illimani, montaña y ente telúrico invocado repetidamente por Cutipa en la novela; especialmente significativo es un poema suyo incluido como apéndice al final del libro y titulado “La sal del sur”» (112).

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RETORNO DE “LA NOVIA MÁS FRAGANTE”: RETERRITORIALIZACIÓN DEL CASTELLANO EN EL CANADÁ DE ALEJANDRO SARAVIA*

Norman Cheadle**

Abstract

Este artículo argumenta que el poeta canadiense-boliviano, Alejandro Saravia, en su *Lettres de Nootka* (2008), reterritorializa la lengua castellana en Canadá haciendo memoria de las exploraciones españolas. Se centra en la lectura del poema “Cartas de Nootka” y su fondo histórico: el choque en el siglo XVIII de los imperios español y británico, así como el de ambos con la cultura indígena, en la costa occidental de lo que hoy en día es el Canadá. Evocando la historia y geografía canadienses en castellano, Saravia logra sugerir una nueva manera de ‘escribir en canadiense’.

Return of “The Most Fragrant Bride”: Reterritorialization of Spanish in the Canada of Alejandro Saravia

This article argues that the Bolivian-Canadian poet Alejandro Saravia, in *Lettres de Nootka* (2008), reterritorializes the Spanish language in Canada by recalling the Spanish explorations here. “Cartas de Nootka” is read against its historical background: the collision between the Spanish and British empires, as well as that of both with indigenous culture, on the west coast of what is now Canada. By evoking Canadian history and geography in Spanish, Saravia manages to achieve a new way of ‘writing in Canadian’.

Il ritorno de “La novia más fragante”: riterritorializzazione del castigliano nel Canada di Alejandro Saravia

L’articolo s’ incentra sulla lettura della poesia “Lettere di Nootka” e del suo contesto storico: lo scontro nel XVIII secolo tra l’impero spagnolo e quello britannico, e di entrambi con la cultura indigena, nella costa occidentale dell’attuale Canada. Evocando in castigliano la storia e la geografia canadesi, Saravia suggerisce un nuovo modo di ‘scrivere in canadese’.

La rugosa costa oeste de *British Columbia*, del Canadá actual, no siempre fue *british*. Por el Tratado de Tordesillas de 1494, reafirmado por una bula papal de 1506, todas las tierras bañadas por “la mar del Sur” – el actual océano Pacífico

* Este trabajo es una traducción y adaptación de un artículo más extenso: “El verdadero nombre de Mozino Point...”.

** Laurentian University di Sudbury, Canadá.

Oltreoceano. L’identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

– pertenecían a España. Desde el canal de Revillagigedo en Alaska hasta el estrecho de Juan de Fuca que separa British Columbia del estado de Washington (EE.UU.), el mapa de la costa, las cartas de navegación, están salpicados de topónimos españoles. Ciertamente, tras el viaje exploratorio del navegante Juan de Fuca a fines del siglo XVI, los españoles no se movilizaron durante la mayor parte del período colonial para sentar sus reales en la costa noroeste del Pacífico. Solo la incursión del imperio ruso, con su factoría principal en Sitka en el actual Alaska, motivó en la segunda mitad del siglo XVIII a la corona española a mandar expediciones al norte y establecer una fortaleza en Nootka en la actual *Vancouver Island* que, como recuerda Alejandro Saravia, se llamó en un principio la isla de Quadra y Vancouver. Afianzado en este recuerdo, y en los aludidos topónimos castellanos, ahora fosilizados dentro de su pronunciación anglonorteamericana, Alejandro Saravia en su poemario *Letras de Nootka* hace resucitar la presencia española en el noroeste pacífico y abre perspectivas sobre la breve pero incisiva incursión de la lengua castellana en Canadá, así como su posible interacción con los idiomas autóctonos de la costa pacífica.

Alejandro Saravia es un escritor canadiense-boliviano, uno de los más talentosos del “Latinocanáda” acuñado por Hugh Hazelton, y que destaca no solo por su dominio de las dos lenguas oficiales de Canadá, el inglés y el francés, sino también por su conocimiento de las literaturas francófona y anglófona de su país adoptivo. Su producción literaria se realiza en su idioma materno, el castellano, pero también en inglés y en francés. El resultado de su empeño es un diálogo performativo entre las tres lenguas y las culturas que vehiculizan, diálogo realizado explícitamente en el contexto canadiense, lo cual a su vez realiza cierta naturalización del castellano en un país que se supone queda fuera del alcance del territorio rozado por la lengua de los conquistadores. Incluso Felipe Fernández-Armesto, por ejemplo, cuyo soberbio ensayo histórico, *Our America*, boga por la reterritorialización del español en Estados Unidos, en donde había quedado imperfectamente suprimido por la agresiva colonización angloamericana, presta poca atención a la penetración hacia el norte de los españoles más allá de California y parece dar por sentado que Canadá quedará fuera del ámbito de una Norteamérica rehispanizada¹. Alejandro Saravia, al ir

¹ Fernández Armesto evoca el mito del rey Héspero, astutamente resucitado en 1535 por el cronista Oviedo que alegaba que las Américas eran las mismas Hespérides que habían pertenecido por derecho divino al rey fabuloso. Los españoles, según Oviedo, no hacían más que recuperar sus territorios perdidos. Con el actual avance por EE.UU. de la cultura hispana, Armesto concluye que la profecía de Oviedo parece cumplirse y agrega: «En las Américas continentales, solo quedarían fuera del reino reconstituido de Héspero el Brasil, las Guayanas, Belice y Canadá» (290; traducción mía).

en busca de la historia cultural de Canadá, ha encontrado la manera de afincarse en esta zona septentrional evocando líricamente el paso en el siglo XVIII de los españoles en la costa oeste de la actual provincia de British Columbia; el poema se titula “Lettres de Nootka” e impone su título al poemario entero, *Lettres de Nootka* (2008).

El título alude a las *Noticias de Nutka* (1803-1804) de José Mariano Moziño, el científico ilustrado de Nueva España que investigó la flora y fauna, así como el pueblo y su lengua de Nutka, que se encuentra en la costa pacífica de la actual Vancouver Island en Canadá. El poema “Lettres de Nootka” tiene dos iteraciones en libro, la primera en inglés y la segunda, enriquecida, embellecida, en español bajo el título “Cartas de Nootka”. Una y otra finalizan con una diferencia:

under the Pacific waters
only gorgonian corals
still keep in silence
the name of Mozino Point (28)

bajo las aguas del océano Pacífico
sólo los corales de Gorgona
todavía guardan en silencio
el *verdadero* nombre
de Mozino Point (119; subrayado mío)

Solo la versión castellana alude a la tilde suprimida del topónimo actual de Mozino Point, a la anglicización que borra la memoria del científico mexicano por quien fue nombrado la punta de Moziño.

Pero, ¿por qué el título de la versión inglesa del poema, y del libro epónimo, se da en francés? *Lettres de Nootka* evoca el género epistolar que inició les *Lettres persanes* (1721) de Montesquieu, género dieciochesco que en España nos dio las *Cartas marruecas* de José Cadalso, libro contemporáneo de las *Noticias de Nutka* de Moziño². Tanto Montesquieu como Cadalso inventan personajes extranjeros que visitan a sus países respectivos (Francia, España) desde donde estos viajeros escriben cartas informativas a su país de origen (Persia, Marruecos). Este recurso literario permite a los autores europeos postular especulativamente un punto de mira que está fuera de su propio sistema cultural para que éste se torne exótico, extraño; intentan alcanzar así una perspectiva crítica de su propia nación. Saravia evoca el género epistolar pero su procedimiento difiere del de sus antecedentes dieciochescos; en el caso de Saravia la perspectiva desde afuera no es fruto de un ejercicio especulativo sino resultado de su propia experiencia vital: en tanto canadiense-boliviano es a la vez *outsider* exótico y ciudadano canadiense, dualidad que pauta la temática del libro entero.

² Moziño redactó sus *Noticias de Nutka* en 1793 (Monge y del Olmo 88), el mismo año en que las *Cartas marruecas* de Cadalso se publicaban por entregas en el *Correo de Madrid* (Cadalso 22).

Con su doble yo, Saravia explora una nueva manera de ‘escribir en canadiense’, tema que se introduce en el poema “The Man Who Pretended to Write in Canadian”. Al recordarse la intervención española en la costa occidental canadiense, se desestabiliza el relato colonial que sustenta este nuevo estado-nación, relato cuyos protagonistas y autores han sido francófonos y anglófonos, para admitir también a actores hispanohablantes. El acto de escribir en canadiense ya no será igual.

El tema de la escritura futura en Canadá se anuncia en “The Man Who Pretended to Write in Canadian”, poema erótico y sueño utópico. El yo poético y su amante anglófona están en una cama que se transforma en barco, «a boat [that] moves through the quiet sea of time»:

The wood of this boat holds the memory of the first fallen angels.
 ‘We live in a beautiful world’
 says a voice that comes from a
 remote invisible island
 [...]

 Oblivion is the name of the enemy.
 Oblivion sinks its teeth deep into their flesh (88-89).

La clave es esa remota isla invisible. Alusión a Utopía, sí, pero se refiere también a Nootka y su pasado español. El *enemy* al que se resiste el yo poético, el hombre que pretende escribir en canadiense, es el olvido histórico. Entonces, el doble poema “Letras de Nootka / Cartas de Nootka” se vincula con el tema de escribir en canadiense. Como la pareja de amantes de “The Man Who Pretended to Write in Canadian” – uno hispanohablante, la otra anglohablante – “Lettres de Nootka” también tiene una doble manifestación: una primera versión en inglés, una segunda y definitiva en español. Entre las dos versiones media un título en francés, “Lettres de Nootka”, al igual que en la histórica “disputa de Nootka”, a la que volveremos en seguida, la lengua francesa medía como lengua de diplomacia cuando los capitanes George Vancouver y Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra, a la vez amigos y contrincantes, se trezaban en negociaciones en Nootka en 1792. Así como la utópica coincidencia total resulta imposible entre dos amantes, “Lettres de Nootka” y “Cartas de Nutka” son poemas diferenciables; el enemigo ha tragado el «verdadero nombre de Mozino Point», nombre que solo se vislumbra en el poema redactado en castellano. La presencia española en la costa oeste canadiense – aunque «los mapas/ los libros de historia/ apenas guardan la frágil memoria de Santa Cruz de Nutka» (118) – se ha vuelto fantasmal; se la tragó el mar del tiempo y del olvido.

Visión doble

«Ante el espejo de los días, una pupila pregunta a la otra: «¿fuieste otra?, ¿eres el mismo ojo de esta mañana?, ¿adónde nos lleva este camino de tanta distancia?» (17). Así, en el primer poema del libro en castellano "La nueva tierra", el poeta se interpela a sí mismo en segunda persona, interpelación figurada en el diálogo de sus dos ojos. Un ojo mira hacia el pasado, el otro hacia el futuro. Se trata de un yo doble, pero no desdoblado o alienado: un yo boliviano, cuya tierra nativa «ya casi no es tuya» (18)³ y un nuevo yo canadiense, curioso, aventurero, que viaja por el nuevo país siguiendo «un vasto mapa [inscrito] en la palma de tu mano» (18).

En otro nivel el yo doble remite a dos modalidades epistemológicas: el poeta como navegante o explorador y el poeta como etnógrafo científico; ambas están representadas en dos personajes históricos de la Ilustración dieciochesca española. Al navegante y cartógrafo Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra que, en el apogeo de su carrera, lideró una importante expedición científica en 1792, se le dedica una estrofa entera de "Lettres de Nootka" / "Cartas de Nootka":

by night on the bridge under a swaying oil lamp the seafarer from Lima slowly dissects on paper the secret veins of the ocean (26)	por la noche en el puente bajo la lámpara de aceite que el mar mece el navegante del Alto Perú diseca lentamente en el papel las secretas venas del océano (116-117)
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Otra estrofa recuerda al naturalista novohispano José Mariano Moziño:

by day under the tall red cedars the Mexican José Mariano draws, ink on paper the lines of Chief Maquinna's face the paths of sorrow to come (27)	de día bajo los altos cedros rojos el mexicano José Mariano dibuja con papel y tinta china el rostro del Jefe Maquinna en su piel escritos los senderos de dolor que vendrá (117)
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Bodega y Quadra, el navegante que en su vida nunca cesó de explorar, corresponde al lado experiencial del poeta, a su 'ojo nocturno'. El científico

³ En *Rojo, amarillo y verde*, novela que Saravia redactó y publicó en Canadá en 2003, el protagonista se reniega de Bolivia por ser una falsa patria, una nación que nunca fue tal por haber pasado directamente de su condición de colonia española a neocolonia del imperalismo norteamericano. La Bolivia que denuncia la novela es la que existió anterior a la presidencia de Evo Morales. Una discusión de la novela se encuentra en mi trabajo "El Canadá americano de Alejandro Saravia": 110-113.

ilustrado Moziño, que trabaja a la luz del día, documenta los orígenes del drama etnográfico que producirá la nación canadiense⁴. Sin embargo, el poeta se identifica particularmente con el navegante: el Alto Perú en tiempos coloniales designaba lo que hoy en día es Bolivia, país nativo de Saravia. Pero el Bodega y Quadra histórico era oriundo de Lima, como dice el poema en inglés; en la versión castellana Saravia ha cambiado el dato histórico para estrechar el vínculo metafórico con su propio caso y hacer figurar a su yo poético como reincarnación del capitán limeño que así regresa dos siglos después a conocer de nuevo «las costas de esta frágil, fetal Canadá» (116). Los antepasados del poeta inmigrante estuvieron presentes en los albores de este estado-nación canadiense, con anterioridad al artefacto binacional inglés-francés que se creó con la ley de Confederación de 1867.

Lugar y tierra autóctonos

Saravia profundiza la idea de Canadá y sus literaturas reconociendo a las voces indígenas. Algunos poemas son como cantos nerudianos a la tierra que nos llegan a través de alusiones a tradiciones autóctonas. En Montreal, por ejemplo, oye en la voz de la *throat-singer* Tanya Tagak el canto de una diosa inuit (“Sedna en el bulevar St-Laurent”: 19-22). Afina el oído para escuchar «los cantos del viento que recorre las catedrales de bosque y aullido de Thunder Bay» al tiempo que olfatea «el olor ursino que flota sobre la vasta alfombra de musgo en las boscosas entrañas verdes de Waskiescu» (9); con estos versos los topónimos de lenguas indígenas se integran a la voz de la tierra que ahora se deja oír en español. En Kanesatake – pueblo Mohawk – el poeta ya ha comido el corazón de un castor, emblemático animal canadiense. Y en Chibougamau, Quebec, le sirvió carne de oso «una mujer indígena montañesa que te mira como a hijo perdido, el que recién regresa a casa. Ella sabe que los latinoamericanos son más indígenas que ingleses o franceses» (18). Así, se postula implícitamente una comunidad indígena panamericana, desde el continente sudamericano hasta el norte de Canadá. Los latinoamericanos son producto de cinco siglos de mestizaje entre ibéricos y pueblos autóctonos, y su sangre indígena los acerca a los pueblos originarios del norte más que a los canadienses de ascendencia británica o francesa. Por otra parte, la lengua castellana,

⁴ Los excelentes dibujos de *Noticias de Nutka* son obra de Atanasio Echeverría, que el Xavier Lozoya (120) compara con un fotógrafo periodístico. Archibald Menzies, naturalista que viajó con George Vancouver, conoció a Moziño y a Echeverría en Nootka; más tarde expresó su gran aprecio por el trabajo de Echeverría (Engstrand. “José Moziño: 2004).

otrora reservada al uso imperial y exclusiva de los conquistadores, ha sido apropiado por los pueblos conquistados y se ha naturalizado en su progenie mestiza. El latinoamericano, mestizo por sangre y por cultura, oye hablar a la tierra canadiense en español.

La simpatía, el vivo interés que muestra el poeta por los pueblos autóctonos canadienses recorre todo el libro, a partir de su propio título, siendo Nootka un topónimo indígena⁵. El poeta evoca «el rostro del Jefe Maquinna/ en su piel escritos/ los senderos de dolor que vendrá» (117). Saravia hace eco de la simpatía que expresaba Moziño por los naturales de Nootka; éste protestaba indignado contra las alegaciones de «perversidad» que algunos europeos blandían en su contra, y llegó a afirmar: «En los cinco meses que nos mantuvimos entre ellos, no experimentamos una ofensa de su parte» (169). Por otra parte, el científico ilustrado denunciaba los injustificables desmanes cometidos por los pretendidamente civilizados: «La humanidad es el mejor carácter de la civilización: Todas las ciencias y artes valen nada si sólo sirven para hacernos crueles y orgullosos» (169).

Hispanocanadá y Nootka

En su prólogo a *Letras de Nootka*, el crítico Antonio Giménez Micó felizmente caracteriza el poemario como una serie de mapas que se suma en un «atlas de Nootka» (9), así señalando la clave de la visión hispanocanadiense de Alejandro Saravia. «Ahora eres de aquí» reza la primera frase de “La nueva tierra”, primer texto en castellano del volumen. En el poema final, “Cartas de Nootka”, otro verso que le hace eco: «Aquí estás en Nootka» (117). Origen y ubicación se confunden: el ‘aquí’ se llama Nootka. Se diría que la famosa pregunta de Northrop Frye – *Where is here?*⁶ – azuzase al poeta durante todo el recorrido del Canadá que se realiza a través del poemario. Si ‘aquí’ empieza siendo Montreal, pronto incluye a Thunder Bay y Waskiesu, Peggy’s Cove, Saskatoon, Calgary, Nunavut, Whitehorse para finalmente quedar anclado en Nootka. Nootka es a la vez el final del recorrido canadiense y el principio histórico de Hispanocanadá. Ocurre

⁵ Desde 1979 esa zona es territorio del *Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council*, una alianza de catorce pueblos originarios de la costa oeste de la isla Vancouver. “Nuu-chah-nulth” significa «a lo largo de las montañas y del mar»: www.nuuchahnulth.org/tribal-council.html.

⁶ «La sensibilidad canadiense ha sido profundamente conmocionada, no tanto por nuestro famoso problema de identidad, por importante que sea éste, sino por una serie de paradojas en lo que atañe a esa identidad. La pregunta ‘¿quién soy?’ nos deja menos perpleja que algún otro enigma como el de ‘¿Dónde es aquí?’» (Frye 220; traducción mía).

que la fortaleza San Lorenzo de Nutka se construyó en 1789, varios decenios antes del nacimiento oficial del estado-nación Canadá y en momentos en que la paternidad de nuestro país futuro, de existencia todavía fetal, se disputaba entre varios pretendientes imperiales: los rivales eran España, Rusia, Gran Bretaña y ese país recién independizado, los Estados Unidos de la América del Norte.

Los españoles habían sido los primeros europeos en el noroeste pacífico, gracias al viaje de Juan de Fuca en 1592, antes de las incursiones rusas que datan de 1740 y el viaje por la costa que hizo el inglés James Cooke en 1778. Atraídos por la fama y el éxito de Cooke, los *Boston men*, marineros expertos y ávidos cazadores de pieles, también empezaban a frecuentar aquellas costas lejanas. Nootka era un importante sitio estratégico; había sido un centro de comercio desde mucho antes de la llegada de cualquier europeo. Los rusos nunca amagaron con tomar Nootka, conformándose con su factoría en Sitka (Alaska) y más tarde con un puesto en Fort Ross, California. Los norteamericanos, por su parte, todavía no eran la potencia que iban a ser en el próximo siglo. La contienda acabó por centrarse en la cuestión de quién iba a quedar en posesión de Nootka: la corona británica o la española. El español Juan Pérez, que había navegado hasta la islas de la Reina Carlota⁷, pretendió haber zarpado en Nootka en 1774, James Cooke lo hizo en 1778. Los dos reivindicaron el honor de ser el primero.

Diez años después, las dos potencias estaban al borde de la guerra por la posesión de Nootka, lo que significaba también el dominio sobre el lucrativo comercio de pieles de gran parte de la costa pacífica. La Primera Convención de Nootka de 1790 evitó la guerra por un tiempo, pero los detalles del acuerdo quedaban por resolver. El capitán Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra, al mando de la Real Expedición de los Límites – con misión tanto diplomática como científica –, se encontró con el capitán George Vancouver precisamente en Nootka en 1792, con el fin de negociar una resolución definitiva de la crisis. De acuerdo con la historiadora Janet Fireman, el refinado y sofisticado capitán español ‘sedujo’ y se mostró más hábil que su homólogo inglés (Fireman 443). Vancouver, normalmente de carácter adusto, quedó tan encantado por la espléndida mesa y los agasajos de Bodega y Quadra, que sufrió un insólito exceso de generosidad y propuso que la gran isla que los españoles e ingleses acababan de circunnavegar se llamara la isla de Quadra y Vancouver, con el apellido del español en el puesto de honor. La verdad es que los dos guardaban un respeto recíproco por su capacidad de navegantes e intercambiaban información cartográfica.

