

NATIONAL IDENTITY, TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE: A REVIEW ON CANADA'S FICTION AND ITS MULTIFACETED GLOBALISATION

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ABSTRACT: Both Brazil and Canada exist in-between the status of colony and coloniser, tradition and modernity, past and future; belonging to the New World, there is a lot one might learn from the other. These countries are spaces in which literature might rethink ontologies – precisely in terms of identity. Literature reflects one's society, examining and projecting manners for changing or asserting its epistemes. The national myth is nothing but a myth, and, as such, its reality gaps can only be filled in by other illusory meanings. Myths can destroy us; but they can also help us resurrect as nations. Within this brief study, I decide to accept such challenge, and to depart from the identity condition of Brazil to concoct a sketch of what might have been going on in Canadian fiction during the process of globalisation. The palpability of national identities, their relevance and vitality, shall be tested, for if I say "I am not a Canadian, I'm Brazilian" I need to know what I am talking about. Do I?

Keywords: Canada, globalisation, literature.

IDENTIDADE NACIONAL, LITERATURA TRANSNACIONAL: UMA REVISÃO DA FICÇÃO CANADENSE E DE SUA GLOBALIZAÇÃO MULTIFACETADA

RESUMO: Tanto o Brasil quanto o Canadá existem entre o status de colônia e colonizador, tradição e modernidade, passado e futuro; como parte do Novo Mundo, existe muito aprendizado que um pode tirar do outro. Estes países são espaços onde a literatura pode repensar ontologias – precisamente no que tange a identidade. A literatura reflete nossa sociedade, examinando e projetando maneiras de alterar ou reafirmar suas epistemes. O mito nacional não passa de um mito e, como tal, suas lacunas de realidade só podem ser preenchidas por outros sentidos ilusórios. Mitos podem nos destruir; mas também podem nos ajudar a nos reerguer como nações. Neste breve estudo, decido aceitar tal desafio, e parto da condição identitária do Brasil para propor um esquete do que pode estar havendo com a ficção canadense durante o processo de globalização. A aplicabilidade das identidades nacionais, sua relevância e vitalidade, é testada, já que, se digo "Não sou canadense, sou brasileiro", eu preciso saber do que estou falando. E sei?

Palavras-chave: Canadá, globalização, literatura.

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The bull never gored the man; rather the man gored himself on the horn of the bull (HEMINGWAY, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, 1940, p. 31).

INTRODUCTION: WHAT “TO BE PART” MEANS

When nations, as units, are designed as spatial epistemes that gather specific artefacts within a single group, nothing is so clear and simple as it might seem for the reckless observer. External influence (and this is not something whose existence is to be regretted) can never and should not be ignored nor looked upon with disregard or contempt during such process of “being part”. Nonetheless, one must seek to understand oneself and that place and space he/she occupies with certain autonomy – notwithstanding the undeniable paradox of any nation: therein, there is a dependent autonomy, an isolation through contact, a separation through interaction. In this sense, living in a nation that has at the same time broken with tradition and kept up with it, many thinkers have reflected upon the condition of Canada and upon its controversial identity. Such discussion occurs within official and unofficial channels – and literature surfaces as a place requiring a rather consistent attention in this regard. Therefore, and even though the issue of national identity might sound to some of us more obsolete than pertinent for the postmodern ideas now in vogue, “many of Canada’s writers are still engaged in creating a literary map of the country. This map reveals in imaginative language what Canada looks like, and what it means to grow up and be part of a specific region” (STOUCK, 1988, p. 299). Many subjects in Brazil, Canada, and other American countries have been engaged in such enterprise for quite a while, since understanding “what it means to grow up and be part” of regions that belong to the same continent of the giant U.S.A is both a complex and multifarious challenge – regardless and due to the presence of the giant.

Within this brief study, I decide to accept such challenge, and to depart from the identity condition of Brazil to concoct a sketch of what might have been going on in Canada in this sense. The palpability of national identities, their relevance and appliance, shall be tested, for if I say “I am not a Canadian, I’m Brazilian” I need to know what I am talking about. It is also important, though, not to disregard or take for granted what tradition has told us so far concerning the identity of the unit, notwithstanding how erroneous one might think some of its assumptions may be. Countries are also built through fiction; illusions create realities, ideas about people transform the very essence of such people. This is the reason why one can only think of next steps if the previous ones are summoned onto the arena; after all, having “bleak ground under your feet is better than having no ground at all: any map is better

than no map” (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 246). One can only bring light if he/she experiences bleakness; ignoring Canadian colonial and neo-colonial historical backgrounds would be, thus, a huge mistake for it is exactly such contextual references that might allow us to depart from new temporal and spatial conditions. Both Brazil and Canada exist in-between the status of colony and coloniser, tradition and modernity, past and future; belonging to the New World, much dialogue can take place in a bridge that might be constructed to unite them. It is the knowledge of what has been done that gives you the tools for doing it differently, after all “knowing your starting points and your frame of reference is better than being suspended in a void. A tradition doesn’t necessarily exist to bury you: it can also be used as material for new departures” (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 247). Building a nation and its culture requires such material, and, depending on the approach to this material, an identity that makes you surface might be the very identity that buries you.