Un tercer contrincante importante en ese juego diplomático era el Jefe Maquinna o Macuina de Nootka. El historiador Christon Archer apunta que «Ma-

⁷ Las Queen Charlotte Islands, tierras ancestrales de los haida, se llama hoy en día Haida-Gwaii.

quinna se hizo experto en sacar toda ventaja posible y llegó a ser un diplomático consumado por derecho propio; con frecuencia fue más listo que los españoles, británicos y estadounidenses» (59; traducción mía). En su artículo sugestivamente titulado “Dangerous Liaisons: Maquinna, Quadra, and Vancouver in Nootka Sound”, Yvonne Marshall muestra cómo Maquinna se aprovechaba de los europeos, manipulándolos en su propia campaña por sobrepasar en prestigio a sus rivales Wickananish y Tatoosh, prestigio que conferiría el honor de ser jefe dominante de una suerte de federación cultural y económica de la costa occidental de la isla Vancouver⁸. Finalmente, tras firmar en 1794 la última Convención de Nootka – y ante la gran decepción de Bodega y Quadra – los españoles se retiraron de Nootka y del territorio que sería más tarde British Columbia.

En la reñida disputa de Nootka se condensa en un solo episodio el gran drama geopolítico por el cual surgía un nuevo orden mundial bajo el signo de la independencia de las Américas. En Nootka se chocaron dos imperialismos: el español, que se basaba en el monopolio de la corona española; y el imperialismo mercantilista de ‘libre comercio’ de Gran Bretaña. El resultado de aquella colisión se ha interpretado de muchas maneras, según las varias perspectivas nacionales de historiadores británicos, anglocanadienses, españoles y estadounidenses. Para los británicos y su progenie colonial, por ejemplo Lennox Mills, se trata del acontecimiento que pone coto a la presencia española en el noroeste pacífico y prepara el terreno para que se extienda el alcance de *British Columbia* desde el interior hacia la costa⁹. Los estadounidenses enfatizan el empate entre los imperios contendientes que duró el tiempo suficiente como para permitir la expansión del territorio estadounidense más al norte de lo esperado (Cook ix). El español Luis Mariñas Otero concluye su minuiciosa interpretación de la controversia en un tono de desafío: «Nutka nunca quedó en manos inglesas» (26)¹⁰.

Semejante nostalgia por la gloria del imperio español está ausente de la lectura que Alejandro Saravia hace de aquel fascinante drama histórico. El poema “Cartas de Nutka” minimiza el papel de los peninsulares: «no todos los marinos venían de Cádiz,/ La Mancha u otro jirón de tierra seca y amarga» (116); y realza el protagonismo de los criollos: Bodega y Quadra, Moziño. Como ya vimos arriba, aquél

⁸ La tesis interesante de Marshall es que lo sucedido en 1792 anticipa la unificación política del actual Nuu-chah-nulth Council (160).

⁹ «Indirectly, one result of the Nootka Convention of 1795 was to secure British Columbia for the British Empire. Had it not been for [British Prime Minister] Pitt’s action, the overtures then in progress between Spain and Russia would probably have led to the division between them of the whole coast» (Mills 121).

¹⁰ Mariñas Otero se justificaría esta conclusión tomando al pie de la letra la última Convención de Nootka de 1794, en la que ambos imperios renuncian a la soberanía sobre Nootka (Cook 547).

es una faceta, quizás la más importante, del alter ego de Saravia. Su carrera naval (1762-1794), que fue motivo en tiempos recientes de una novela histórica firmada por Antonio Menchaca, coincidió con el apogeo de la Marina Ilustrada de España que modernizaron los reyes Borbones Carlos II y III y que rivalizaba, según al menos un historiador, con las marinas inglesa y francesa (Tovell 3). Bodega y Quadra participó en casi todos los importantes viajes exploratorios del noroeste pacífico. Bajo la pluma de Saravia, lo vemos como un adivinador de corrientes marinas secretas; es un *mama tni*, como los nutkianos en aquel entonces llamaban a los europeos: un «hombre que vive en el agua» (Efrat 93). La otra cara del yo poético de Saravia, el novohispano José Mariano Moziño, fue un hombre ilustrado de avanzada, a quien elogió el mismo Alejandro Von Humboldt (Engstrand. “Of Fish and Men: 4). Su obra científica *Noticias de Nutka*, fruto de cinco meses de observación en Nootka en 1792, sigue siendo hasta hoy día un documento fundamental para historiadores, etnógrafos, antropólogos y lingüistas.

Criollos y peninsulares hacen causa común en la lucha político-lingüística que informa el poema “Lettres de Nootka / Cartas de Nutka”, lucha hegemónica que la lengua castellana – ‘la novia más fragante’ – perdió a raíz de la retirada de los españoles de Nootka. En vez de recordar al personaje histórico llamado George Vancouver, Saravia evoca la estatua dorada del mismo, así como su legado y su significado ideológico: «de pie en lo alto de la Asamblea provincial/ parece decir que sólo el inglés y el francés/ fueron las únicas lenguas/ que llegaron/ cuando Canadá era sólo una/ extraña palabra indígena» (118-119). La efigie de Vancouver, desde la cima del Parlamento en la ciudad de Victoria, capital de British Columbia que se nombró por la emperatriz Victoria¹¹, parece pregonar a los cuatro vientos la primacía de la lengua inglesa y, en segundo lugar, la francesa, lengua vasalla desde la Batalla de la Llanuras de Abraham (1759) por la cual los franceses cedieron Nueva Francia (la provincia actual de Quebec) al imperio británico. Así, «esta isla no se llama más/ Cuadra [sic] y Vancouver» (119).

Ahí está el lamento del poeta, y también un desafío sutil al lector anglocanadiense. ¿Quién se acuerda del verdadero nombre de Punta de *Moziño*? ¿Quién recuerda que el pueblito costero *Tofino* debe su nombre al Vicente *Tofino*, profesor de astronomía y cartografía de la Academia Naval Española en Cádiz, a quien apreciaba Bodega y Quadra (Tovell 8, 16, 17), cuyo apellido a su vez quedó suprimido de la isla de Quadra y Vancouver? ¿O que las aguas de *Caamano Sound* fueron sondeadas por el navegador Jacinto *Caamaño* Moraleja? Tanta *ñ* podada es obra del olvido enemigo en que ha quedado sumida esta zona de la memoria histórica canadiense.

¹¹ En la actualidad sobrevive en Victoria la memoria de la reina decimonónica en el *Empress Hotel*, el más ostentoso de la ciudad.

Conclusión

En 1867, cuando se creó el autónomo Dominio de Canadá, Georges Muir compuso una canción que se convirtió en una suerte de himno nacional no oficial del Canadá inglés, *The Maple Leaf Forever*, cuya letra celebra la gloria de las conquistas británicas, desde el Quebec de 1759, pasando por las Queens-ton Heights de 1812 (contra EE.UU.) hasta Nootka: «Our fair Dominion now extends/ From Cape Race [Terranova] to Nootka Sound» (*The Canadian Encyclopedia*). Resulta significativo que, en vez de una importante ciudad costera como Vancouver o Victoria, la canción aluda a la histórica disputa de Nootka. En vez de la independencia canadiense, el patriotismo anglocanadiense del siglo XIX todavía celebraba nuestra condición de artefacto colonial del imperio británico; las victorias de éste sobre otros imperios poblaban el imaginario de «esta frágil, fetal Canadá» (Saravia 116). Nuestra condición ideológica de feto siguió lastrándonos hasta bien entrado el siglo XX, ya para entonces un feto menos frágil que monstruoso, y todavía pervivía en el discurso de cierto retrógrado gobierno federal, felizmente defenestrado en 2015.

La poesía canadiense de Alejandro Saravia viene a aliviar ese lastre colonialista. Yendo al encuentro de los varios imperialismos que históricamente disputaron el territorio canadiense, Saravia nos ayuda a hacer memoria, a abrir otras perspectivas panamericanas nutridas por sus culturas autóctonas y a crear nuevas condiciones culturales para que cante en canadiense la fragante novia retornada.

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QUEBEC PROVINCIA DE CHILE: VOCES TRANSNACIONALES EN *COBRO REVERTIDO* DE JOSÉ LEANDRO URBINA

Javier Vargas de Luna*

Abstract

En *Cobro revertido* (1992) se organiza el destino de un exiliado político cuyo mayor empeño es, en la figura de su personaje central, regresar a Chile desde un país a punto de nacer: un Quebec independiente y soberano. El relato delinea los rasgos sociales de esta nación emergente bajo una forma inesperada de 'latino-americanismo'. José Leandro Urbina ha dilatado las fronteras de ambas realidades históricas para enlazarlas en la reflexión de que tanto separatistas como refugiados habitan una geografía 'transnacional' de cruces y de reflejos socio-discursivos.

Quebec, a Province of Chile: Transnational Voices in José Leandro Urbina's Collect Call
Published in 1992, *Collect Call* exposes the fate of a political refugee whose main endeavor is, through its leading character, to return to Chile from a country about to be born: an independent and sovereign Republic of Quebec. While emerging as a nation, the pages of the story outline its social features under a new expression of 'Latin Americanism'. Furthermore, this paper seeks to explain how José Leandro Urbina expands the boundaries of both historical realities in order to show that separatists and refugees inhabit a 'transnational' geography plenty of social-discursive junctions.

Quebec provincia del Chile: voci transnazionali in Cobro revertido di José Leandro Urbina
In *Cobro revertido* (1992) si organizza il destino di un esilio politico il cui impegno principale sta nella figura del suo personaggio principale, ritornato in Cile da un paese sul punto di nascere: un Quebec indipendente e sovrano. Il racconto delinea i tratti sociali di questa nazione emergente sotto una forma inattesa di 'latino-americanismo'. José Leandro Urbina ha dilatato i confini delle due realtà storiche per collegarle nella riflessione che sia i separatisti che i rifugiati vivono in una geografia 'transnazionale' di incroci e di riflessioni socio-discorsive.

Hay todavía en la América Latina unos cuantos escritores, algunos de ellos talentosos, que vagan errantes en busca de su soledad perdida.

Mario Benedetti

(*El escritor latinoamericano y la revolución posible*: 94).

* Université Laval, Quebec.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

Señas de identidad compartidas

En tanto que texto finisecular, parecería que *Cobro revertido* (1992) fue escrita para (re)afirmar una constante entre casi todos los escritores latinoamericanos desde la época de las independencias, es decir, que el verdadero refugio del perseguido – y del emigrante en general – está en las geografías de la ficción, y que la escritura es y será siempre el mejor norte para conjeturar el retorno. A manera de rápido ejemplo, allí están, en pleno siglo XIX, los destierros de Andrés Bello, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, José Mármol, Juan Montalvo, José Martí o José María Heredia. En igual orden de reflexiones, por dicha experiencia han de transitar casi todas las figuras mayores de nuestras letras en el siglo pasado: Vallejo, Jorge Amado, Neruda, Roa Bastos, Onetti, Eduardo Galeano, Donoso, Skármeta, Tito Monterroso, Manuel Puig, Reinaldo Arenas, Cortázar, Juan Gelman, Cabrera Infante, Peri Rossi y un largo etcétera... Si bien es cierto que algunos de ellos se desarraigaron por decisión propia, la mayoría asumió la expatriación como un momento vital, para su escritura tanto como para la salvaguardia de la integridad; al respecto, quizás valga la pena diferenciar el asilo poético del destierro político con las reflexiones de Benedetti sobre la «promoción del exilio» (92 y ss.) para aclarar las honduras y los matices, reales o premeditados, de lo que significó la búsqueda de asilo para el escritor latinoamericano durante casi todo el siglo XX. Por otro lado, la lista sería mucho mayor al sumar las figuras del período colonial – rápido vienen a la mente el Inca Garcilaso y el novohispano Juan Ruiz de Alarcón –; desde allí, resultaría casi obligado extender la reflexión al Medievo hispánico para conjeturar la primera gran madurez del tópico en el *Poema del Mío Cid*, y, una vez iniciada la consideración de larga data, por qué no apropiarnos de Ovidio como el más grande de todos los expatriados de la latinidad. Sirva, pues, este botón de muestra para significar que, desde sus raíces mismas, muchas de las coordenadas de las literaturas latino-hispánicas han sido trazadas con las caligrafías del desarraigo.

Ahora bien, en lo que toca al exilio de los escritores chilenos llegados a Canadá tras el golpe militar del 1973, la novela de José Leandro Urbina se integra a otras voces cuya intensidad de exploraciones reclamó muy pronto la consideración de literatura ‘diaspórica’, es decir, una valoración de conjunto basada en señas de identidad compartidas. Reinventar la memoria del país perdido en los ámbitos de la prosa, el verso o el ensayo; rescatarse como escritores en un idioma ‘contaminado’ por la experiencia de una cultura ajena; traducirse con la novedad de los significados que la(s) lengua(s) de la sociedad de bienvenida impuso; reinventarse en una ficción de frontera donde la memoria de la raíz y el descubrimiento del asilo cohabitaran en una especie de elocuencia híbrida o de expresividad mixturada..., tales pueden ser, en palabras muy llanas, los elementos

constitutivos de dicha visión panorámica aplicada a los escritores chilenos que se arraigaron en el Canadá durante la primera década de la dictadura militar, muy en especial en las provincias de Quebec y de Ontario, como es el caso del propio autor de *Cobro revertido*. La lista de autores, aquí, vuelve a ser extensa y ella incluye textos de diversa catadura existencial y obras de una muy variada filiación estética: Jorge Etcheverry, Naín Nómez, Erik Martínez, Alfredo Lavergne, Claudio Durán, Manuel Aránguiz, Francisco Viñuela, Elías Letelier, Luis Lama, Luciano Díaz, Nieves Fuenzalida, Gonzalo Millán, Jaime Serey y Jorge Cancino, entre otros. El propio Jorge Etcheverry, cuyos trabajos de reflexión e investigación se revelan esenciales para dimensionar la literatura del exilio en América del Norte, ofrece una mirada al detalle de las corrientes, los afanes creativos y los momentos trascendentales que incluso dieron lugar a la creación de “Ediciones Cordillera”, una casa chilena de publicaciones fundada en Ottawa – ver «Poesía chilena en Canadá: historia e identidades» (183-199).

Para lo que conviene decir en este introito, es preciso caer en la cuenta de que, aun y cuando entre los exiliados parece dominar la poesía sobre otros géneros, la prosa de José Leandro Urbina comparte las texturas de un dolor común a todos los escritores de la diáspora, y su libro es, sin duda ninguna, un espacio verbal donde el Canadá francés comienza a ‘hablar en chileno’ gracias a su singular intersección de calendarios. Tal y como enseguida se observará, en *Cobro revertido* los acentos del Quebec separatista se pronuncian con las inflexiones de un Chile dispuesto a ‘con-fundir’ en ellos la historia de sus persecuciones y de sus desarraigos.

Cruces históricos y discursos transnacionales

Cobro revertido es un libro que reconstruye la historia de un refugiado cuya vida y destino cobran una nueva dimensión histórica ante la inesperada noticia de un fallecimiento familiar del otro lado del continente. Como el título hace suponer, la comunicación telefónica es el evento que sirve de fuerza motriz en una narración que nos expone las urgencias del regreso envueltas en la evocación de un pasado que se desborda en la memoria de la persecución política, el golpe de estado, el amor iniciático, los primeros pasos en la militancia, la huida del país y, asimismo, la llegada al exilio canadiense. En sentido estricto, es esa muerte ocurrida tan a trasmano la que insufla vigor a la novela, pues el anuncio revive las causas del destierro así como los dolores asociados a la búsqueda de un nuevo destino en la ciudad de Montreal. Sin embargo – es menester decirlo –, el texto cumple primero con la buena literatura al crear un entretenido y angustioso suspenso alrededor de las diligencias que preparan el posible retorno del personaje a su país natal,

objeto final en el que se concentrarán todas las energías del relato. En consecuencia, la consideración socio-política que puede decantarse de un libro como *Cobro revertido* no bastaría para argumentarlo en tanto que hecho estético, y es por ello que lo histórico, dentro y fuera de Chile, tanto como lo narrado, dentro y fuera de Quebec, están subordinados en el texto de Urbina a la intimidad de aquella llamada telefónica... Insistamos: esto es literatura, y la reflexión socio-crítica, que puede y debe aprovechar siempre la riqueza de libros así, es un valor añadido a su capacidad de hacer sentir antes que a su intención de informar sobre el devenir de los desplazados por las dictaduras en América Latina.

Ambientada en la ciudad de Montreal hacia finales de los años Setenta, las sincronías entre el relato y la vida de su autor poco a poco adquieren nitidez en la figura de un *alter ego* que llega hasta nosotros bajo el antifaz de un 'sociólogo' cuyas amistades, instaladas en el activismo político, la bohemia y el destierro, lo alejarán en todo momento de sus responsabilidades académicas. Por lo demás, esos estudios suyos – siempre frustrados y, por lo y tanto, siempre vigentes como prejuicio negativo hacia su persona – en forma paulatina han de confirmar lo que la provincia de Quebec significó para muchos latinoamericanos durante la llamada "Operación Cóndor": un ámbito donde la fuerza de los postulados independentistas, surgidos del anhelo de crear un nuevo país separado del Canadá inglés, se imbricaron con las banderas ideológicas de los recién llegados. No está de más recordar que aquella estrategia de represión y eliminación de opositores políticos, también conocida como "Plan Cóndor", aglutinó a casi todos los regímenes militares del Cono Sur a partir de los años Setenta, y que la coincidencia histórica entre el arribo de los refugiados sudamericanos y el separatismo quebequense derivó en una atmósfera propicia para el estudio de sus respectivos idearios así como para su posterior hibridación discursiva.

Por lo demás, muchas de las figuras de la literatura quebequense de aquella época pronto entraron en contacto con los escritores chilenos del exilio. La cercanía y el intercambio de experiencias dio lugar, incluso, a la publicación de antologías que también podrían ser calificadas de 'transnacionales', como es el caso de aquel libro que hacia finales de los Ochenta llevaría por título *La Présence d'une autre Amérique* y que reunió los trabajos de autores como Alfredo Lavergne, Claude Beausoleil, Hugh Hazelton y Paul Chamberland, entre otros. En resumen, todos estos préstamos y cruces de posiciones políticas, estéticas y literarias exhiben a una generación de exiliados capaz de asumir como algo propio la opción soberanista de la provincia pues, como bien dice aquel personaje de Urbina en el interior del relato, tomar partido en las luchas políticas es la mejor «forma de empezar a pertenecer» a Quebec (123).

Quebec: extensión socio-discursiva del Chile de la época

En este punto, valdría la pena analizar las antesalas de dicha intersección histórica en la cual Quebec aparece como una extensión socio-discursiva del Chile de la época. Cuando en la década de los Sesenta toda búsqueda de rompimiento con el *establishment* en muchos países de América Latina era estigmatizada mediante los manidos argumentos contra las influencias cubanas, Quebec atravesaba por un periodo que pretendía renovar los esquemas de su vida social. Mejor conocida como la *Révolution tranquille*, en dicha etapa se buscó, sobre todo, estimular el paso de una tradición socio-religiosa inmovilista y arcaizante (ver Paquet 55 y ss), a un mundo cuyo nuevo sentido de modernidad encontró un gran estímulo en la Exposición Universal celebrada en 1967 en la propia ciudad de Montreal. Así, en el momento en que las dictaduras militares latinoamericanas recrudecían sus prácticas totalitarias y hacían aún más flagrantes los desplazamientos de refugiados, Quebec clausuraba las políticas conservadoras de Maurice Duplessis, Primer Ministro de la provincia entre 1944 y 1959 – ejerció un primer mandato durante la década anterior a la II Guerra Mundial, lo cual hace de Duplessis una figura siempre controversial para la historiografía local debido a su prolongada permanencia en el poder –.

Ahora bien, si las luchas sociales en América Latina se insertaban en los escenarios hemisféricos que durante la llamada “guerra fría” hicieron de Estados Unidos el gran aliado material o el peor enemigo ideológico, la pretendida refundación de Quebec exponía la construcción de su nuevo destino nacional en un marco menos global, aunque siempre parecido: el abandono o la permanencia dentro de la federación canadiense. Así, llegados a los años en que la novela transcurre, es decir, durante la víspera del referéndum separatista de 1980, en la provincia gobierna por primera vez el *Parti Québécois*, hasta hoy el gran impulsor de la independencia desde una ideología nacionalista que se pretende afín a la social-democracia. Herederos de aquel citado discurso de Charles de Gaulle en el Montreal de 1967 – *vive le Québec libre!* –, y bajo la dirección de su líder histórico, el Diputado y también Primer Ministro René Lévesque, desde su llegada al poder en 1976 los miembros del partido separatista subordinaron la totalidad de sus luchas a la construcción de un nuevo país en donde la palabra ‘independencia’ se nutrió de contenidos liberadores respecto al mundo inglés. En consecuencia, y según nos lo explica la propia novela, el exiliado chileno vivió en la provincia un proceso de igualación en la ecuación utópica quebequense (27 y ss.). Y es, pues, dicha razón la que sostiene la tesis de que el refugiado pudo nutrirse del sociolecto de los independentistas dado que el lenguaje político al uso volvió a dividir la realidad local entre opresores – el resto del

Canadá – y oprimidos – la nación francesa de Quebec –, tal y como lo han hecho siempre los discursos de las izquierdas latinoamericanas.

A ello se debe, además, que los personajes de José Leandro Urbina sepan retratar su paso por el exilio con matices que nunca perderán ni su fuerza ni su vigencia, a pesar de vivir en el destierro. Incluso los calificativos de “fascistoide” o de “revolucionario”, entre muchos vocablos más que pudieran citarse para el efecto, encuentran resonancias hispanoamericanas dentro de las reflexiones que sobre el futuro de la nueva nación francesa en América se ofrecen en el relato. Y aunque bien puede argumentarse que todas estas confluencias son solo aplicables *in vitro* al mundo narrado y no al contexto de producción de la novela, no puede ni debe olvidarse que a principios de los Noventa, justo cuando el libro está por salir a la luz, Quebec preparaba ya su segundo referéndum separatista. En consecuencia, todos estos cruces históricos se hacen perceptibles gracias a que Urbina ha conocido y vivido muy de cerca cada una de las fases de la dilución de lo quebequense entre los tejidos ideológicos chilenos, y viceversa.

Al extender lo anterior a otras presencias latinoamericanas en Montreal, pronto caemos en la cuenta de que en dicha ciudad de Quebec también se ha prolongado la historia política de países como Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Uruguay y Paraguay, sin olvidar la mención de los casos de España y de Portugal, muy presentes en la pluma del autor chileno. Conforme el siglo XX avanzó, lo sabemos muy bien, se produjo el arribo de nuevos refugiados provenientes de América Central y de Colombia. De alguna manera, la novela funciona como un espacio expresivo donde la ciudad quebequense se ha convertido en el lugar que asegura el presente y, por lo tanto, en el sitio donde se puede organizar la reflexión de lo perdido – otra vez, dentro y fuera de la ficción –.

En este orden de ideas, los antecedentes que en el dominio de la ficción construyen la imagen de Canadá y de Quebec como mundos abiertos al refugiado, con políticas sociales orientadas a la recepción del inmigrante y con proyectos colectivos enfocados a su integración, pueden localizarse ya en novelas del siglo XIX americano. Aunque los ejemplos no son muy abundantes, un buen punto de partida para ilustrar lo anterior podría localizarse en ese título clásico que prelude la Guerra de Secesión en los Estados Unidos, *La cabaña del tío Tom* (1852), de la escritora Harriet Beecher Stowe, texto cuya historia de esclavitudes y de persecuciones culmina en la ciudad de Montreal, desde entonces un universo social favorable para la escritura de las nostalgias. En efecto, ya sea en la elaboración directa o en la perspectiva tangencial, la ficción que ha tocado el tema del destierro ha privilegiado siempre la imagen de Quebec – o de Canadá en general, tal y como lo hace Isabel Allende en *La casa de los espíritus* en 1982 – como un ámbito donde es posible escribirlo todo en todo momento. Por consiguiente, no es muy aventurado exponer que la literatura continental ha consagrado en el imaginario univer-

sal la noción de Quebec en tanto que ámbito abierto a los cruces discursivos, es decir, una geografía que libera la 'literatura del otro' para acercarla a la 'lectura de todos'. Al alcanzar tal vigencia en los dominios de la imaginación, la provincia ha trascendido como un 'país de países', como la 'voz de voces' de una nación de identidades interpoladas, esto es, como un mundo donde las herencias locales completan con su especificidad nacional los posibles extravíos del perseguido.

La consagración escritural de una pérdida

En lo tocante a las fibras verbales más íntimas del libro, las inquietudes poéticas del exilio chileno se individualizaron en *Cobro revertido* mediante una escritura contradictoria en cuyo interior se anunció, con regionalismos sudamericanos y formulaciones idiomáticas propias de Quebec, la imposibilidad del regreso. En otras palabras, Chile comenzó a suceder de otra manera en autores que, como José Leandro Urbina, convocaron en sus páginas la presencia de la lejanía y la familiaridad de la distancia. Su obra, en tanto que literatura del destierro, se dirigió muy pronto hacia la consagración escritural de una pérdida; si acaso se prefiere el otro extremo de la misma perspectiva, esto equivale a proponer que todos los libros que se han acercado al tema del exilio trascienden casi siempre como la dolorosa celebración de una lectura donde las palabras trastocan y confunden muchos de sus significados históricos. Es eso lo que Hazelton, en sus análisis sobre Urbina, deja en claro al señalar «la dificultad emocional que muchos escritores refugiados manifiestan al escribir sobre el golpe de estado: encono, culpa, dolor, desorientación...» (216). De hecho, muchas de las verdades que la novela construye alrededor de la noción del 'desarraigo' concitan ideas de lo efímero, situaciones inacabadas, escenarios incompletos y por tanto insuficientes en la construcción del destino de los personajes. El camino que sigue Urbina para aclarar todas estas contradicciones es el de la exhibición de una individualidad que ha hecho de la trashumancia su nueva forma de ciudadanía, su gesto existencial más inevitable y también más definitorio. Tal y como lo manifiestan muchos de los personajes de la novela, al expatriado no le queda más opción que deambular por los márgenes del tiempo: sí, el desarraigo hace vivir en los cruceros de la historia pues solo allí es posible sobrevivir como separatista y reconocerse chileno en un solo golpe de voz.

Aunque las cronologías generacionales nunca son aplicables en los dominios de la creación literaria – al menos no en forma absoluta –, *Cobro revertido* inaugura una década literaria muy agitada en la reelaboración del tema de la dictadura y del exilio. Anterior al libro de Urbina, en 1990, Ariel Dorfman produjo su comentadísima pieza teatral *La muerte y la doncella*; después vino Carlos

Cerda con *Morir en Berlín* (1993), Ana María del Río y *Tiempo que ladra* (1994), y, por supuesto, *Estrella distante* (1996) de Roberto Bolaño. Hace un par de años, en el 2012, Juan Forch publicó *Las dos orillas del Elba*, una obra que puede categorizarse de crepuscular en el marco de los relatos asociados al destierro. Entre todas ellas, la recepción crítica ha sostenido el libro de Urbina como uno de las más penetrantes gracias a que nos hace visitar los trasfondos verbales de un multilingüismo abigarrado que avanza hacia nosotros por la vía de un realismo que lo mismo llega a ser lúdico que desolador. Dicho de otro modo, el gran tema del exiliado se nos expone mediante vaivenes narrativos que se equilibran mientras se contraponen o que se contrarrestan mientras se armonizan. Al hacer bascular las jerigonzas de lo coloquial con las solemnidades de la consideración sociológica, y al acercar lo quebequense a lo hispanoamericano, en Urbina todo vuelve a ser complemento y disociación, incluso esa estructura narrativa que nos habla desde la memoria de sus figuras centrales para, acto seguido, abrir la puerta a una voz omnisciente que nos hace progresar con solvencia en lo leído. Quizás eso sea lo que sostiene la actualidad de *Cobro revertido* en tanto que hecho estético: sus exploraciones verbales ponen a prueba el tópico del exilio al darle vida a un personaje que se refugia entre utopías sociales que se le parecen mucho, sí, pero que nunca poseeremos por completo.

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LA PRESENZA DI AUTORI CILENI IN CANADA DOPO IL 1973, CON UNA INTERVISTA A JOSÉ LEANDRO URBINA

Michele Campanini*

Abstract

Negli anni Settanta del Novecento in Canada si sono formate numerose comunità di esuli latino-americani in fuga dalle dittature. All'interno di queste comunità è fiorita una significativa esperienza letteraria, che ha visto gli autori di origine cilena assumere un ruolo di rilievo. Il presente contributo vuole ripercorrere quell'esperienza, anche attraverso un'intervista a José Leandro Urbina, scrittore ed esule, per concludere con una prospettiva contemporanea sugli autori di seconda generazione.

The Presence of Chilean Writers in Canada after 1973, with an Interview with José Leandro Urbina

In the 70s of the twentieth century in Canada were formed numerous communities of Latin American exiles fleeing dictatorships. Within these communities a significant literary experience has flourished, and the authors of Chilean origin assumed a leading role. This paper aims to retrace that experience, even through an interview with José Leandro Urbina, writer and exile, to conclude with a contemporary perspective on the authors of the second generation.

Gli autori latino-americani in Canada

La presenza di autori latino-americani in Canada ha avuto inizio a partire dalla seconda metà dagli anni Settanta del Novecento, con l'avvento delle dittature negli stati dell'America Latina (già in Brasile nel 1964, poi in Uruguay nel 1972, in Cile nel 1973, in Argentina nel 1976) che hanno portato all'esilio migliaia di persone, e fra loro tanti intellettuali già molto attivi nei rispettivi paesi di origine. L'affermazione di tali autori è iniziata qualche anno dopo il loro arrivo nel paese nord-americano, quando alcune case editrici – come la Coach House, la Wallace, la Québec Amérique e la Cormorant Books – hanno dimostrato interesse per il nuovo ambito letterario caratterizzato dalla nascente 'letteratura

* Università di Siena.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

migrante¹, pubblicandone traduzioni in inglese e in francese. Una certa attenzione è stata loro rivolta anche da case editrici appartenenti alla sfera latino-americana – come la Cordillera, la Split Quotation e la Omelic – che hanno stampato opere prevalentemente di esuli politici, plasmatisi quindi nel paese di origine. Altri editori – quali El unicornio verde e La enana blanca – hanno diffuso, invece, le produzioni letterarie di autori plasmatisi in Canada e connessi con la comunità latino-americana presente nel Paese².

Anche giornali e riviste locali, regionali e nazionali hanno iniziato a pubblicare testi, note critiche e interviste riguardanti tale tipologia di letteratura, in progressivo sviluppo. La sua affermazione si deve, pure, all'impegno di diffusione degli autori che intervengono costantemente ad eventi pubblici con letture e presentazioni delle loro opere. Certo è che è stato necessario qualche anno affinché questi scritti trovassero uno spazio all'interno del complicato mosaico letterario della nazione, costituito da individui di differenti nazionalità. Va ricordato che il Canada ha attirato, nelle sue sterminate estensioni, continui e inarrestabili flussi di immigrazione già a partire dalla seconda metà del Novecento e fino ai giorni nostri.

La loro notorietà si deve, almeno in parte, al fatto che essi appartengono al continente americano, e condividono molte caratteristiche comuni agli scrittori canadesi. Hugh Hazelton, ne segnala alcune: «colonization, the implantation of European culture in an indigenous environment, the gradual freeing from Eurocentric literary models, and the search for autonomous means of expression» (3). Trovandosi quindi in un terreno fertile, gli esuli latino-americani carichi degli stimoli politici e culturali dei paesi di origine abbandonati all'improvviso, hanno svolto un ruolo fondamentale per gettare le basi della futura notorietà di tale letteratura, come ricorda Jorge Etcheverry:

is the 'pure' ethno-cultural (Latin American) cultural/literary/publishing activity that seems to be growing in recent years as a result of an increase in the hispanic population and the work initiated by exiled Latin American groups during the 1970s and 1980s. The work of these latter groups has created an ambience that fosters the existence of a real Latin American cultural space, which though limited, is nonetheless expanding (112).

¹ Sull'argomento vedasi, tra gli altri, Serafin il cui studio mira a stabilire la tassonomia del genere 'letteratura migrante', concentrandosi dapprima sul significato del termine 'migrazione' e sulle motivazioni che inducono le persone a migrare per poi affrontare le tematiche ricorrenti, le strategie stilistiche e l'analisi dei personaggi. Sia pure applicato all'ambito della letteratura argentina, lo studio, permette per estensione, di definire modelli di una specifica tradizione, in base alla retorica di continuità, di temi e di riferimenti comuni.

² Per un ulteriore approfondimento si veda Etcheverry 111-116.

A differenza degli Stati Uniti, dove la presenza della comunità latina è forte di milioni di persone e c'è un interesse reale per gli autori appartenenti a questo ampio gruppo etnico, sia da parte di importanti case editrici che di giornalisti e di dipartimenti universitari interessati a studi e ricerche sul tema, in Canada la comunità latino-americana ha un'incidenza molto minore, e l'interesse che suscita è abbastanza marginale rispetto al *mainstream* letterario del Paese. Tuttavia, questa relativa marginalità ha favorito, come ricorda Hazleton, la costituzione di un *unicum* linguistico, non distinto per origini nazionali:

The smaller number of Latin Americans in Canada have encouraged people from different backgrounds to transcend national and cultural boundaries and define themselves linguistically, so there is now a surprisingly high degree of integration and a fertile cultural interchange between the various Spanish-speaking nationalities resident in the country (4).

All'interno di tale gruppo, i poeti e gli scrittori di origine cilena ebbero senza dubbio un ruolo di rilievo rispetto agli altri latino-americani.

Gli autori cileni in Canada dopo il colpo di stato del 1973

A partire dai mesi immediatamente successivi al colpo di stato dell'11 settembre 1973, moltissimi intellettuali cileni hanno scelto il Canada per il loro esilio costituendo un gruppo abbastanza omogeneo; molti di essi che poi si sono affermati nella nuova patria avevano già avviato le carriere in Cile³. Come osserva Etcheverry, hanno iniziato la loro attività con un certo margine di vantaggio rispetto alle ulteriori comunità latino-americane sparse sul territorio; ciò è dovuto a una presenza più marcata: «they tended at times to take the lead over other Latin-American communities in cultural matters» (118). Di sicuro i cileni ne dividevano molteplici elementi generali, fino al punto di divenire in qualche modo un esempio rappresentativo per tutte le collettività allora presenti. Stabilitisi prevalentemente nelle grandi aree urbane di Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, essi sono presenti in numero minore anche nelle aree urbane di Ottawa, Winnipeg, Calgary ed Edmonton. Nella maggior parte dei casi, sono giunti da soli in Canada, con un'unica eccezione costituita dal gruppo di poeti della cosiddetta “Scuola di Santiago”, stanziatisi ad Ottawa:

³ È importante ricordare che ci sono casi isolati di autori cileni presenti in Cile prima del 1973, come il poeta surrealista Ludwig Zeller, trasferitosi a Toronto nel 1970 o Renato Trujillo, giunto a Montreal nel 1968, dove si stabilisce.

Chilean poet and critic Naín Nómez had met Canadian graduate students from Carleton University while he was attending the University of Chile and was later invited to teach Spanish in Ottawa. Nómez's associates from the 'School of Santiago' poetry group [...] Jorge Etcheverry and Eric Martínez, along with other writers also linked to the university, all went on to settle in Ottawa, thus creating an early focal point for Chilean literary activity in Canada (Hazleton 7-8).

Tuttavia, verso la fine degli anni Settanta, con l'apparizione dei loro primi libri, si risveglia un reciproco interesse. Fra coloro che iniziano a pubblicare un'opera figura senza dubbio Francisco Viñuela, con le sue poesie contenute in *Exil transitoire / Exilio Transitorio*, tradotto in francese ed edito a Montreal dalle Editions Nouvelles Frontieres nel 1977. Nel 1979 Gonzalo Millán dà alle stampe la sua importante raccolta di poesie *La ciudad*, con Les Editions Maison Culturelle Quebec-Amerique Latine, casa editrice alla cui fondazione aveva contribuito un altro poeta cileno, Manuel Aránguiz. Anni dopo, nel 1986, Millán riceverà in Cile il premio per la poesia dalla Fondazione Pablo Neruda. Nel 1981 lo stesso Aránguiz pubblica una silloge bilingue inglese/francese dei suoi poemi, dal titolo *Cuerpo de silencio / Corps de Silence*. Nel 1976 Naín Nómez, spostatosi da Ottawa a Toronto, entra in contatto con altri autori come il poeta Claudio Durán e lo scrittore Juan Carlos García.

Senza dubbio la città più importante dal punto di vista dell'editoria cilena alla fine del decennio è Ottawa che, grazie alla fondazione delle edizioni Cordillera (1976), per opera dello scrittore Leandro Urbina, immette sul mercato – oltre ad opere dello stesso Urbina e di poeti quali Etcheverry e Nómez – la prima antologia di scritti latino-americani apparsi in Canada, dal titolo *Literatura chilena en Canadá / Chilean literature in Canada*. Il volume include sia testi di poesia che di prosa, presentati in versione bilingue da Christina Shants, la quale da lì a poco sarebbe diventata la principale traduttrice nell'area di Ottawa, oltre che la moglie di Urbina. Per la prima volta, un libro di autori cileni diviene accessibile anche al pubblico canadese, e questo ha cambiato molto le cose da quel momento in avanti, come ricorda Hugh Hazelton: «Cormorant Books, of Dunvegan, Ontario, for instance, brought out translations of works by both Urbina and Nómez in the mid-1980s. The Latino-Canadian benchhead in Canadian letters had been established» (10).

Il tema dell'esilio nella letteratura cilena in Canada

Come ho già avuto modo di scrivere citando Etcheverry (118), gli scrittori e i poeti di origine cilena rappresentano un caso unico nel panorama della letteratura latino-americana in Canada, in quanto si tratta di autori – già conosciuti

nella propria terra –, che si sono relazionati con una comunità di esuli molto unita, capace di offrire loro un buon supporto. Questo li ha portati, almeno in una prima fase, a mantenere vive le tematiche dell'esilio, della difficoltà del percorso di integrazione nel nuovo Paese, dell'inevitabile contrasto fra cultura di origine e cultura di nuova acquisizione. Il poeta cileno Naín Nómez a tal proposito scrive:

In the case of Chileans, most of whom emigrated in the aftermath of the military coup, the majority of them, for a certain time, chose as the main theme of their work the experiences of uprooting, frustration, cultural separation, nostalgia for the lost world, the repression there, loneliness and the differences between the two worlds, all of which produced a symbolic freezing of the memory and a denial of the acceptance of the present. In their literary work, the constant of exile crops up, a continuous process of integration and disintegration in which the appeal from both cultures acts both as motivating and schismatic forces (120).

Dalla prospettiva di esule, egli ha tracciato i punti salienti del processo di adattamento al nuovo contesto culturale degli scrittori cileni osservando in prima persona come il fenomeno sia stato riprodotto in letteratura. Tre sono le fasi di sviluppo individuate: all'iniziale visione della cultura del paese di origine come un 'tempo' di perfezione e completezza interrotto bruscamente dall'esilio, seguono la disintegrazione e la frammentazione del passato che già non esiste più, unite a un approccio al futuro disilluso e senza speranza; ciò produce nel presente sentimenti di vuoto, solitudine e sradicamento. Si arriva poi alla tanto dibattuta integrazione, che implica un riesame della relazione di identità fra la vecchia e la nuova patria (121), manifestandosi come un tentativo di bilanciare il rapporto con entrambe le culture attraverso una mediazione critica. Il che conduce all'assunzione di una nuova identità sociale:

This new identity would mean creative maturity; the attempt to assume the porosity of Canadian society, creating an art developed in the interstices and hollows of its cultural body, which would grow out of a critical relationship with its surroundings in order to resist both alienation and attachment (121).

Anche lo scrittore José Leandro Urbina – del quale segue un'intervista –, negli anni in cui Nómez pubblicava le sue riflessioni sul tema dell'esilio, si interroga sulla propria identità di esule: «Compelled to think about my particular state of life as a Chilean-Canadian writer who came to this country as an exile, I have been literally overwhelmed by the number of different angles and levels from which it is possible to review such an experience» (*Writing in Exile*: 123). Nell'affrontare il problema, egli individua tre punti fonamen-

tali: la questione della lingua e della mitologia nazionale o personale – connessa all'identità individuale –, la condizione sociale e la posizione che definiscono la prospettiva di uno scrittore – valori morali, gusti, mondo che si sceglie di rappresentare...⁴. Il suo romanzo *Cobro revertido*, approfondisce con estrema efficacia tale tematica attraverso ventiquattro ore della vita a Montreal di un esule cileno, che ha appena ricevuto dal Cile la notizia della morte della madre. Calzanti sono le seguenti parole di Hough Hazelton nell'inquadrare il protagonista: «The sociologist is an amiable, anarchic, sensitive individual whose failure to understand or accept the rules of the game in both Chilean and Canadian society ultimately leads him to tragedy» (221). Il suo declino e la sua 'caduta' saranno il prodotto sia della propria personalità che del disorientamento e della disperazione causati dall'esilio. Non a caso, Sylvie Perron osserva: «Rejected by their country and in permanent conflict with a world in which they no longer play their former role or occupy their former place, exiles tirelessly sift through their past in an attempt to recover their identity» (230). In effetti, la radice del suo fallimento sta proprio nell'incapacità di riconciliare il passato con il presente.

La testimonianza di José Leandro Urbina

Per approfondire l'esperienza degli autori cileni in esame, ho ritenuto fondamentale acquisire la testimonianza di un rappresentante di spicco di quegli anni. Fra le decine di importanti e riconosciuti poeti e scrittori, che non mi è possibile citare in questo breve articolo⁵, ho deciso di chiedere un racconto diretto dell'esperienza in Canada, di esule e di scrittore, a José Leandro Urbina, ritornato stabilmente in Cile da alcuni anni. Egli ha iniziato il proprio esilio a Buenos Aires nel 1974, per poi proseguirlo in territorio canadese nel 1977, dove ha vissuto per un lungo periodo, prevalentemente a Ottawa. È autore tra l'altro di *Las malas juntas*, pubblicato dalle Ediciones Cordillera nel 1981, divenuto poi un classico sul colpo di stato in Cile e sulla repressione militare del regime. Nel 1993 ha dato alle stampe il romanzo *Cobro revertido*, ambientato nella comunità di esuli latino-americani di Montreal, vincitore del "Premio del Consejo Nacional del Libro y la Lectura de Chile" nel 1993. Il suo ultimo romanzo, *Derrumbe*, è apparso in Cile nel 2015. L'intervista risale al dicembre 2015.

⁴ Per ulteriori notizie si veda Urbina. "Writing in Exile...": 123-126.

⁵ Per approfondimenti si rimanda a Hazelton 3-27, Etcheverry 119-122 e Nómez 111-118.

Ud llegó a Quebec en 1977, continuando un exilio que comenzó en 1974 en Argentina. ¿Por qué eligió Canadá, fue al azar o una elección consciente?

En realidad llegué a Ontario, a Ottawa, a la universidad de Carleton a estudiar mi MA⁶. La situación en Argentina se había hecho insostenible con el golpe de estado de 1976, con Videla a la cabeza, sobre todo para los exiliados chilenos. Como yo tenía algunos amigos en Canadá, que pertenecían a mi generación universitaria, recurrí a ellos para salir de Buenos Aires. No era fácil emigrar en esos días, estaba todo muy politizado.

¿Qué recuerdos tiene Ud de su llegada a Canadá? Fue difícil integrarse en la sociedad canadiense?

La entrada a Canadá fue a través de la comunidad chilena. Era curioso vivir en una comunidad exiliada que se mantenía atenta a los eventos del país de origen. Canadá en un principio era como un escenario extraño en el que nos movíamos sin prestar mayor atención. El manejo del idioma dificultaba las cosas. Había un grupo importante de gente educada, profesionales, que por mucho tiempo solo tuvo acceso al mundo canadiense a través de trabajos de baja categoría, como limpiadores, restaurantes, etc. La mirada política tampoco ayudaba. Había contacto con grupos progresista, pero en general no había gran contacto con el canadiense medio hasta que comenzamos a ligarnos al trabajo universitario.

Después de 1974, año en que comenzó su exilio, ¿cuándo fue la primera vez que regresó a Chile? ¿Qué impresión tuvo?

La primera vez que volví a Chile fue a fines de diciembre de 1985 y me quedé hasta casi mediados de enero. Tres semanas intensas donde mayormente circulé entre familiares. Pinochet estaba todavía al mando del país y no quería poner en riesgo o correr riesgos en una ciudad donde la represión se sentía. Santiago era una ciudad contaminada y la gente no se arriesgaba a hablar con extraños.

En la novela Las malas juntas Ud escribe: «Diciembre de 1987. Hemos venido desde Canadá a pasar las navidades con la familia. [...] Estamos todos un poquito entonados. Padres, hermanos, vecinos» (90) ¿Esta condición se refiere a un viaje real a Chile?

Sí, es la primera vez que viajo con mis hijos y pasamos la navidad con mis padres y hermanos. Ahí comenzamos a conversar más largamente y a nivel de lo cotidiano de lo que estaba pasando cada uno en ese tiempo fatal.

⁶ Master of Arts.

Por lo general, los escritores en el exilio, como lo fue Ud, tienen grandes dificultades para contar los trágicos acontecimientos que han sucedido en su país de origen, pero Ud se las arregló muy bien: ¿cómo fue eso posible?

Yo me di cuenta en Buenos Aires de esa dificultad. Era amigo de un crítico literario, Mariano Aguirre, que recibía relatos y testimonios desde Chile y los publicaba en diarios internacionales. Yo leía con él y las evaluaciones eran coincidentes. La carga emocional era tan grande que se comía a la dimensión narrativa y terminaba siendo un grito que solo comunicaba dolor o rabia. Entonces comencé a experimentar con formas cortas y a buscar cierta distancia con la materia a narrar. Creo que me sirvió mucho la lectura de Isaac Babel, *La caballería roja*, para entender cómo lograr efectividad en el contar ese tipo de eventos históricos.

¿Cuánto de José Leandro Urbina y su experiencia de vida como exiliado hay en el carácter del sociólogo en el libro Cobro revertido?

Siempre hay algo de la experiencia personal en lo que uno escribe, pero también mucho de lo que uno observa y filtra. El sociólogo es uno de los personajes del grupo de los derrotados, y el proceso que él hace de asumir su situación tenía similitud con la confusión y la parálisis observable en algunos jóvenes de la comunidad exiliada.

En Cobro revertido Ud utiliza la primera persona cuando se refiere a los recuerdos del sociólogo, sin embargo Ud utiliza la tercera persona cuando la acción se sitúa en la vida presente en Montreal. ¿De dónde viene la elección estilística de usar estos dos métodos diferentes de contar las historias?

Eso me ayudó a resolver el problema del personaje intoxicado. El narrador en tercera persona cuenta al sociólogo cuando éste no está en condiciones de hacerlo. Es una especie de Lazarillo y le daba más variedad al relato. Creo que los relatos en primera persona pueden ser monótonos y cansadores, a no ser que el narrador sea muy hábil.

En Cobro revertido Ud escribe: «Quizás podría escribir algo sobre los limpiadores y los ritos de integración en la sociedad quebecuá de fines de los setenta» (33). ¿Cómo fue 'su' rito de integración en Quebec?

Mi rito de integración fue limpiando oficinas en Ottawa. Incluso una vez limpiamos oficinas del RCMP⁷ lo que provocó una situación muy extraña. Yo viajaba mucho a Montreal; *Cobro* está instalado en Montreal porque me pare-

⁷ Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

ció el escenario más adecuado para la novela. Una ciudad puerto, muy cosmopolita, y en donde se cruzan las culturas fundadoras de Canadá. El proceso político de la época parecía mucho más interesante visto desde allí.

El sociólogo dice: «hay muchos refugiados e inmigrantes que tienen miedo a opinar y que no quieren comprometerse, porque temen que se van a ver involucrados otra vez en acontecimientos penosos» (43). ¿Sucedió realmente entre los exiliados chilenos en Canadá este tipo de comportamiento?

Por supuesto. Hubo mucha gente que no quiso saber más de política. El castigo había sido muy fuerte y querían comenzar una nueva vida desde cero. Improbable, pero mucha gente de clase media, con familia, se fueron separando, poco a poco, del grupo más político.

En Cobro revertido Ud escribe: «El exilio es una enfermedad [...] La tensión entre lo que eramos y lo que somos no se resuelve nunca» (59). ¿Ud fue capaz de resolver esta tensión?

En cierta medida, sí. La escritura me ayudó en eso. La posibilidad de leer y escribir le daba cierta continuidad a mi vida. Podría decir que por mucho tiempo viví como estudiante.

En Cobro revertido el sociólogo considera a los otros exiliados 'su familia'. ¿Eran realmente tan estrechas las relaciones entre los exiliados latinoamericanos en Canada en los años Setenta y Ochenta?

Vengo de una cultura de familias grandes, de una cultura que hasta 1973 era gregaria. Hablábamos de 'nosotros' cuando hablábamos de los chilenos. Hablar de yo y yo, nos parecía repugnante. Esa fue una marcada diferencia cultural con los canadienses. Además, la experiencia trágica del golpe creaba lazos importantes entre exiliados, incluso con la gente que no compartía en absoluto tus intereses.

Durante el exilio, ¿Ud estuvo en contacto regular con su familia en Chile?

Más o menos. El teléfono era carísimo para las conexiones internacionales. Pero algunos familiares nos visitaban cuando podían viajar.

En 1988, con la caída de la dictadura, ¿que pasó entre los escritores chilenos en Canadá? ¿Era más fuerte el deseo de regresar y contribuir a un renacimiento del país o era más fuerte la voluntad de permanecer en el país donde los exiliados chilenos vivieron durante casi quince años y habían hecho una nueva vida?

El grupo se dividió. Algunos partieron de vuelta un poco antes del '88. Ellos eran los que tenían contactos para sobrevivir en Santiago, gente que se había

doctorado en diversas materias y que podía encontrar un rincón en el país. Otros no volvieron, algunos lo hicimos más tardíamente.

¿Por qué decidió volver a vivir de forma permanente en Chile después de 17 años desde el final de la dictadura, en el año 2005? ¿Qué había cambiado?

Tomé esa decisión cuando vivía en EEUU. Después del 11 de septiembre gringo la atmósfera se puso muy hostil hacia los ‘otros’ y comencé a sentir que la cultura anglo-norteamericana me había saturado. Ya no quería estar más allí, me había convertido en un ser irrelevante y quería renovar mi relación con Chile aunque fuera difícil.

Ud ha pasado muchos años en Canadá, ¿cuál es su relación con el idioma inglés? ¿Alguna vez ha escrito textos narrativos en inglés?

Nunca quise escribir en inglés. Con una rigurosa traductora en la casa no daban ganas de intentarlo. Por otra parte, siempre sentí que mi lengua de escritura era el español. Esa es la lengua en que puedo expresarme mejor. Cuando uno tiene un cierto nivel de conocimiento del idioma, cuando uno puede comunicar con fluidez, no quiere sentirse torpe e infantil balbuceando en otro. Eso pasaba en un principio. Luego mi conocimiento del inglés superaba al del canadiense medio. Hasta hoy leo con absoluta competencia en ese idioma, pero nunca me tentó escribirlo. Conrad no fue mi modelo.

Ud se las arregló para publicar su primer libro en Chile, cuando Pinochet todavía estaba en el poder. ¿Qué efecto tuvo esta publicación? Regresó a Chile para presentar el libro?

No, pero *Las malas juntas* fue siempre un libro muy popular aquí. Es de los pocos libros escritos sobre el post-golpe, en narrativa. Algunos cuentos se fotocopiaban y circulaban de mano en mano fuera de los circuitos comerciales o institucionales. José Miguel Varas, el escritor chileno que hacía un programa de radio desde Moscú, leyó por ese medio algunos cuentos de libro. Creo que hasta hoy tiene alguna resonancia. Fui el primero que trabajó sistemáticamente el cuento corto y el microcuento en Chile y eso me convierte en el abuelo de la narración corta en el mundo literario chileno. Luego, la forma se popularizó de manera inimaginable.

¿Qué queda de la extraordinaria experiencia relacionada con la editorial Ediciones Cordillera, que fundó a finales de los años Setenta en Ottawa?

Cordillera fue otro salvavidas. Los que participábamos en ese proyecto nos negábamos a morir como escritores, poetas o intelectuales. Queríamos seguir siendo creativos y mostrar que los latinoamericanos y chilenos no era un grupo

de pobres indiecitos que venían a ser protegidos por una sociedad superior y más buena. Cordillera fue un espacio en el que preservar identidad y recuperar a creadores chilenos esparcidos por el mundo.

¿En los años Setenta y Ochenta cual era la relación entre los escritores y los intelectuales exiliados Chilenos en Canadá? ¿Y cuál fue la relación con otros escritores e intelectuales de América Latina? En este periodo eran frecuentes las oportunidades de encuentro y de intercambio?

En general, las relaciones entre escritores chilenos eran buenas, tan buenas como pueden ser las relaciones entre escritores. Con otros escritores latinoamericanos no hubo contactos sistemáticos. Creo que Jorge Etcheverry, por su consecuencia política, fue el que mantuvo las relaciones más estrechas con los escritores e intelectuales que aparecían por Ottawa. También Naín Nómez en Toronto tuvo la oportunidad de participar en grupos de estudio importantes, con sociólogos y científicos políticos que pensaban nuevas alternativas para la izquierda.

Actualmente ¿cuánto de Canadá queda todavía dentro de Ud?

Bastante. Creo que los canadienses que yo conocí tenían actitudes solidarias que ayudaban a la preservación de la fe en la humanidad y la posibilidad de amistad y generosidad. Esto suena hoy ingenuo. No sé hacia donde habrá evolucionado Canadá en los últimos quince años, tampoco hay que idealizar.

Per una prospettiva contemporanea: è presente una nuova generazione di autori di origine cilena in Canada?

Ho posto questa domanda a José Leandro Urbina, cercando di capire se nel Canada di oggi ci sia una seconda generazione di scrittori cileni che, in qualche modo, possa raccogliere la grande eredità lasciata da quella straordinaria prima generazione di cui lui fa parte. Anche se non ha più rapporti stretti con la comunità letteraria cilena canadese, Urbina ha risposto: «Creo que hay una segunda generación, pero al parecer la gran mayoría no escribe en español. Esa es una diferencia fundamental. Tú puedes decir que Millán, Etcheverry, Nómez y yo somos escritores chileno-canadienses, pero en Chile se me considera un escritor chileno sin más. No sé si a los de la nueva generación los considerarían así». Quindi questa seconda generazione è presente, anche se non scrive più in spagnolo, ma in inglese o in francese, trattandosi di autori formati in Canada.

In cerca di maggiori informazioni, ho rivolto la stessa domanda a Hugh Hazleton, che è uno dei maggiori esperti di *Latino-Canadian Literature*, il quale mi ha risposto:

Yes, absolutely: there has definitely been a new influx of younger writers from Latin America, who've come for a variety of reasons besides political exile. There are a few from Chile, including Blanca Espinoza, but not many. Most of them are from Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela or other countries that weren't as much part of the stream of exiles and refugees from the Southern Cone and Central America. Most have immigrated to Canada for personal, often economic reasons, or as graduate students who went on to teach, while a large number of Mexicans in particular have settled in Montreal because they like the bilingual culture here and are involved in artistic and cultural activities. Ángel Mota and Martha Bátiz Zuk are two of the best known. There is also a new second generation of writers of Hispanic background, daughters and sons of earlier immigrants who continue writing, but in English or French. Many of them are quite well known, including Carmen Aguirre, Guillermo Verdecchia, and Mauricio Segura (dicembre 2015).

Su consiglio di Hazleton ho infine interpellato anche Gabriela Etcheverry, la figlia del noto poeta cileno Jorge Etcheverry, esule in Canada dopo il 1973. Gabriela ha dedicato la sua tesi di laurea e la successiva tesi di dottorato proprio alla seconda generazione di scrittori latino-americani in Canada, e pure la sua risposta ha confermato la presenza di un'ulteriore generazione di autori di origine cilena – e latino-americana in generale –, anche molto attiva. L'utilizzo della lingua spagnola, tuttavia, risulta quasi scomparso: i giovani di oggi scrivono le loro opere in francese o in inglese, le due lingue ufficiali della nazione. Pertanto, la risposta di Gabriela, ben riassume l'odierna situazione della scrittura canadese di origine cilena:

There is still a dearth of second-generation Latino-Canadian writers, but a few of them have had much more public attention than their predecessors since they tend to work in English and French, rather than Spanish. Much of the second generation work is being done in theatre and memoir. Carmen Aguirre came to Canada from Chile as a young child and is known for her plays and memoirs, particularly her award-winning memoir *Something Fierce*. Rosa Laborde, also Chilean-Canadian second generation, has recently emerged as a promising playwright for her work, *Léo*. And another well-known Chilean-Canadian writer is Mauricio Segura. He is based in Quebec and is best known for his novel about Latino and Haitian youth in Montreal, *Côte des Nègres* (or *Black Alley* in English translation) (dicembre 2015).

Gli anni passano e la seconda generazione di autori cileni si sta ritagliando i propri spazi, sia pure con maggiori difficoltà rispetto ai loro predecessori. È cambiata la lingua che usano per scrivere, poiché ora utilizzano la 'loro' lingua. Tante cose sono diverse, senza dubbio *in progress*, rispetto a quanto scriveva Jorge Etcheverry più di venti anni fa, nel 'lontano' 1995: «Until now, a second generation of latin American-Canadian or Hispanic writers is largely absent» (118). L'esule, ormai, si è completamente integrato in quel "mosaico" culturale che è il Canada odierno alla cui formazione nazionale ha contribuito con il suo 'modesto' apporto.

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LA TRAYECTORIA IDENTIDARIA DE CARMEN AGUIRRE: TESTIMONIO DE UNA (LATINO)CANADIENSE REVOLUCIONARIA

Sophie M. Lavoie*

Abstract

El testimonio *Something Fierce: Memories of a Revolutionary Daughter* (2011) de Carmen Aguirre analiza la cuestión de la identidad de la *narradora* frente al exilio después del golpe de estado de Pinochet y a la clandestinidad impuesta por la madre revolucionaria, la autora Carmen Rodríguez. El cuestionamiento identitario (Chile, Canadá, la clandestinidad, y de clase social), el diálogo con la voz materna (literaria, política y generacional), y los intersticios de la obra dentro de la literatura y la sociedad canadiense estructuran el relato. El rico tejido de estas particularidades significa una nueva trayectoria para la literatura (latino) canadiense.

Carmen Aguirre's Identities: Testimonial of a (Latino)Canadian Revolutionary

The book *Something Fierce: Memories of a Revolutionary Daughter* (2011) by Carmen Aguirre analyses the question of the narrator/author faced with exile resulting from Pinochet's coup d'état and the clandestine existence imposed by her revolutionary mother, author Carmen Rodríguez. The account is structured by a discussion of identity (Chilean, Canadian, clandestine and tied to social class), a dialogue with the (literary, political and generational) maternal voice, and the interstices of the work in Canadian literature and society. The rich interweaving of these characteristics in Aguirre's memoirs suggests a new path for (Latino)Canadian literature.

La traiettoria identitaria di Carmen Aguirre: testimonianza di una (latino)canadese rivoluzionaria

La testimonianza *Something Fierce: Memories of a Revolutionary Daughter*, della cileno-canadese Carmen Aguirre, analizza la problematica dell'identità della 'narratrice' di fronte all'esilio successivo al colpo di stato di Pinochet e nei confronti della clandestinità imposta dalla madre rivoluzionaria (1979-1984), l'autrice Carmen Rodríguez. Il racconto è strutturato sulla questione identitaria (Cile, Canadá, clandestinità, classe sociale), sul dialogo (letterario, politico e generazionale) con la voce materna, sugli interstizi dell'opera all'interno della letteratura e della società canadese. Il ricco tessuto di tali particolarità segna una nuova traiettoria per la letteratura (latino)canadese.

* University of New Brunswick - UNB, Fredericton, Canada.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

El cuestionamiento identitario

En *Something Fierce* de Carmen Aguirre¹, la problemática identitaria se construye a partir de ejes fundamentales: los dos países de la autora, Chile y Canadá, y dos factores agravantes – la clandestinidad y la clase social. El diálogo con la madre, además de ser generacional, se construye en el contexto político y literario volviendo inesperado el asentamiento de la obra en el campo literario canadiense. El tejido de estas tres particularidades significa, por lo tanto, un nuevo tipo de narración en la literatura (latino) canadiense.

La trama describe la clandestinidad como un flujo de personajes y situaciones frente a los cuales la narradora erige su identidad contando una experiencia compartida con su familia. Relato considerado como «la lucha por recuperar lo perdido²» (Torres-Recinos 112) o como «a way of putting the pieces of her broken life together» (Osorio 2), le permite a la niña-autora recuperar, en gran parte de su libro, la despreocupación y la alegría de la niñez que vivió en Chile por siete años. Lo que revela la novela no es una vida descompuesta y rota sino una construcción identitaria compleja central a la reflexión en el testimonio: la joven se hace adulta durante los años descritos, a través de los altibajos producidos por el trabajo revolucionario de su familia.

Así se trata de un cuento íntimo de su vivencia y la historia de su madre³ – es decir una versión alternativa de la biografía de Rodríguez que la propia autora no ha publicado – como se puede ver en los agradecimientos, donde Aguirre

¹ Aguirre vive en Canadá desde la edad de 5 años cuando su familia salió de Chile para refugiarse en Canadá después del golpe de estado en 1973 – de 1973 a 1978, 8302 chilenos llegaron como refugiados a Canadá (Da 2). Dramaturga, ha escrito dieciocho obras teatrales en inglés, cuatro de las cuales han sido publicadas. También es actriz de teatro, películas y teleseries de éxito. En Vancouver ha facilitado talleres de Teatro del Oprimido de Augusto Boal, teatro creado para promover justicia social, en la que se trabaja con poblaciones marginalizadas. Luego de seis años de exilio, la madre, Carmen Rodríguez, se unió a la lucha clandestina en contra de Pinochet (1974-1984) y se llevó a sus hijas. La hija heredó el compromiso revolucionario y el deseo de relatar su experiencia; Rodríguez es autora de varios libros de poesía, cuentos y una novela. Aguirre no puede contar su propia historia sin involucrar la vivencia de su madre, quien tiene su propia novela *Retribution* (2011), más que desde el punto de vista de una adolescente, escrita en inglés, y publicada el mismo año. El efecto de la experiencia clandestina es recíproca para ambas.

² Al decir ‘lo perdido’, Torres-Recinos se refiere puramente al referente ‘Chile’, con toda la rica carga simbólica (sociopolítica y cultural) que implica.

³ De hecho, la relación con la madre en la creación de la identidad de Aguirre se hace a través de la ficción y del testimonio (no tenemos más detalles personales sobre su relación). Por lo tanto no se introducen ni se comentan correspondencias entre el libro de la hija y el de la madre ya que daría para otro artículo.

afirma: «she has allowed me to write my version of the story, and in so doing to reveal her secrets» (276). La palabra *allow* (permitir) refuerza el lazo entre las dos mujeres y revela la relación de poder entre la madre y la hija. Sin la autorización, Aguirre no podría contar la historia y los actos transgresores, contradecir la palabra de la madre escritora y divulgar los secretos de dicha mujer, lo que marca la novela con una profunda carga testimonial.

Además de volver a su adolescencia turbulenta, el libro participa a dos tendencias literarias muy claras. Evidencia la necesidad de las mujeres de rememorar su implicación (como participante o hija de participante) en movimientos revolucionarios poniendo de relieve lo que significa el exilio y la clandestinidad para la diáspora⁴. De tal forma, la autora ubica su testimonio dentro del *corpus* de los escritores del exilio, en una comunidad más amplia de latinoamericanos desterrados. Tanto en *Something Fierce* como en *Retribution* de Rodríguez, una cita del poemario *Estado de Exilio* de Cristina Peri Rossi, abre el libro. Se subraya la filiación personal y literaria y con el campo más amplio ya que la uruguayesa escribe en este poemario «Partir/ es siempre partirse en dos», palabras que tienen eco en ambas obras (59). La ascendencia de la obra va más allá de la sangre puesto que se sitúa en el sector de la literatura latinocanadiense⁵. Si bien Rodríguez, recién llegada, sentía la necesidad de escribir en español y trabajaba en la lucha clandestina, con el tiempo, se integró a los círculos literarios canadienses⁶.

⁴ En su análisis del teatro de las chilenas, Julie Shayne confirma las tendencias temáticas de estas mujeres que se aprovechan del teatro: «to keep their communities alive while also reflecting and documenting the past that brought them to Canada» (216). El teatro, actividad colectiva, permite reunir la comunidad de refugiados y purgar emociones, algo confirmado por Aguirre en una entrevista sobre su práctica como actriz (entrevista).

⁵ En su introducción a *Latinocaná: A Critical Study of Ten Latin American Writers of Canada*, Hugh Hazelton traza la trayectoria de la faena literaria: aunque no le dedique a Aguirre una sección del estudio, porque sus publicaciones son contemporáneas al estudio, cita a Rodríguez quien participó a los inicios de la literatura latinocanadiense al fundar con un colectivo una revista literaria feminista bilingüe en Vancouver en 1989 (17).

⁶ Su temática no cambió, algo problemático según Hazelton: «his or her concerns as an exile [...] may be far removed from those of English- or French-speaking authors and their audiences» (22). Tanto en inglés como en castellano, estos textos están excluidos de los temas literarios canadienses, detallados por críticos como Margaret Atwood en su libro seminal *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972). Hasta la fecha, la literatura latinocanadiense solo conoce una recepción mínima en los estudios literarios canadienses, mientras otras literaturas del “mosaico cultural” (como se llama en Canadá) se deslizan con pasos acertados. Por ejemplo La literatura afrocanadiense se ha extendido con George Elliott Clarke autor de *Odysseys home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature* (2002). Existen varios estudios sobre la literatura haitianocanadiense como en *D'autres rêves. Les écrivains migrants au Québec*, dirigido por Anne de Vaucher Gravili (2000).

Temáticamente, las obras teatrales de Aguirre muestran «the strongest echo of [Ché] Guevara's call. In her work we encounter the most explicit engagement with, and, indeed, endorsement of Latin American revolutionary politics» (Verdecchia 181). A la vez, el compromiso político vincula a Aguirre con otras escritoras del exilio (Rodríguez, Belli, Peri Rossi, etc.) alejándola de los lectores que prefieren leer obras escritas en las lenguas oficiales canadienses, lo que explica el éxito de la literatura indocanadiense compuesta en inglés y de la haitianocanadiense en francés. En una conferencia en 1993, Rodríguez concede que le gustaría acceder a un público más amplio (“I live in a language that's not mine”: 213), mientras la hija, por su parte, esquivo el problema al escribir directamente en la lengua del exilio.

Sobre su propia experiencia identitaria como escritora, Rodríguez pasa con los años de un movimiento precario y transitorio entre dos espacios a una posición acogedora de y en la nueva cultura, como aclaran sus palabras: «my heart trespasses borders and stretches over a whole continent to find its home at the two extremes of the Americas» (14). Un hogar – *home* – que cristaliza también la construcción identitaria de su hija, como lo veremos más adelante.

En contraste a esta progresión de la identidad y de la escritura de Rodríguez, el libro de Aguirre, publicado en inglés por una casa editorial importante, ganó el premio Canada Reads de 2012, un concurso en la radio pública (CBC) que decide cada año, entre cinco libros, el que todos los canadienses deberían leer⁷. Éxito rotundo, *Something Fierce* es una paradoja en el campo literario latinocanadiense y «a notable exception to this invisibility [...] one of the few Latina/o Canadian literary texts to have received mainstream attention and readership in English Canada» (Etcheverry. *Cultures of...*: 48)⁸. Por lo tanto, el uso del inglés como lengua de publicación del libro de Aguirre marca el texto con una voluntad de compartir sus vivencias, más que de manera íntima, e indica el afán comercial por acceder a la comunidad literaria.

Sin embargo, el libro todavía muestra a la autora como ‘otra’⁹ quien se construye una identidad canadiense que sirve de contrapeso a sus experiencias latinoamericanas: las referencias culturales son una mezcla de alusiones latinoamericanas y norteamericanas. Por ejemplo, Aguirre se refiere al pelo de la patinadora artísti-

⁷ Un año después de la publicación de la novela y durante la época del éxito, la editorial Douglas & McIntyre entró en bancarrota (Barber) y dejó a Aguirre sin 60.000\$ en pagos. Sus amigos recaudaron fondos para ayudarla (Grams).

⁸ Se trata de ‘invisibilidad’ (no existencia) como lo que Hazelton (23) etiquetó de espacio liminal (existencia paralela).

⁹ Al contrario Etcheverry señala, sin definirlo, que «Canadianness is never articulated as being part of [Aguirre's] true identity. [...] the only other factor making the work ‘Canadian’ is its publication» (*Cultures of...*: 91).

ca Dorothy Hamill (36), al cantante Barry Manilow (31) y a los personajes del programa *El Crucero del Amor*, con su título en inglés (9). Estos referentes culturales la colocan netamente en el campo mediático cultural norteamericano y hacen que el libro sea más accesible al público anglófono a pesar de su temática.

Más allá de la geografía

Para hacer el libro más inteligible, un mapa incluido en las primeras páginas demuestra la distancia geográfica y el desconocimiento de la otra América que existe en Canadá. Esta inserción ubica la narración asentadamente en un lugar lejano y exótico. Es más, la palabra Canadá no aparece, aunque geográficamente exista en la parte superior del plano; Norteamérica termina con los Estados Unidos. No podemos ver allí el deseo de borrar la existencia canadiense, ‘invisiblearla’ como lo sugiere Etcheverry, pero el paratexto (sea de la autora o la editora, y según la definición de Gérard Genette) afiligrana la lectura del libro. El lector ideal sabe dónde se sitúa Vancouver, el punto de referencia canadiense, pero tendrá que buscar Neuquén, Argentina, o Corioco, Bolivia. Es más, en el relato, Aguirre retrata a Argentina como *other planet* haciendo metáfora a la transformación identitaria que la afecta (145).

En *Something Fierce*, la primera perspectiva identitaria de la autora es la necesidad de pertenecer a un lugar, identificarse de alguna manera, medido por la visión política revolucionaria de su madre, que al principio establece: «the North was the forbidden place of belonging» (2). Simbólicamente el Norte se asocia peyorativamente con la cultura capitalista, contra la que lucha Rodríguez y en oposición al proyecto utópico que se realizaba en Chile con Allende, truncado por Pinochet. Aguirre incorpora a su madre en otros escritos; por ejemplo, Flaca en *The Refugee Hotel*, cuyo «comportment is always guided by revolutionary standards» (Verdecchia 186). Esa actitud se extiende a todo lo norteamericano y capitalista, representativo del imperialismo cultural, que a pesar de sus maldades, le permite expresar sus ideas políticas, algo prohibido en los países latinoamericanos; en camino en Bolivia, Aguirre explica que no puede divulgar su compromiso político como lo hacía en Vancouver (101). En contraste con el Norte prohibido, en el relato, cuando su madre se salva gracias a unos Mapuches chilenos, les explica «I’m from here» (184). Pertenece al país, forma parte de ‘su gente’.

El rechazo de la cultura norteamericana lleva al rechazo del idioma para Rodríguez quien titula un ensayo «I live in a language that’s not mine» (“I live in a language...”: 208). Este ‘no es mío’ es importante, como sí, para la madre y la hija, el pronombre posesivo estableciera con certeza el dominio y el senti-

do de pertenencia. Un personaje de Rodríguez afirma: «you don't stop being who you are because you become a Canadian citizen» (*and a body...*: 26). Para algunos, la pertenencia y la ciudadanía pueden resultar excluyentes de una u otra identidad: las dos autoras se acomodan con la aceptación, o no, de la identidad.

El segundo cuestionamiento identitario es la realidad subjetiva de la experiencia de la adolescente. Un ejemplo significativo, según los recuerdos de Aguirre, es que la ciudad es racialmente homogénea; Vancouver «where you could buy tropical fruit in the dead of winter, was full of White people who kept their bodies and faces perfectly still when they talked» (2). Rodríguez confirma que la raza entra en su reflexión en el exilio: «since living in Canada, I have been forced to see something that I had never seen before: color. In Chile I didn't have color. I was like everybody else. Colour was not an issue» (“I live in a language...”: 217). Ambas hacen comentarios ingenuos – el Canadá es un país blanco y Chile sin colores de piel –, que revelan más sobre las autoras que sobre los países. El privilegio de la población norteña está implícito en la mención de la fruta tropical siempre disponible, un símbolo importante de la relación capitalista que sostiene el sistema jerárquico entre los continentes y contra el que luchan. La ironía de la presencia de la fruta tropical y no de la gente de estos países exóticos sorprende a Aguirre al llegar al Norte y la deja en una posición distinta cuando vuelve al sur. La identidad racial es una de las primeras comparaciones que hace Aguirre y un contraste con la percepción de raza en los países latinoamericanos donde las ciudades del sur están «full of people who looked like me, dressed in their best and smelling of cologne» (11) y la escuela boliviana con «hundreds of brown faces» (40). El color rige la experiencia: es negra en Canadá, blanca en Bolivia y Perú. En Argentina narra: «I was ashamed to be mestiza in a country full of Whites» (148).

El contraste cultural es lo que le permite a la narradora descubrir los efectos de su propio exilio, sin mediación parental, como sigue «I realized what I'd been missing in Vancouver all those years: human heat. Heat coming from strangers, shoulder rubbing [...] full eye contact» (12). La inmovilidad norteña blanca es el contrapunto de la bulliciosa vida sureña: «rainy night in Vancouver [...] so sedate and sterile after La Paz» (99). La realidad climatológica y geográfica de Chile no afecta la representación que se hace: en contraste con el frío distanciador de Canadá, un frío tanto literal como simbólico, el calor de Latinoamérica es mucho más acogedor porque corresponde al recuerdo vivido y tierno de la infancia. De hecho, Aguirre describe las casas familiares chilenas como *capsule* (235) y *cocoon* (239) cuando las visita, espacios que esconden y protegen.

El hogar tan elusivo

La identidad de Aguirre, como ya evidenciado, está marcada por la relación con Canadá y, para ella, como para los exiliados, Chile es un país lejano pero identificable por sus acentos, sus olores y los recuerdos. Por eso sus abuelos «brought Chile with them in their pockets, their suitcases, their eyes and voices. I'd smelled a country on them [...] a country that still clung to my own skin and hair» (63). La identidad se lleva dentro y se aferra al exiliado, así los olores (las colonias, la fruta, la piel) y los ruidos (las voces, los acentos, el silencio) son marcadores culturales de la construcción de la memoria y la subsecuente edificación de su identidad. Como los abuelos 'traen Chile' a Canadá, Aguirre trae Canadá a Latinoamérica, en su identidad de exiliada. Las experiencias descritas por ella se ven también en los textos de Rodríguez quien escribe: «after fourteen years of exile, I had gone back to Chile looking for those scents, voices, flavours, textures, and images that my memory insisted on calling 'home'» (*and a body...*: 101). El hogar (*home*) sobrevive en la memoria a través de los sentidos.

La descripción de la profundidad identitaria es elocuente. En Argentina, Aguirre retrata una amiga que es «Chilean to the core [...] it was precisely her Chileanness that drew me to her. There was nothing to explain; all the social signals were understood» (149). De esta forma la escritora reconoce lo chileno y lo vincula con lo social. Por otra parte, en un cuento de Rodríguez, un personaje dice a la exiliada que es «Canadian to the marrow» (*and a body...*: 121), poniendo de relieve la ambigüedad de la identidad canadiense: los 'verdaderos' canadienses, hasta la médula, son los indígenas. La asociación física de la ciudadanía con los huesos marca lo canadiense con una herencia normal construida por los antepasados que poblaron el país mientras, para los exiliados, recuerda las fosas comunes de la dictadura de Pinochet.

Cuando pondera su pasado en la ciudad de Vancouver «a place so distant it was already as if it had never existed» (9) y «the other side of the world» (186), Aguirre, geográficamente lejos, lo pone en oposición a lo que vive en Latinoamérica. Por ejemplo al cursar una clase de arte en Bolivia rumia sobre la educación hippie canadiense: «lost for a moment in memories of macramé hour at my old school» (42). Eso le permite manifestar cierta nostalgia por la experiencia latinoamericana que revela aspectos comunes de la vida exiliada en Canadá, al principio mediado por la lente de la infancia. El recuerdo del exilio lleva la etiqueta del desarraigo y de la inocencia infantil: muñecas y ropa de segunda mano, y empleos básicos y precarios. Sin embargo, el acto de contar la experiencia la relega a la niñez, un momento de libertad completa ya descartada, pero que resuena en la identidad de la adulta que, varias veces, menciona

la transición hacia la adolescencia con su miles de problemas. Cada lugar dejado atrás en sus andanzas contribuye a su personal evolución, por eso todos son importantes: «I loved the country now as if it were mine» (127).

Como los revolucionarios, juzga la sociedad norteamericana dogmáticamente, critica a compañeros y decide «never to drink or do drugs» (99). Existe tanto rigor en su vida y no se le permite rendirse a la pérdida de control que producen estas sustancias porque las consecuencias de un lapsus pueden provocar la muerte. En Latinoamérica, Carmen y su hermana viven una vida falsa que no afecta su ‘verdadera’ personalidad: las creencias revolucionarias. Su existencia clandestina es pequeñoburguesa, a pesar de su ideología. En Bolivia algunos chilenos les imparten una enseñanza ortodoxa: viven como burguesas para esconder su identidad pero «we had to be careful to not let our bourgeois tendencies get the better of us» (113). Es más, deben autocondenar su comportamiento a pesar de la obligación de vivir así (117); el asunto de la clase social permea el relato del principio al final.

Además de ser chilena y canadiense, existe otra identidad porque ‘la gente’ de Aguirre es la comunidad de chilenos refugiados en Canadá que no son chilenos ni tampoco canadienses, pero es ‘su gente’. Como la experiencia del destierro de Edward Said, «the unhealable rift» (173), Rodríguez confirma la existencia de ese cronotopo llamado exilio¹⁰ y explica las repercusiones del desarraigo para su obra: «like most of my stories, it was written in a place called Exile» un lugar que no existe en ningún mapa (“I live in...”: 209). Si bien sus cuentos se conceptúan en ese cronotopo, otras obras de Aguirre también presentan iguales espacios, como bien observa Etcheverry: «the physical space where the characters meet in the new ‘Canadian’ home’» y «a metaphor for the sense of liminality and in-betweenness-feelings often associated with the forced migration from one’s nation of origin» (“Carmen Aguirre...”: 276). El lugar físico y geográfico se repliega en un espacio liminar temporal y, luego, se vuelve un lugar de ‘no existencia’.

La construcción de la identidad del exiliado se complica con las percepciones de los que se han quedado en Chile y de los norteamericanos. La autora describe una visita a Chile donde tiene que esconder sus ideas revolucionarias y dice que, frente a su abuela, es «a girl she no longer knew» (137). No solo cambia su identidad sino también la idea externa de cómo debería ser y esta opinión se extiende a las apreciaciones de otros refugiados. Cuando un tío chileno le pide dinero a su padre, comenta: «my uncle was among the many Chileans who refused to believe

¹⁰ A este propósito, Rodríguez escribe: «for the first few years I didn’t really live here. I lived here, but I was Chilean. I lived in function of my quick return [...]. I lived making sure that my daughters would not forget» (“I live in...”: 210).

that most First World exiles were janitors and lived hand to mouth» (112). Basada en falsas polaridades, Aguirre recuerda también las percepciones corrientes sobre la cultura norteamericana y cumple este rol en la clandestinidad, enfrentándose a los estereotipos: «being a flawless English speaker with a Canadian father made me royalty among the rich and middle-class» (159).

Las apariencias instauran las categorías de belleza – «standards had been set by the invaders. Indian was ugly, Spanish was beautiful, gringo was downright gorgeous» (106) – que imponen su jerarquía en los países que visita. En Argentina, «being Chilean meant you lived with the poorest of the poor, the brownest of the brown, the dirtiest of the dirty [...] even lower on the social class scale than Gypsies, another hated group» (159), mientras en Bolivia, la alteridad se refuerza aún más con el sexismo prevalente evidente en la siguiente afirmación: «Chilean whores! Go back to where you came from» (94). Si por un lado eso la lleva a un cuestionamiento de la identidad de los diferentes migrantes, por el otro las apreciaciones le causan una reevaluación de su identidad chilena idealizada. Es más, a causa de la actividad política clandestina, la identidad de la escritora cambia según la visión de los demás y fluctúa según la necesidad de esconderse, de enmascararse en un mundo artificial, porque tiene que conformarse con los avatares que vive. Como Aguirre y su hermana hablan inglés, fácilmente pueden pasar por hijas de canadiense, lo que se les pide con frecuencia y fortalece el lazo con Canadá. Sin embargo, según la circunstancia, necesitan adaptarse a otra óptica¹¹ política en cuanto Canadá puede ser tanto el país del exilio de los chilenos pro Allende como el de ‘refugiados’ económicos buscando oportunidades en la minería. Por eso, ‘la gente’ de Aguirre se restringe a los exiliados chilenos, aunque se extiende a otras víctimas de dictaduras.

La constante necesidad de cambiar lleva a Aguirre a una reflexión existencial fornida que corre en paralelo con el relato, sobre todo cuando siente los efectos psicológicos de la clandestinidad. Por eso llega a referirse a su no existencia: «I didn’t exist. I didn’t exist in the Cousin’s life, or in this country [Chile], or in the exile countries of Bolivia or Canada. I didn’t exist anywhere anymore. It was that simple» (73). Como Canadá en el mapa, ha dejado de existir como ser entero y único, con ideas coherentes, así los numerosos obstáculos, reforzados por las hormonas adolescentes, no le permiten concebirse: «I craved the chance [...] to leave the underground, to be myself» (166). El miedo a revelarse o manifestar algo de su entorno clandestino es más fuerte que su

¹¹ Elocuentes son las siguientes palabras: «If the border guards ask you, you must tell them that you left Chile for Canada in September 1970, because your parents are in the mining sector and had some work to do with [la compañía] Noranda [...] a right-wing pro-Pinochet family» (59).

deseo de cumplir con las exigencias de su mamá y pronto descubre que no aguanta la situación: «I was tired of lying, of keeping up the facade, of living in fear» (148). La clandestinidad le requiere que sea adulta responsable precozmente, pero lo que anhela es «to feel happy-go-lucky for a change, far away from the compartmentalized life of the underground» (123). El lenguaje de la clandestinidad le impone algo casi imposible para una joven de su edad: identidades múltiples. En una esfera abstracta, es posible, pero en la realidad, no lo es; lo confirma en las últimas escenas cuando ella pide credenciales argentinas y descubren sus identidades (256). La autora se había desenmascarado; es el único momento en el libro cuando una persona, fuera del ámbito de los clandestinos, discute su identidad y, simbólicamente, constituye otro instante de cuestionamiento para la autora.

El momento más revelador llega después de su tentativa de suicidio cuando intenta eliminar su problemática de identidad. Le dice a su padrastro: «‘I want to go home’. Words I’d never spoken [...] they’d finally come out, I couldn’t stop saying them [...] He didn’t ask what I meant by home: Vancouver, Bolivia or Chile? I wouldn’t have known the answer if he had» (166). La joven no sabe dónde hallar su hogar después de años de tránsito y de mentiras cuando cada lugar ha sido significativo. El deseo de ser íntegra, de poder revelar su verdadera personalidad, ser ella misma, sin el estrés de los factores externos, es patente. La cita muestra la construcción del ‘hogar’ y de la identidad en todo su laberinto; *home* sigue siendo algo abstracto, como Aguirre una mujer compleja.

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BIBLIOGRAFIA ISPANO-CANADESE 1973-2015

Rocío Luque*

Abstract

Con la presente bibliografia si vuole offrire una panoramica su ciò che stato pubblicato dagli scrittori ispano-americani emigrati in Canada. Ci si focalizzerà pertanto sulla loro bibliografia primaria e secondaria, consultando i cataloghi bibliografici, in modo da capire quali siano gli autori, le aree e i periodi presi maggiormente in considerazione.

Hispano-Canadian Bibliography 1973-2015

The purpose of this bibliography is to provide an overview of the Spanish-American writers published in Canada. Therefore, we will focus on primary and secondary bibliography of the authors, querying databases of bibliographic catalogs, in order to understand the authors, areas and periods taken into greater consideration.

Con la presente bibliografia si vuole offrire una panoramica su ciò che stato pubblicato dagli autori ispano-americani emigrati in Canada nel periodo che va dal 1973 al 2015, focalizzando l'attenzione sull'emigrazione cilena e argentina, scaturita in seguito, rispettivamente, alla dittatura militare di Augusto Pinochet – 1973-1990 – e al Processo di Riorganizzazione Nazionale di Jorge Rafael Videla – 1976-1983. In secondo luogo, figurano gli autori originari della Colombia e del Messico, espatriati per le forme specifiche di violenza che minano questi paesi, e, a seguire, scrittori provenienti dalla Bolivia, El Salvador, il Perù e l'Uruguay.

La ricerca si basa sul catalogo globale *Worldcat*, il catalogo nazionale canadese *Amicus* – poiché include il collettivo delle biblioteche del paese, compresa la biblioteca nazionale – e la piattaforma di varie università del Québec, *Érudit*, in quanto si occupa di scienze sociali e promuove i propri lavori tramite la diffusione di riviste in formato elettronico.

La bibliografia primaria presenta i testi apparsi in volume, in miscellanea e in periodico, e anche alcune risorse *on line* disponibili. La bibliografia seconda-

* Università di Udine.

ria include studi critici a carattere monografico, capitoli di libro, articoli in formato cartaceo e *on line*, tesi di laurea o master, e pagine web dedicate a suddetti autori. Il materiale primario e secondario è presentato in ordine alfabetico e, in presenza di più opere della medesima firma, si è scelto l'ordine cronologico crescente. Per indicare dati non riportati dalle banche digitali, si è ricorso alle seguenti sigle: p.n.r (pagina non riportata), s.d (*sine data*), s.n (*sine nomine*).

Si segnala, inoltre, che sono state incluse le opere degli autori ispano-canadesi pubblicate fuori dal Canada ma presenti nei circuiti bibliotecari del territorio e le opere in lingua originale, così come, dove esistenti, le traduzioni in inglese e in francese. Non sono stati considerati, invece, per ragioni di spazio, sebbene ricoprono un ruolo di enorme importanza, i testi in cui suddetti scrittori fungono da traduttori. Ciò verrà trattato in un secondo momento.

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ITALIA



THE FRIULIAN-CANADIAN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Deborah Saidero*

Abstract

This essay reconstructs the Friulian immigrant experience to Canada through the works of some Friulian and Julian-Dalmatian writers. It highlights how while voicing the deep sense of loss that Friulians feel for their homeland, these texts also prompt a reconciliation with displacement and a reconfiguration of the idea of home which can include multiple belongings. It also analyses how these texts employ different languages, including Friulian, as a strategy of historical reappropriation of the immigrant experience and of renegotiation of identity.

L'esperienza migrante dei friulano-canadesi

L'articolo ricostruisce la storia dell'emigrazione friulana in Canada attraverso un'analisi di alcune opere di scrittori friulani e giuliano-dalmati. Oltre a dare voce al persistente dolore che affligge i friulani per la perdita della propria patria, questi testi evidenziano anche la necessità di superare il trauma della dislocazione e ridefinire i concetti di patria e appartenenza. Si analizza inoltre come l'uso di diverse lingue, tra cui il friulano, costituisca una strategia di riappropriazione storica dell'esperienza migrante e di rinegoziazione identitaria.

For my grandparents

Friulian emigrants to Canada: a personal memory

When my grandfather arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1951 he did not have a place to stay, nor food to eat. The first nights, he and his fellow *paesani*¹ from Friuli found shelter in an abbey, where they slept on the floor. During the day they would go down to the station where they would buy a small bag of peanuts for 5 cents, the little food they could afford. There they waited to be hired for

* Università di Udine.

¹ The term "*paesani*" refers to people from the same town.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

some job or another, disdaining none offered to them. Thus, when asked if he could mine, my grandfather said: «Yes, of course», even if he had never been near a mine before. He was soon embarked on a small plane that took him up north to the wild, perilous forests of Labrador. For some happy coincidence, he did not end up in the iron ore mines, though, nor as a woodcutter or timberman as his fellow countrymen, but was sent to work in the kitchens as a camp cook. The pay was good and the food abundant: it must have seemed like a real paradise for a starving wretch like himself.

It did not take him very long to save enough money to put a down-payment on a piece of land in the backwoods of New Brunswick and to bring his wife and son in from Venzone. After undergoing mandatory medical examinations in Rome, the young boy and his mother crossed the ungentle Atlantic for eight days in January of 1952 and made their epic journey to the Canadian wilderness. Here they were surrounded by mountains of snow, heaped higher than houses along the roads, and by endless hectares of dark forests and menacing wild animals. The little trailer house my grandfather had wheeled in stood on a small clearing in the woods, just big enough to grow a little garden patch in the summer and keep some fowl and pigs. The rest was utter wilderness. No houses or cities for miles and miles, the closest town being Campbellton, 50 miles away. No one there but a young woman and her seven-year-old son, patiently waiting for a plane to occasionally bring a beloved man home from Labrador.

About a year later my grandfather's older brother also made the trip across the Atlantic and joined them in New Brunswick with his wife and son. They all remained there, in the cold North American wilderness, for another short while and then decided to head west, lured by the prospect of better jobs in Canada's growing urban centers. My uncle settled in Montreal, while my grandfather moved to Toronto, two cities which were to host large Friulian communities². There they were slowly able to rebuild a sense of belonging with their fellow *paesani* even if the family was separated once again.

² Today the Friulian diaspora counts a fairly large community in Canada, concentrated above all in the metropolitan areas of Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City and Vancouver. Although it is impossible to determine their precise number, «there is no doubt» – as Guido Barbina states – «that Friulians constitute one of the most consistent immigrant groups to enter Canada in the 1950s». At the end of the XX century it was, in fact, estimated that approximately «80,000 Canadians were either born in Friuli or are at least partially of Friulian descent», of whom about 40,000 to 50,000 lived in the Toronto area («The Friulian Community...»: 48-49).

Recording the Friulian immigrant experience

My grandparents' story, like that of many Friulian immigrants, is one that has long been wrapped in silence. It is one made of fragments of memory, entrusted only to the ears of those who care to listen. Being mostly of humble, rural origins, many Friulians have passed down their stories orally, following a deep-rooted Friulian storytelling tradition, but very few have recorded their experience in writing. First-generation immigrants like my grandparents often lacked a medium to write in. Friulian, their mother tongue and the only language they used confidently, is mostly an oral language, which, still today, few speakers know how to read and write. Italian, the language they may have learned at school, is one they were not fully competent and at ease in, while English or French, the languages of acculturation, were for them tools of linguistic survival in everyday contexts of communication, which they used imprecisely and with some degree of hybridization with Friulian³. Moreover, most Friulian immigrants were peasants and labourers and, thus, not very inclined to writing or other forms of artistic expression. In her essay on "Writers from Friuli Venezia Giulia in Italian Literature of Migration to North America", Monica Stellan acknowledges, for instance, that although Friulians had a very strong impact on Canadian society which they contributed to build, «[T]hey could not, however, voice their feelings about their own immigrant experience in literary form because they lacked knowledge of either English or French, they suffered from fatigue due to their hard work, and they had little education» (124).

Joseph Pivato, who has had a prominent pioneering role in promoting critical studies on Italian and Friulian writing, similarly remarks that «[I]n terms of writers the Friulian community has a very small group compared to people from other regions of Italy» ("The Invisible Poet...": 24). Their writing has thus often remained invisible and neglected, even within the context of Italian-Canadian writing, itself a minority literature within the greater context of mainstream

³ While it is widely recognized that linguistic intermingling between English and Italian has spawned a hybrid form known as "italiese", little mention has been made to the development of what we could call the "friulanese" variety, that is, the hybrid code resulting from the mixing of Friulian and English among Canada's early Friulian community. Although similar in many aspects to "italiese", it bears some specific lexical traits that are indicative of its diverse origin: English words that in "italiese" have a typical -o ending, like "il sinko" (the sink), remain unaltered ("il sink") in "friulanese", since Friulian does not generally have -o endings. Other words which in "italiese" have typical -a endings (i.e. "la bega", the bag) often present -e endings among Friulian-Canadian speakers ("la/le beghe"). Verbs also follow the Friulian convention of ending in -â, or -î, rather than -are or -ire, i.e. "scuizâ" (to squeeze).

Canadian literature (Ferraro). The only anthology of Friulian writers is, for instance, *A Furlan Harvest*, edited by Dôre Michelut in 1993, which collects the unpublished writings of six Friulian women who participated in a creative writing workshop held at the Famee Furlane in Toronto. Most of the contributors had not published anything before the anthology; nor have they published anything since. They are thus not established writers whose literary masterpieces are being collected because worthy of a national literary canon. And yet, the anthology set an example of some sort, inspiring others to collect miscellaneous works and resist homogenizing politics in Canada.

Despite the scarcity of their productions or the literary value that can be ascribed to them in terms of traditional categories of high vs. low literature, those Friulians who have undertaken the endeavour of becoming scribes for their people are, nonetheless, worthy of attention. The body (albeit slim) of writing they have produced is, in fact, significant mostly because it constitutes an important historical record of the Friulian immigrant experience. It offers, in fact, a genuine account of what Friulian immigrants to Canada experienced in their lives and hearts: the hardships of departure and settlement, the nostalgic longing for their beloved Friuli, the love for their unique culture and language, the pain of assimilation, and even the disillusionment for the changes that have gradually occurred in Friuli since they had to leave. At the same time, while preserving the memory of a significant experience that has distinguished the Friulian people in past centuries and is now historically over, it provides a dialogic bridge between the migratory experience of Friulians and that of other immigrants. It echoes – as this brief overview will show – universal traits of the immigrant experience, which may help us foster a deeper understanding of the human tragedies faced by many migrants still today.

The literary works of first-generation Friulian immigrants

The literary works produced by writers of Friulian origin are variegated in terms of themes and sensibilities, and they are written in various languages, namely English, French, Italian and Friulian, the minority language spoken only in parts of the Friuli Region. The body of writing referred to as Friulian also comprises writers of Julian-Dalmatian origin, who use Istrian, Dalmatian and Venetian dialects and whose homeland, once part of Italy, is now part of Slovenia or Croatia. Both communities share what Genni Gunn calls a “magnetic impulse” (*Faceless*: 12) toward their homeland, which they approach in various ways: at times, with the nostalgic yearning of the immigrant who is desirous to return home, or with the delusional stance of the illegitimate exiled

son; in other cases, with the dialectically critical gaze of the expatriate who writes back to the motherland, or the ethno-cryptic approach of the second-generation immigrant who has learned to repress the other homeland in favour of total assimilation.

Among the first-generation immigrants, there are emigrant-writers, like Ermanno Bulfon and Rina Del Nin Cralli from Codroipo, and Doris Vorano from Nogaredo di Corno, who have turned themselves into writers and recorded their personal immigrant experiences in Friulian, their mother tongue. Others, like Silvano Zamaro from Cormons and Aldo Gioseffini from Carvacco wrote, instead, in Italian, the vehicle which, as Stellin writes, they considered «best suited to express [their] feelings and to give prestige to [their] literary endeavour» (“Writers from Friuli...”: 130). All have produced a single publication, which is autobiographical and dominated by a persistent elegiac tone, a trait typically found in all early Italian-Canadian writing as well. Zamaro’s *Autostrada per la luna* (1987) and Gioseffini’s autobiography *L’amarezza della sconfitta*, published in 1989, exemplify, for instance, the typical parable of the Friulian emigrant who faces the hardships of immigration with self-determination, but remains unable to fully accept the new country as his own because he seeks to return to his native Friuli. Zamaro lived in Edmonton, Alberta for only a decade and then returned home. Gioseffini, instead, who started his emigrant experience as a child in the 1930s, first in Europe and then in North America, had to admit his defeat and accept unwillingly that he lacked the means to spend his old age in his motherland, a country which does not recognize his property and social security rights.

The opposite prospect of recreating a Friuli in Canada is expressed by Ermanno Bulfon, who emigrated to Toronto in 1967 at age 25 after receiving his orders. He was an active member of the Friulian community in Vaughan where he was a well-loved parish priest until his death in 1985. In 1977 he published a collection of poems entitled *Un Friûl vivût in Canada* under the name Bepo Frangel. The poems, as Pivato has pointed out, are infused with a deep sense of loss: «there is the obvious loss of the immigrant who must leave his family, country and culture behind. But there is also the sense of loss due to the changes in the region of Friuli» (“The Poetic Voice...”: 68). His nostalgia for a disappearing rural Friuli, for the beloved land, friends and family members he had to leave behind, but also for the simple country life he enjoyed as a child and a young man before having to face the hardships of immigration and adulthood, is conveyed through the expressive potentialities of Friulian, his oral mother tongue, which is also the language of the heart. Being a priest, Bulfon mastered Italian and English as well, so his linguistic choice is not out of necessity, but represents a conscious desire to give voice to his personal feelings, and

also, I believe, to those of his fellow Friulian parishioners. The longing and sadness he conveys are those all Friulian immigrants in Canada shared: they were eternally homesick for “a mê tiare”, “La Mê Cjase”, “Il Mê Pais”, “Mê Mari”, and my beloved “Friûl”. They eternally longed to go back one day soon to that land, as had been possible for generations of other Friulian emigrants before them. In his survey of Friulian emigration patterns, Franc Sturino underlines, in fact, that emigration was «woven into the daily lives of Friulians» at least since the 1500s, so much so that the region developed a «culture of emigration» (“Patterns of Friulian Emigration...”: 34). Yet, since this emigration (directed mainly north of the Alps or within Italy) was usually temporary, it allowed many to maintain their small farms and return to their native villages (35). This cultural engendering about emigration led many Friulians in Canada to believe that their stay in North America could be a temporary one and kindled the illusory dream of returning, which kept many trapped in false hopes and idealized visions of their native homeland.

In the poem “L’emigrant”, Bulfon, however, summons Friulians to recognize that, despite the profound sadness they feel for leaving Friuli, it is the new land that offers them and their children the possibility of a better future, which is theirs to build: «‘O ài lassade/ la mê tiare./ Un siúm./ Mi sumii ancjemò/ e sperì/ al doman plui biel/ dai nestris fruz» (*Un Friûl...*: 38). A similar view is also echoed by Doris Vorano in her poem equally entitled “L’emigrant”, where she shatters the illusion that dreams can come true and warns that the Friuli left behind is not what the returning emigrant will find: «L’emigrant.../ Al volares cjatà/ quant che al torne tal so Friûl,/ ce che a la lassât/ tanc agns prime [...] e investit/ a si cjate devant la realtât» (*Puisis...*: 29). What he finds is, instead, a different, changed reality which has become so unfamiliar that he feels as alienated and lonely there as he does in the new land: «a si sint di gnûf bessôl/ come vie pal mont» (30). He is condemned to leave again and to eternally dream about the world he left behind hoping to return to it someday. His is a fantasy-world which continues to exist only in his dreams. Reality, the poet suggests, needs to be embraced without idealizations in order to find some peace of mind and heart.

Like Bulfon, Vorano chooses to write her collection of poems *Puisis e riflessions* (1983) in Friulian, the language that fills her heart: «La to lenghe/ che quant tu la sintis/ a’ ti pas il cûr» (21). Through her linguistic choice, Vorano, who emigrated to Montreal in 1959, at age 15 and is sufficiently fluent in French, is thus making an important identity statement. She uses the language of home and family to counter the loss of language, culture and history occasioned by the immigrant experience, and to reinforce the sense of connection with her people by relocating this minority language beyond national borders.

Her poems, although personal, are directed to her fellow Friulian countrymen, who like herself, are part of a long-lasting diaspora and must learn to heal from that perpetual sense of nostalgia and loss that scars their hearts.

Rina Del Nin Cralli has also been writing poems in her native Friulian tongue since the late 1970s, although most of them have remained unpublished until recently. A first collection of some of her poems entitled *From Friuli*, appeared only in 2015, with their English translations. Before that, a few poems had been published in the Italian newspapers *Il Ponte* and *La cisilute*, in publications from the FAMEE Furlane in Toronto, and in *A Furlan Harvest*⁴. For Cralli, who arrived in Toronto in 1958 at age 29 with her husband, Friulian is the only linguistic choice available, as both Italian and English are languages she does not master fully. Yet, like for Vorano and Bulfon, it is a deliberately self-conscious choice aimed at establishing a link with her people, as well as an expressive medium through which to voice and overcome her nostalgia. As Pivato writes: «It seems as if this language lends itself to expressing feelings of nostalgia. With over 100 years of emigration from Friuli the oral language has been shaped with words of longing and loss» (“The Poetic Voice...”: 67). The unbearable feeling of longing caused by displacement is evoked in poems like “Nostalgie e tulipans”, “Il Distac”, and “Emigrant”, where the poet elegiacally laments the painful separation from her beloved homeland where she – like many other Friulians – has left her heart. In others, like “Une Vore di Strade”, “Friûl”, “Il Me Paîs” and “Statisticchis”, she is, instead, aware that her homeland has changed considerably and that «perhaps what I cherish/ in my heart is just/ an illusion» (*From Friuli*: 113). There is also a sense of pride for the achievements that Friulians have made in Canada and the awareness that «Our/ greatest satisfaction/ is to feel part/ of this nation» (31). She is, thus, welcoming, a reconfiguration of the ideas of home and belonging, which rests on an acceptance of multiple homelands at once.

What seems particularly interesting about this bilingual publication is its attempt to preserve a minority language like Friulian in a space that transcends geographical confines and to counter the disappearance of the Friulian immigrant experience by relocating it into another idiom. The bilingual character of *From Friuli* counters, in fact, the isolation of Friulian, a language that is slowly disappearing, and shows the beauty, texture and expressive power of this oral, mostly rural, language by placing it in dialogue with English. Indeed, the English translations done by a number of other Friulian immigrants, including

⁴ Some of Cralli’s poems also appeared in a cassette recording in 1982. On Side A Rina sings five of her poems to the musical accompaniment of Gino Salvador and Valentino Taglione, while on Side B she reads 20 of her poems.

poets Dôre Michelut and Marisa De Franceschi who also write in their native tongue, re-contextualize the Friulian poems in a dialogic space of polyvocality, which – as Pivato writes – makes the Friulian language «capable of evolving its heteroglossia» through the dialogue with other languages (*From Friuli*: 147).

Second-generation writers from Friuli

Both Dôre Michelut from Sella di Rivignano and Marisa De Franceschi from Muris (San Daniele) are second-generation writers who emigrated to Canada as young children and experienced the loss of their mother tongues under the pressure of forced assimilation to the new country. In many Friulian-Canadian households, it was, in fact, not unusual for adults to use Friulian only among themselves, and address their children in Italian, considering it more prestigious than the oral idiom. As adults, however, both writers felt the need to retrieve their lost mother tongues as a necessary part of their quest for identity. Thus, although they write mainly in English, the language of acculturation and education which they learned in Canada, they also reclaim their other languages, Friulian and Italian, by creating a heteroglossic continuum among the three languages in their lyrical collections. In the poem “International Cuisine”, for example, De Franceschi celebrates her Friulian roots by placing the Friulian names of typical rural dishes like «*Polenta e frico*», «*Musèt e Bruàde*», «*Salam cul Asêt*» and «*Radricc cul Ardièl*», alongside Italian and English dishes, in a culinary feast which culminates in her acceptance of all traditions: «*A mi plasé dut/... I love it all*» (150-152). In *Loyalty to the Hunt* (1986) and *Ourobouros: The Book That Ate Me* (1990), Michelut resorts, instead, to self-translation to celebrate her plurilinguistic and pluricultural identity⁵. As she explains in her autobiographical essay “Coming to Terms with the Mother Tongue”, the retrieval of her Friulian mother tongue through self-translation allows her to engage in a polyphonic dialogue with herself, which enables her to achieve a unification of identities within her fractured and hybrid self, where «each language still speaks me differently, because it must, but each speaks me more fully» (170). Re-appropriating her Friulian mother tongue was, thus, seen as a necessary part of the process of renegotiation of selfhood which allowed her to overcome the sense of displacement she felt in relation to both cultures, the Canadian and the Friulian/Italian, and to embrace a transcultural identity.

⁵ For a discussion of Michelut’s use of self-translation cf. Saidero. “Plurilinguism and Self-translation...”.

Many Friulians who were born or grew up in Canada faced a similar loss of their linguistic and cultural identity and experienced the trauma of living between cultures and of feeling compelled to neglect one in favour of the other. Some writers have thus chosen to shun from using Friulian or language-mixing devices, and to engage with their ethnic roots in a more cryptic manner. In Quebec, Bianca Zagolin from Ampezzo, Philippe Antonio Poloni from Porcia and François D'Apollonia from Codroipo all write in French, while in Vancouver Genni Gunn from Udine writes in English only. Their approach to their Friulian ethnicity is diametrically opposed to that of writers like Dôre Michelut, who even changed her name from Dorina Michelutti to signal her overt, dialectical engagement with her Friulian roots. Gunn, instead, conceals her real name, Gemma Donati, behind her English alias, just as she deliberately encrypts her engagement with her heritage culture in her poetic texts⁶. Never at the center of her creative world, her ethnic search for identity is always part of a deeper impulse to come to terms with all her selves and to situate herself in a global landscape. Her Friulian and Italian heritage is, thus, a somewhat marginal presence and is expressed through the powerful metonymic and metaphorical images she creates, like that of the faceless woman which, as I have argued elsewhere, is an apt metaphor for the migrant subject (cf. Saidero. "Le maschere dell'io"). In her poetry, personal memories about her family's immigration to Canada or about her childhood years spent in Friuli surface silently, like an underground river that flows under the surface of the text, erupting here and there on the page. In the poem "Fossil Highway", for instance, from the collection *Faceless*, the reference to her Italian origins, «I found my name half buried in Italian earth/ and still the roots cross an ocean», is placed within an artfully woven web of metaphorical associations between the human body and geographical-geological spaces, where rivers are «arteries nurturing the earth», «water sings birth songs», «the mountain speaks stone erupts its language/ from within», her hand is «a fossil highway» and her «birth tongue echoes/ in the beat of wings» (*Faceless*: 18-19). Likewise, in the poem "Incendiaries", the memory of her dead father and «the ocean of untold stories» (*Faceless*: 17) she never asked him about when she was young, reverberates in the burning forests of British Columbia, which are metonymically associated to the flames of burning memory. The landscape becomes here, as elsewhere in her production, a metaphor for memory, emotions and relationships and symbolizes her endeavor to inhabit and belong to multiple realities – to be, in other

⁶ Gunn's self-censorship of her ethnic identity could also be seen as a response to the dangerous work of her father during WWII as a military officer working for the British allies in Trieste. Recently, Gunn has spent time in Trieste, her birth town, searching the archives in order to reconstruct her father's past.

words, a transnational citizen whose identity is never stable and fixed, but continually shifting like the earth's «thin mantel crust» (*Faceless*: 12).

Julian-Dalmatian writers

Other writers who reimagine their sense of belonging in terms of cosmopolitan citizenship are those belonging to the Julian-Dalmatian diaspora. Gianni Angelo Grohovaz from Fiume and Caterina Edwards whose maternal family is from Lussino, emphasize, for instance, how for them the idea of home is necessarily decoupled from that of nation-state⁷. Since their Istrian homeland is no longer geographically part of Italy, it is merely a place of memory. In her creative autobiography *Finding Rosa: A Mother with Alzheimer's, A Daughter in Search of the Past*, Edwards pieces together the dramatic vicissitudes suffered by the Istrian-Italians during the World Wars, emphasizing how they were forced to shift their national affiliations and ethno-cultural and linguistic identification, but also to acknowledge their stateless-ness as they passed under various regimes – the Reign of Italy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Fascist Rule, the Nazi regime, the Allied Command and the Yugoslav Communist regime. Further displacements caused by their forced deportation to internment camps in Eastern Europe, to refugee camps in Caltagirone, Sicily, or by immigration overseas fostered a sense of up-rootedness and unbelonging to any place, which necessarily creates «a porous border between familiar and unfamiliar, neighbour and stranger, *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. Between at home and lost» (*Finding Rosa*...: 320).

In her historical account Edwards ironically comments on how the Italian-Istrians were considered «untrustworthy» (*Finding Rosa*...: 216) by Italy and denied their citizen rights when they were massed onto train cars and herded off to Sicily like animals going to slaughter. In some of his poems written in the “fiumano” dialect (*Per ricordare le cose che ricordo*, 1974), Grohovaz vehemently expresses a similar resentment toward the mother country who turned her back on her exiled sons, like a wicked stepmother. In “Io ti ripago: Italia senza core”, for instance, he inveighs against Italy for having signed the Treaty of Osimo and ceding the so-called “Zona B” (the section of Istria just south of Trieste) to Yugoslavia. Italy is here deemed responsible for having deprived the Italian-Istrians of their land and for having condemned them to a life of exile. This position lingers in the works of some of the other Friulian writers discussed

⁷ Another writer from Istria is Mario Duliani (1885-1954) who recorded his experience of internment in Canadian concentration camps in *La ville sans femmes* (1945).

in this essay who perceive the immigrant experience as an injustice and blame the homeland for letting them go away. They also feel betrayed and blame their beloved Friuli for not recognizing them as her exiled sons when they return.

The legacy of Friulian-Canadians

The love Friulian-Canadians feel for their mother country remains, nonetheless, unconditional – it is an intimate, visceral bond that transcends space and time and that is passed down as a legacy to the following generations. The descendants of many Friulian immigrants who have made their home in Canada continue cherishing this legacy. Among them are noteworthy critics and scholars like Joseph Pivato, Linda Bortolotti Hutcheon, Olga Zorzi Pugliese, Roberto Perin, Diego Bastianutti, Konrad Eisenbichler, Monica Stellin and Anna Pia De Luca, who have greatly contributed to uncovering the silenced histories of their Friulian ancestors, by investigating their literary, artistic and historical achievements⁸.

Friulians are certainly a significant tessera of the multicultural Canadian mosaic, a society they have not only assimilated to, but which they have contributed to forge with their many talents, crafts and simple daily endeavours. Their stories constitute a valuable voice, which must not be forgotten, nor discarded as minor and thus insignificant. The various writers who have recorded these stories and spoken for their people contribute in their own, very special and peculiar, way to inserting the Friulian experience within a broader transcultural context, in which the experience of Friulian immigration can enter into a Bakhtinian polylogue with those of other migrants. In this dialogic and polyvocal space, pain and trauma can ultimately turn into pleasure and «absolute delight» as Michelut writes (*Furlan Harvest*: 18).

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ANNA MORONI PARKEN: A TRANSCULTURAL LIFE WRITING OF EARLY CANADA

Monica Stellin*

Abstract

Emigranti by Anna Moroni Parken was published in Milan in its 1st edition in 1896, followed by a 2nd edition in 1907, with the additional subtitle *QUATTRO ANNI AL CANADÀ*. This memoir adds a compelling voice to the partially unknown narrative of nineteenth century migrant women, as well as an example of life writing outside some established categories. And yet, it remains for the most part overlooked or ignored.

Anna Moroni Parken: un'autobiografia transculturale del Canada dei pionieri
Emigranti di Anna Moroni Parken fu pubblicato a Milano in prima edizione nel 1896, seguita da una seconda edizione nel 1907, col sottotitolo *QUATTRO ANNI AL CANADÀ*. Questo memoriale aggiunge una voce attraente alla poco conosciuta narrativa dell'immigrazione femminile, nonché un esempio di autobiografia fuori da alcune categorie prestabilite. Ciononostante, rimane per lo più trascurato o ignorato.

Transatlantic migrations at the end of the 19th century

At the end of the nineteenth-century an autobiographical account was written on the experience of an Anglo-Italian woman in the Canadian wilderness. *Emigranti* by Anna Moroni Parken was published in Milan in its first edition in 1896, in the *Biblioteca Azzurra* of the *Rivista per le Signorine*. In 1907 a second edition was issued as a small volume by the publisher Angelo Solmi, again in Milan, with the additional subtitle *QUATTRO ANNI AL CANADÀ*¹. This memoir, written by a rather uncommon participant in the transatlantic movement and settlement of

* Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada.

¹ Quotations are taken from the 1907². In it the author's name was no longer hyphenated. The two editions present no substantial changes to the text, with the exception of an additional last brief chapter entitled "Alcuni anni dopo" that narrates – apparently following the suggestions of a few reviewers – some family events that took place after the publication of the first edition.

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

millions, adds a compelling voice to the partially unknown narrative of nineteenth century migrant women, as well as a human poignancy to their experience. And yet, it remains for the most part overlooked or ignored.

Emigranti raised some interest among scholars of the Italian experience in Canada and, more specifically, the literature of migration (Stellin. *Bridging the Ocean*: 39-54) where it is considered an unusual case, being the only published Italian text, written by a woman, produced between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and describing a first-hand experience in the Canadian wilderness towards the end of the nineteenth century. If Italians ever participated in the settlement of Muskoka at that time, no relevant record remains. Nevertheless, the Italian language created a barrier for Moroni Parken's work to become known by scholars not proficient in it, as a particular example of life writing. Although she states clearly that: «Benché inglese di nascita, sono moglie e madre di italiani» (76), in neither edition did she use her Italian last name only. For the most part, her written work presents a different experience from that of the Italian immigrants of that time. Scholars in Italian-Canadian history well illustrated how the first major wave of migrants from the Italian peninsula coming to this land at the turn of the 19th century was composed of young men, for the most part from the southern regions, illiterate, who, once in Canada, lived either in urban community neighborhoods or districts where hiring by the CPR, or other industries – such as mining – made them reach several areas across Canada. This first wave was characterized by temporary migration; most migrants did not come to settle: either they came and went back home once they reached their financial goal, or, they would migrate multiple times for the same reason. Their goals were always to help family members improve their status and life conditions back at home. In doing so, they would aid chain migration among kinship and township members (Sturino). For this reason, Moroni Parken's account can be associated more in its content, tone and cultural traits with the settlement of Canada in the second half of the nineteenth-century, mostly with immigrants from the British Isles (Hamilton 2).

Moroni Parken's life writing

Her stay in the Muskoka region took place between 1881 and 1885-1886². This information is consistent with the passenger register dated August 16, 1881 of the ship *Teutonia*, listing all five members of the Moroni family arriving at Quebec

² Most biographical information is derived from the text. Archival research is ongoing.

City. She was 31 at the time (Libraries and Archives Canada)³. Two more children would be born in Muskoka. An unfortunate financial setback had forced them to leave Italy and join her British parents and brother in Canada, where they had immigrated earlier. She lived in the wilderness for four years, adapting to the environment, primitive conditions, and the lifestyle with remarkable strength and determination. However, circumstances changed for the worse, due to her husband's illness, her brother's and parents' move to the southern United States and a large family to take care of. They survived thanks to the help of other settlers and returned to Italy thanks to an unexpected endowment. Moroni Parken was one of many settlers who left: the Muskoka region overall had a high percentage of abandoned farms over the years⁴ (Woodlinger 6).

If we, the reader, consider Moroni Parken's text as life writing, then we must come to terms with critical issues that have limited the interpretation of her text for quite some time. Autobiographical life writing is a genre that allows range and more flexibility by including various kinds of writings, such as memoirs; an autobiographical author does not continuously write about others, is present in the text as himself/herself, and can choose evolving levels of fictive narration. Life writing is, in fact, a way of seeing and anticipating the reader (Kadar 10). *Emigranti* is life writing as autobiographical literature that combines traits of life testimony and anthropological life history, in its description of mostly British settlers in the Muskoka region.

In interpreting life writing as a genre, we are aware of the difficulties it poses. As Linda Hutcheon underlines, «to write of anyone's history is to order, to give form to disparate facts; in short, to fictionalize» (82). Life writing is adopted here also as a critical practice, letting us «reread the canon while inserting the prejudices of women and women's 'styles'» (Kadar 11). Should we embark then in the rather daunting task of finding 'reality', or focus instead on the text, the page and our presence as readers? As life writing, non-traditional literature and literary non-fiction, *Emigranti* defies means often adopted in positioning a written text, especially in Italian-Canadian literature. Also, present-day national literatures are under pressure to denationalize, to find new arrangements of

³ The family name was misspelt Maroni and all five members' names were listed: Richd [sic], Annie, Eresta, Amy, Sophia.

⁴ In 1868 the provincial Free Land Grant and Homestead Act gave 200 acres of land in Muskoka to families willing to settle there. Each settler had to clear fifteen acres of land, build a house, live on the property for five years. If the requirements were met, he could become the owner. The majority of immigrants to Muskoka were farmers and merchants, bringing with them the knowledge and skills needed in such wilderness, such as the Parkens, the author's parents and brother. However, around 1900 the federal government offered free land in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and whole communities left Muskoka (Woodlinger 6).

form and content, to adapt to a changed cultural and social world (Dagnino Transcultural Literature). Should *Emigranti* be considered only as an example of a work of: «Writers... [who] were visitors to Canada», as briefly mentioned in *A History of Italian Canadian Writing*? Is such literary history to be structured on the authors' place of birth and residence? (Pivato) Or, instead, should a literary history be based on the texts, their inner significance and transcultural and universal meaning? First produced in the 1970s, this history of Italian Canadian writing still forms an important chronological bibliography of this body of work, making this literature and its contribution to the Canadian literary scene known to a larger readership.

However: «In Italy the Italian writing produced in Canada is not part of the national institution of writing in that country. Rather it is part of an expatriate literature of writers outside Italy, or writers in the world. In many ways it does not fit into the 600-year old tradition of Italian letters» (Pivato). There are signs that this may be no longer true, and the Italian literary canon may be changing: one example is the attention received by Nino Famà's novels in Italy, as well as Canada (see Aliberti, Amoroso, Stellan. "Per una letteratura", just to name a few). Today, the relevance given to such categorizations, and the separation between Canadian and Italian Studies, only presents the risk of creating unnecessary rifts, rather than links, but also raises some methodological questions.

Transcultural narratives are becoming a significant part of the literatures in both countries and on both continents, and recent world events give life writing on migration even more relevance and significance. Recent studies have brought forward theories on 'transcultural writers' (Dagnino Transcultural Writers): the definition refers to contemporary «culturally mobile writers [...] who, by choice or because of life circumstances, experience cultural dislocation, follow transnational life patterns, cultivate bilingual or plurilingual proficiency, physically immerse themselves in multiple cultures, geographies, or territories, expose themselves to diversity, and nurture plural, flexible identities» (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers*). If Dagnino's definition refers to recent cases, nevertheless Moroni Parken can be seen as a «historic literary example» of transcultural writer: someone «who underwent a 'creative transplantation'» (Dagnino *Transcultural Writers*, *World Literature*).

In the context of feminist criticism a re-consideration of these exclusions is now due, in order to understand their effects on the text and the reader. Thus, we see how works such as *Emigranti* get misinterpreted. Moroni Parken's text shows how inadequate and misleading the above-mentioned categorizations are, and transcends them. As an example, when Moroni Parken's fourth daughter is born in Muskoka, one of her older daughters comments: «La *baby* non è italiana come noi: è canadese; però siamo sorelle ugualmente» (59).

Her Italian language narrative is infused with the Canadian *topos* of survival (Atwood). The motif of isolation and survival is quite common in Canadian literature, but it finds deeper resonance in the immigrant experience itself, with the feelings of estrangement and alienation that the migration process entailed. As a metafiction written after her return to Italy, more positive than negative experiences of herself in the Canadian woods are poignantly conveyed. She seems to remain true to her 'self'. She entitles her work *Migrants: Four Years in Canada*, and not 'The Diary of a Lady Travelling with her Family'. She mentions «la nostra vita di coloni canadesi» (15), and how they became settlers on a 200-acre lot (18, 20):

Cominciavamo a far conoscenza della vita di coloni e v'assicuro che le occupazioni non mancavano; persone di servizio non ce n'è nei Back-Woods, bisognava quindi far tutto da sé [sic]: vacche e polli da curare, frutta e verdure da raccogliere, conserve da preparare per l'inverno, pane e torte da cuocere, il bucato da fare, gli squisiti pesci del lago da pescare. Donne e bambini avevano tutti il loro compito, mentre gli uomini attendevano ai campi (29).

She had not come to Canada to pay a visit, she had come to build a home and settle, to change from a lady of the city to one of the wilderness. For some time, she had a place she could call home, until elements and events made it impossible to live there any longer. Even if in the very end she had to face the dangerous forces of nature, there is still a sense of nostalgia: for her the hut in the woods did become her home, and it was in the wilderness that her more resilient and free 'self' came to be. Her narrative, especially when rewriting past events, could have presented her Canadian experience as a temporary incident from the very start; it does not.

Moroni Parken is well aware of her Italian readership, and its inability to fathom the wilderness, something that she had to come to face herself. However, this did not stop her from expressing opinions that might not be agreeable to all, especially some Italian readers⁵. As British-born, she does appreciate many aspects of the community life in Muskoka, structured around customs and traditions familiar to her. Her narrative is mostly embedded in an Anglo-Canadian context, and what little is expressed of her own Italian culture has to do with her love for her family, her friends and her great ability to sing opera. She gives an accurate description of communal life in rural Canada, but does not

⁵ «Gli emigranti inglesi non sono però, come generalmente gli italiani, la parte più miserabile, più debole, della popolazione che nel nuovo mondo va a cercar fortuna, o scampo a castighi meritati. Sono invece i più coraggiosi, i più forti, quelli che non temono il lavoro e le privazioni, che amano lottare contro le difficoltà e sfidare l'ignoto» (18).

show the same knowledge or understanding of the contemporary Italian immigration (18-19). Therefore, it is true that her life writing cannot be categorized as Italian-Canadian, as presently understood, and nobody would expect it to be. It cannot be 'hyphenated', although it is in the Italian language and it narrates a Canadian experience, and its writer resided in Muskoka as a settler for four years. It is true also that she shares her mostly English culture and is an educated woman who writes about her life. Although 'technically' not Italian-Canadian, her life writing still remains meaningful and interesting for all those who wish to know about immigrant women's life writing in pioneer Canada.

Writing in Italy about the Canadian wilderness

Slight changes between editions can give us a sense of how the publication had already evolved with the publishing movements of those times. The first edition was included in a special series of a magazine for young ladies. Journals and magazines for boys and girls, young ladies and men (as the one cited above) were becoming more common at the turn of the twentieth century, although mostly among the upper and middle classes living in cities such as Rome, Milan, Turin and Florence. Their creation and distribution had been delayed, compared to other European countries, by the late Italian unification, and the high levels of illiteracy present across the peninsula, especially among lower-class women. Legislation and a nascent school system limited the opportunities of Italian women to fully participate as citizens in the life of the new nation. The second edition, although almost identical in content to the first, as a booklet could reach a larger audience.

It can be estimated that between the time of her return to Italy and the publication of the first edition about ten years went by (1885/1886-1896), that seem to indicate how the writing of this memoir was not an easy task. Nevertheless, her meta-narrative aptly reflects moments and experiences in the wilderness: Moroni Parken's life writing is not flattened and homogenized by memory, but rather she is able to recreate those years showing the evolving sequence of anxiety, attraction and gradual disappointment which the Canadian experience induced in her. At the beginning of her account she conveys her initial apprehension for what awaits her with a nocturnal scene at the port of Quebec City; before disembarking, with the darkness surrounding her, the waters make the ship unsteady and distant fires suddenly illuminate the sky (7-8). Towards the end of her story, just before her departure from New York, she remembers the fires at her arrival and compares them, as to reassure herself, to the rain that safely accompanies them on the journey back home

(137). All these phases are effectively narrated and structured in the memoir, reflecting the transformations that Canadian life had produced in her, in an adventure that, despite the circularity of a return journey, is still presented as an enlightening experience.

The progressive role of women

Moroni Parken, the writer, narrates her 'self' as a woman who, for the sake of her family, had to change her life, but also face unexpected hardships and difficulties. Her recollections create a metafiction that allows her to transpose her individual experiences into a recognition of the progressive role women played in the New World:

In America, là dov'è una donna è la civiltà: intorno alla figura femminile s'aggira sempre l'educazione e il vero progresso; essa è rispettata, quasi direi venerata e la libertà non degenera mai in licenza. Ispiratrice d'ogni nobile opera, d'ogni impresa ardita, la donna obbliga l'uomo a innalzarsi al suo livello, ingentilisce ogni costume e purifica ogni sentimento. Forte contrasto con quei paesi ove la donna ha l'umiliazione di dover confessare che non le è possibile di compiere liberamente tutte le nobili opere alle quali si sente portata, perché non è sufficientemente rispettata dagli uomini (87).

In her advocacy for women's equality, she covertly levies some criticism against societies such as the Italian one where, at the time, women could not see their contributions recognized and were still far from enjoying equality and respect. Here lies another most interesting aspect of this woman writer's life narrative. In fact, previously this memoir was approached for its contribution to the Italian literature of migration to Canada, viewed especially in the context of migration and pioneer literature, however at a closer look:

Non crediate, o fanciulle, che un lavoro materiale abbrutisca; esso con l'abitudine diventa puramente meccanico e lascia liberamente divagare nei regni dell'immaginazione, di sollevarsi in un mondo ideale. La vita faticosa in mezzo alla natura, in quell'aria sottile ed esilarante mi faceva l'effetto che non lasciasse stagnare le idee, e in certi momenti mi sembrava di essere sotto l'influenza di uno stimolante (30).

What makes this account particularly interesting is also its defence of women's role in the advancement of progress, both by direct example through the life experience it portrays, and through the open support her author/writer/protagonist gives voice to. The fact that her work was dedicated in both editions to women such as Sofia Bisi Albini and Celestina Griseri shows how the author

frequented a circle of educated women writers, journalists, educators and activists who were particularly involved in bringing about more progressive ideas at the turn of the twentieth century⁶. Therefore, the Canadian wilderness offered this Anglo-Italian female and feminist writer *ante-litteram* the opportunity to present to an Italian readership a powerful metaphor of what a woman could achieve, even in the wilderness.

Noi trovavamo continuamente l'occasione di pensare e di discorrere di cose elevate. La sera sulla nostra tavola non mancavano mai libri: coi sacchi di farina e pacchi di the e di zucchero, da una fattoria all'altra ci scambiavamo sempre i romanzi più interessanti e i giornali di Londra, di Nuova-York e di Quebec. La lettura è laggiù, per uomini e donne, una abitudine di prima necessità come è [...] a Napoli il giocare al lotto (31).

In describing the urban/urbane customs of an Anglo-Italian woman in rural Canada, she writes an exemplary life narrative of will and adaptation for any woman, but particularly for young Italian women of her time.

Years after her return to Italy Moroni Parker could look back at her life in the wilderness as an adventure and a learning experience, enhancing in her memory the most enjoyable moments and lessening the difficult ones, without however concealing the hazardous situation she had to face. It can be assumed that a certain awareness on her part of the interest and taste of the coeval Italian readership affected her approach to the matter. Her narration gives an attractive, adventurous and detailed description of the pioneer experience in the wilderness, expressing a sense of diversion and moral enrichment, but without hiding the risks of that life. Even when describing the harshest moments of her life in Canada, her tone is always one of dignified hope, and never of humiliating defeat.

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⁶ Her Canadian cabin in the forest was named *Cordisofia*, to remain close to Sofia Bisi Albini.

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GLI AUTORI

Gianfranca Balestra è docente i.q. di Letteratura anglo-americana all'Università di Siena. È autrice di numerosi saggi relativi alla narrativa americana dell'Otto e Novecento e monografie su Wharton e Poe. Si è interessata delle traduzioni letterarie e intersemiotiche di Wharton, Poe, Fitzgerald e Masters. Ha curato varie edizioni italiane di autori statunitensi, una nuova edizione del romanzo di Fitzgerald *Il grande Gatsby* (2011) e il volume *Women in Love. Ritratti di donne in letteratura* (2014). Nell'ambito della letteratura canadese contemporanea ha organizzato il primo convegno italiano su Alice Munro e ha co-curato *Reading Alice Munro in Italy* (2008). Dirige *RSA Journal*, la rivista dell'Associazione Italiana di Studi Nord Americani (AISNA).
gianfranca.balestra@unisi.it

Amandine Bonesso, addottorata in Scienze linguistiche e letterarie con una tesi su *L'énonciation troublée dans la Relation de 1654 de Marie de l'Incarnation*, sotto la direzione di Alessandra Ferraro, è attualmente docente a contratto di Lingua francese all'Università di Udine. Ha soggiornato a lungo in Canada, in seguito alla borsa di studio dell'Università di Udine e del CRILCQ. Le sue linee di ricerca riguardano la letteratura missionaria della Nouvelle-France, la letteratura mistica del Seicento, la scrittura autobiografica e la scrittura migrante italo-quebecchese. È socia del Centro di Cultura Canadese dell'Università di Udine, del Centro Internazionale sulle Letterature Migranti "Oltreoceano-CILM" dell'Università di Udine e dell'Associazione Italiana di Studi Canadesi.
amandine.bonesso@uniud.it

Michele Campanini è dottore di ricerca in Studi comparati di letteratura, teatro e cinema presso l'Università di Siena dove ha svolto attività di professore a contratto di Lingua italiana per dottorandi stranieri presso la SSSC. Fa parte del progetto europeo "Playing Identities" dell'Università di Siena, per il quale è responsabile per i Programmi della Scuola estiva. Ha collaborato con la University of Toronto e con la Masaryk University. Ha pubblicato numerosi saggi e articoli in Italia, Gran Bretagna e Canada sulla letteratura di viaggio e di migrazione. Il suo volume *La traversata. Racconto e rappresentazione del viaggio di emigrazione oltreoceano. Storie, memorie, voci* (2010) fa parte dei *Quaderni della Fondazione Paolo Cresci per la Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*. È curatore di una serie di *Racconti Migranti* per la casa editrice Betti.
michelecampanini@yahoo.it

Oltreoceano. L'identità canadese tra migrazioni, memorie e generazioni, a cura di Silvana Serafin, Alessandra Ferraro e Daniela Ciani Forza, 11 (2016).

Norman Cheadle è professore associato di Lingue e letterature moderne-Studi ispanici alla Laurentian University di Sudbury, Canada. Le sue ricerche si focalizzano sulla letteratura argentina e sugli studi ispanici in Canada. Ha tradotto *Adam Buenosayres* di Leopoldo Marechal (2014) oltre ad avere pubblicato sullo stesso autore diversi contributi critici che vanno da *The Ironic Apocalypse in the Novels of Leopoldo Marechal* (2000) a *A la sombra del Coloso del Norte: Adán Buenosayres en Estados Unidos* (in corso di stampa). Tra le sue pubblicazioni sulla letteratura ispano-canadense si evidenzia *Emerging from a Cloud: The Inter-American Discursive Position of Hispano-Canadian Literature* (2013).
ntheadle@laurentian.ca

Daniela Ciani Forza è professoressa associata di Lingua e letterature anglo-americane all'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, abilitata al ruolo di P.O. Fa parte del Consiglio scientifico della rivista internazionale *Oltreoceano* e della collana Donne e società; codirige le collane: Soglie americane, Culture a confronto, Incontri, Nuove prospettive americane, Le Tre Venezie: turismo e letteratura. Le sue attuali ricerche sono rivolte alle letterature diasporiche in inglese negli Stati Uniti. Fra le sue pubblicazioni recenti, si ricordano *Sguardi obliqui: migrazioni tra identità americane* (2012) e *Il profumo della letteratura* (con S. Francescato, 2014).
dciani@unive.it

Agnese De Marchi si è addottorata in Lingue e letterature angloamericane presso l'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia. Ha ottenuto una borsa FSE come "Esperto in progettazione di eventi culturali per l'area nord-americana" in cooperazione con la Guggenheim Collection di Venezia. Ha collaborato con la Fondazione Ca' Foscari per la mostra "William Congdon a Venezia. Uno sguardo americano" (2012). Tra le sue pubblicazioni, si segnalano i seguenti articoli: "La città della luce e della vita, del mare e del cielo e della melodia: Venezia e lo sguardo americano" (2012), "In Spite of Everything Italy [and Venice] is the Place for Ideas" (2012), "Francis Hopkinson Smith in Venice: a Cultural Frontier Read Through the Picturesque" (2011).
agneseemme@gmail.com

Maura Felice è laureata in Lingue e letterature europee ed extraeuropee all'Università di Udine e in procinto di sostenere la tesi di dottorato, il cui argomento verte sulla scienza e la retorica nei dialoghi rinascimentali, all'Università di Bologna (DESE - Le letterature dell'Europa unita). Ha studiato anche all'Università canadese di Sherbrooke, alla Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris III e al Centro di ricerca sul Rinascimento di Tours. È socia del Centro di Cultura Canadese dell'Università di Udine, del Centro Internazionale sulle Letterature Migranti "Oltreoceano-CILM" dell'Università di Udine e dell'Associazione Italiana di Studi Canadesi. Collabora alle riviste *Ponts/Ponti* e *Interfrancophonies*. Si è interessata alla poesia di alcuni autori italo-canadesi.
maura.feliceds@gmail.com

Alessandra Ferraro è professoressa associata di Letteratura francese e Letterature francofone all'Università di Udine e abilitata al ruolo di P.O. Specialista di letteratura francese contemporanea e di letteratura francofona del Canada, ha orientato le sue ricerche nell'ambito dell'autobiografia e delle scritture migranti, tematiche a cui

ha dedicato i volumi *Raymond Queneau. L'autobiografia impossibile* (2001), *Una voce attraverso il velo. Il linguaggio mistico e missionario di Marie de l'Incarnation* (2014), *Écriture migrante et translinguisme au Québec* (2014). Co-direttrice della rivista *Oltreoceano*, nell'Ateneo udinese ha co-fondato il Centro di Cultura Canadese e il Centro Internazionale di Letterature Migranti "Oltreoceano-CILM".
alessandra.ferraro@uniud.it

Simone Francescato è professore associato di Lingua e letterature anglo-americane all'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia. Si occupa soprattutto della letteratura statunitense tra Otto e Novecento (realismo, naturalismo, estetismo, decadentismo e i loro modelli europei). Tra le sue pubblicazioni figurano: la monografia *Collecting and Appreciating: Henry James and the Transformation of Aesthetics in the Age of Consumption* (2010), l'edizione critica del romanzo *Rosalba: The Story of Her Development* di Grant Allen (2012) e la curatela (con D. Ciani Forza) de *Il profumo della letteratura* (2014).
simone.francescato@unive.it

Davide Giurlando, laureato all'Università Ca' Foscari con una tesi sulle traduzioni intersemiotiche, si è specializzato in cinema d'animazione e cinema come specchio dei mutamenti sociali, politici e culturali di una nazione, tema sviluppato nella tesi di dottorato. Ha tenuto lezioni e curato un convegno internazionale sul cinema d'animazione; dal 2011 è tra gli organizzatori del festival di cortometraggi Ca' Foscari Short Film Festival, curandone il programma speciale Anymation. Ha contribuito a diverse esposizioni in veste di responsabile del materiale multimediale.
davide.giurlando@gmail.com

Martine-Emmanuelle Lapointe è professoressa associata all'Université de Montréal e direttrice del CRILCQ-Université de Montréal. La sua tesi di dottorato è stata pubblicata nel 2008 con il titolo *Emblèmes d'une littérature. Le libraire, Prochain épisode et L'avalée des avalés* (Prix Jean-Éthier Blais 2009). Ha codiretto *Transmission et héritages de la littérature québécoise* (2011) e *Le printemps québécois. Une anthologie* (2013). I suoi temi di ricerca riguardano particolarmente i rapporti tra storia e memoria nelle opere letterarie contemporanee.
martine.emmanuelle.lapointe@umontreal.ca

Sophie Lavoie è professoressa associata di Studi ispanici all'Università del New Brunswick, Fredericton, Canada. Ha ottenuto il dottorato di ricerca presso l'Université de Provence, Francia (2005), e recentemente ha analizzato la letteratura scritta da donne nei paesi 'socialisti' dell'America Latina. Sulla letteratura latino-canadese ha tenuto conferenze e ha pubblicato un articolo che riguarda la scrittrice peruviano-canadese Lady Rojas Benavente in *Pluri-culture et écrits migratoires* (testo coordinato da E. Sabiston e R. Drummond, 2014). Ha tradotto con Hugh Hazelton la silloge *El laberinto vertical* dell'argentino-canadese Nela Rio (2014). Dirige il Registro Creativo dell'Associazione Canadese degli Ispanisti, è presidente dell'Associazione di Ispanisti delle Province Atlantiche (AHPA), tesoriera della Society for Literary Criticism of Spanish American Women Writers (CCLEH) e cronista per la Fredericton Chapter di Ibero-American Academy of Poetry.
lavoie@unb.ca

Rocío Luque è docente a contratto all'Università di Udine e all'UNED di Madrid e lettrice di spagnolo all'Università di Udine. Le sue indagini riguardano gli ambiti della lingua spagnola, della linguistica contrastiva, della traduttologia e delle letterature comparate. Ha pubblicato *España en la memoria de Elena Garro y Octavio Paz. Un diálogo lingüístico y literario* (2011), le co-edizioni *La palabra entre el águila y el sol. El surrealismo en la obra de Octavio Paz* (2012) e *Léxico Español Actual III* (2012), oltre a vari articoli in riviste e volumi nazionali e internazionali. Inoltre, ha tradotto romanzi, antologie poetiche e saggi da e verso lo spagnolo.

rocio.luque@uniud.it

Ulla Krieberegg è docente presso il Center for Inter-American Studies (CIAS) dell'Università di Graz, Austria. Le sue aree di ricerca riguardano gli studi letterari e culturali interamericani, l'interculturalità, l'immigrazione ebraica verso le Americhe, gli studi sull'invecchiamento e le politiche sull'educazione in Europa e negli USA. Di prossima pubblicazione è la monografia *Putting Age in its Place: Age, Space, and Identity in North American Care Home Narratives*. È direttrice esecutiva dell'European Network of Aging Studies (ENAS), oltre a fare parte del comitato del North American Network in Aging Studies (NANAS); è co-curatrice della collana Aging Studies (transcript, Bielefeld).

ulla.krieberegg@uni-graz.at

Rosella Mamoli Zorzi è professore emerito di Letteratura nordamericana all'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia. Si è occupata di letteratura canadese con saggi su Atwood, Ondaatje, Sullivan e altri autori. Ha diretto il Master in Traduzione letteraria di Ca' Foscari, pubblicando una serie di traduzioni di scrittori canadesi, quali Dennis Lee, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Gary Geddes. Ha organizzato per molti anni il "Canadian May in Venice", portando a Venezia un gran numero di scrittori canadesi, da Atwood a Ondaatje, da Sullivan a Geddes e altri.

mamoli@unive.it

Pia Masiero è professoressa associata di Letterature anglo-americane e studi canadesi presso l'Università Ca' Foscari Venezia. La sua ricerca si è concentrata sull'alto modernismo (Faulkner), sulla letteratura contemporanea anglo-americana e canadese (Roth, Auster, Foster Wallace, Munro) e sulla narratologia postclassica di stampo cognitivo. Tra le sue pubblicazioni figurano le monografie: *Philip Roth and the Zuckerman Books: the Making of a Storyworld* (2011), *Names across the Color Line: William Faulkner's Short Fiction 1931-1942* (2012), e gli articoli "On Focalization Once Again: What about the Reader?" (2014) e "Roth's *The Counterlife* and the Negotiation of Reality and Fiction" (2014).

masiero@unive.it

Tatiana Navallo, dottoressa di ricerca in Letteratura ispanica presso l'Université de Montréal, è membro del "Réseau d'études sur l'Amérique Latine (RÉAL)", e insegna presso il "Centre de langues". Le sue linee di ricerca riguardano la cultura ispanica e la letteratura di viaggio nel periodo coloniale ispano-americano, gli scritti autobiografici e

le finzioni storiche nella letteratura contemporanea. I risultati raggiunti sono stati presentati in congressi accademici internazionali e successivamente sono stati pubblicati in riviste specializzate. Ha coeditato il numero monografico di *Tinkuy: Periodismo antiguo en Hispanoamérica. Relecturas* (2010). Il suo volume *Miradas hacia los márgenes. Dinámicas de la cultura impresa en el Río de la Plata (1801-1807)* fa parte della Colección Hispanoamérica di Penelope Academic Press (2013).
ct.navallo.coimbra@umontreal.ca

Francesca Romana Paci è professoressa ordinaria di Letteratura inglese e di Letterature postcoloniali all'Università del Piemonte Orientale. Le sue aree di interesse riguardano il Romanticismo, gli studi contemporanei, in particolare in ambito post-coloniale e la traduzione. Ha studiato scrittori inglesi, irlandesi, scozzesi, canadesi e africani; ha tradotto in italiano poesie di Smart, Coleridge, Byron, Moore, Mangan, MacNeice, Heaney, Michaels, Kulyk Keefer, e anche alcuni racconti di *Macleod* ("Il dono di sangue del sale perduto", 1999; 2003) e Christine De Luca. ("Questo sole furfante", 2015).
fmpaci@alice.it

Biancamaria Rizzardi è fondatrice e direttrice del Master in Traduzione di testi postcoloniali in lingua inglese presso l'Università di Pisa, dove ricopre il ruolo di professore ordinario di Letteratura inglese e postcoloniale. È nel comitato scientifico dell'Italian Association for Canadian Studies (AISC) e dell'National Association of English Scholars (ANDA). Ha all'attivo diversi saggi sulla letteratura canadese, riguardanti sia poeti (Atwood, Musgrave, Layton, Page, Avison, Cohen) che narratori (MacEwen, Lawrence, Watson, Munro).
biancamaria.rizzardi@unipi.it

Deborah Saidero è ricercatrice e professoressa aggregata di Lingua inglese all'Università di Udine, dove insegna traduzione. Ha conseguito un dottorato di ricerca in "Letterature e culture dei paesi di lingua inglese" presso l'Università di Bologna. Si è a lungo occupata di letteratura canadese, con particolare riguardo alla narrativa femminile contemporanea, su cui ha pubblicato diversi studi. Di recente, ha curato un volume di saggi sull'opera di Janice Kulyk Keefer. Svolge anche ricerche sulle problematiche linguistiche negli scritti di autrici italo-canadesi e sul "Canadian English". Nel 2000 ha co-curato il primo *Dizionario friulano-inglese* con Gianni Nazzi, pubblicato dall'Ente Friuli nel Mondo.
deborah.saidero@uniud.it

Pablo Salinas ha ottenuto il dottorato di ricerca in Studi ispanici all'Università di Ottawa. Attualmente è professore di Lingua spagnola e di Letteratura latino-americana alla Shawnee State University. Sue aree di ricerca sono la letteratura latino-americana contemporanea, la relazione tra i processi migratori latino-americani (interni e/o esterni) e la loro rappresentazione nei mezzi audiovisivi. Ha scritto articoli sul cinema peruviano contemporaneo e ha partecipato a diverse pubblicazioni letterarie in Canada, molte delle quali sono state tradotte in inglese e in francese.
pablosm73@hotmail.com

Pierre Samson, romanziere quebecchese, ha esordito con la trilogia brasiliana *Le Messie de Belém* (1996), *Un garçon de compagnie* (1997) e *Il était une fois une ville* (1999), romanzo vincitore del Prix de l'Académie. Nel 2008 ha ottenuto il Prix littéraire des collégiens per il romanzo *Catastrophes* (2007). È inoltre autore di *Arabesques* (2010) e *La maison des pluies* (2013) per cui ha ricevuto il Grand Prix du livre de Montréal. Il suo settimo romanzo, *L'œil de cuivre*, è uscito nell'aprile del 2015.
studiodeparis@gmail.com

Silvana Serafin, professoressa ordinaria i. q. di Lingua e letterature ispano-americane presso l'Università di Udine, dove ha ricoperto numerose cariche istituzionali, è socia fondatrice e presidente del Centro Internazionale di Letterature Migranti "Oltreoceano-CILM". Ha diretto numerosi programmi di ricerca nazionali e regionali; fa parte di consigli scientifici di riviste e di collane in parte da lei fondate e codirette. Le sue ricerche spaziano dalla cronachistica delle Indie alla letteratura tra fine Ottocento-inizi Novecento, contemporanea, di genere e delle migrazioni. È autrice di numerosi volumi (monografie, curatele) e saggi, pubblicati su riviste nazionali e internazionali.
silvana.serafin@uniud.it

Valeria Sperti è professoressa associata di Letteratura francese e Letterature francofone all'Università di Napoli Federico II, abilitata al ruolo di P.O. È autrice di opere che riguardano lo spazio autobiografico nella letteratura contemporanea, la rappresentazione del dittatore nei romanzi francofoni subsahariani della post indipendenza e lo statuto della riproduzione fotografica nel romanzo contemporaneo. Si interessa alla produzione dei prosatori contemporanei francesi e francofoni e agli scrittori espatriati che si autotraducono.
valspe@gmail.com

Monica Stellin è professoressa associata di Italianistica alla Wilfrid Laurier University (Ontario). Le sue aree di ricerca riguardano la scrittura autobiografica femminile, l'esperienza culturale italiana in Canada e la rappresentazione della cultura italiana nei media internazionali. Tra le sue pubblicazioni figurano *Bridging the Ocean: Italian Literature of Migration to Canada* (2006) e *The Virtual Piazza: The Representation of Italian Culture in the Media* (2005).
mstellin@wlu.ca

Javier Vargas de Luna, professore ordinario all'Università Laval (Québec), dal 2004 dirige i programmi di filologia ispanica; precedentemente è stato docente a tempo pieno all'Università del Massachusetts. In qualità di professore invitato, insegna in corsi di cinema, cultura e letteratura a livello universitario in America Latina e in Canada. Nel 2012 ha vinto la borsa di studio annuale per la ricerca dell'Istituto di Studi Avanzati (IEA-Paris). È autore ed editore di numerosi articoli e di oltre una dozzina di libri su temi inerenti alle letterature ispaniche. È anche poeta e romanziere.
javier.vargas@lit.ulaval.ca

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Finito di stampare
nel mese di aprile 2016
presso la Press Up srl
di Ladispoli (Rm)