DISUSSION: THE GLOBAL SUBJECT AND THE IMAGINED UNITY

Using the term “Mother Country” as an ironic epithet for the U.S.A., Dewart discusses the fact that most Canadian editing houses do not feel motivated to invest in promoting Canadian literature. The explanation is simple, Canadian editing houses, just like they do everywhere else, tend to prefer to make sure sales and large profits on “British and US works, which have already obtained popularity. They seldom take the trouble to judge of a Canadian book on its merits, or use their efforts to promote its sale” (DEWART, 1864, p. 20). Brazilians cannot help making the comparison once again; Canada is not alone in this process, U.S.A. literary works – most of which, I dare say, are of a rather questionable quality – also invade Brazil (whose national literature is overtly disregarded by media and potential readers). We know Brazilian literature has to struggle considerably against more commercial pieces – which are strongly advertised and generally given a lot of room for guaranteeing their future success before they are even placed in bookshop shelves. Usually coming either from the U.S.A. or from Britain, such books are granted the status of profit making (and that is precisely, and solely, what they are); and, since culture has been gradually commoditised in the neoliberal world, they end up reaching much larger audiences than those books which, emerging from less central regions, get no similar treatment. Literature becomes a commodity; and art becomes for sale.

The omniscient agent that acts in the drawing of central versus marginal spheres and reinforces hegemonic literary supremacy through its commercial power in Canada is not a

novelty for Brazilians, who also suffer the direct pressure of this predictable process. Likewise, imposing a literary tradition is a synonym for reinforcing a certain understanding towards issues that might go way beyond fiction. Therefore, allowing the U.S.A. to act so aggressively in one's culture (in the case both Brazil and Canada) is giving it enough strength for transforming "marginal" readers into what they want them (us) to be. In this sense Itwaru (1990, p. 144) sagaciously observes that "the state of dependency on American fantasies which work against Canada sees the attraction of Canada through the ideological lenses of the United States – the fetish of materiality, technological rationality, notions of progress". The ideological lenses of the United States have been given to America as a whole, and it behoves the other countries in the continent to inform U.S.A. epistemes that we need no glasses for we can see pretty well with our own marginal eyes. Since this is unfortunately not the case, the understanding of "local" notions as "universal", due to their coming from the central U.S.A. tradition, and the contrary process taking place in what concerns Canadian or Brazilian "regional" beliefs, for they are limited to marginal regions never getting to the "universal" readers, leaves "people confused, dissatisfied, and empty. A situation in which disorientation is glossed over in the obsession with consumption" (ITWARU, 1990, p. 145).

No value is more important for the "global subject" than his/her "obsession with consumption", so the ones who deviate from such agenda are taught to see themselves as a mutation and convinced to change their minds. These are characters who are living under a shade that they share with any contemporary subjects – their obsession with consumption being likewise guided by the fact that "forms of niche consumerism and individualized lifestyles are built around a postmodern style of urbanisation" (HARVEY, 2010, p. 131). This critique towards the postmodern style of urbanisation is in defence to the idea of being, belonging; an attempt to demonstrate that, very often, the fragmentation of our identity is led by the necessity for us to get rid of any sense of justice at all. Forgetting who we are, we have been turned into obsessive consumers – the only thing we are sure to be – in the globalising world map: and this has been a strategy of ultimate importance for the maintenance of global consumerist economy. In this sense, the idea of the global citizen would be closer to the notion of global consumers precisely because capitalism could never have survived and "flourished in the way it has, had it not been for the perpetual expansion of the populations available as consumers organised according to capitalist social relations, technologies, and institutional arrangements" (HARVEY, 2010, p. 144).

Such institutional arrangements are responsible for placing everyone where they supposedly belong, giving them the seemingly necessary tools – consumption – to move back

or forward in such institution. Those whose restraints – either social, political, or financial (sometimes all of them) – to enable such tools are too considerable are convinced they are less in rank and position: they wear the clothing of inferiority without any clear evidence they are inferior at all. In the national construct, learning to see themselves as mutation, the margin – the “minority” (which is actually the majority) – accepts its subjugation through the means of neoliberal tradition and learns to look around through the lenses of the hegemonic needs. As a result, concerning Canadian identity, what have been thriving in the global imaginary are Canadian characters that are not “Canadian” in the self-sufficient or independent sense. Due to the privileged condition of those books which provide stereotypical patterns for their Canadian characters, they are portrayed by external (and sometimes internal) observers who either romanticise or animalise Canadians, sometimes even both. We, as Brazilians, have become used to such exoticisation – for we have always experienced it. Canadian readers, in this sense, grow unnervingly tired of such images: “When in high school I encountered something labelled more explicitly as Canadian Literature I wasn’t surprised. There they were again, those animals on the run, most of them in human clothing this time” (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 30).

Atwood (1972) informs her readers that, since she was a kid, she already refused to accept such self-condemning images like of those “animals on the run” wearing or not “human clothing”. Always in the Canadian forests telling readers nothing different from the several romantic and exotic messages she had already seen at every corner of Canadian towns. She did not bear such messages any longer, she did not agree with the Canadian portraits devised by most of the books she encountered that, somehow, talked about the country (most of them coming from the U.S.A. but some actually coming from Canada – which means assimilated exoticisation). Nevertheless, notwithstanding the clear social and political task of any writer, perhaps it would be unfair to blame the Canadian writers criticised by Atwood (1972) for their exoticised view on their own country and people. What I mean is that when one subject has been taught exhaustively to think of oneself submissively and stereotypically it might be fairly unfair to simply want him/her to start thinking and/or behaving otherwise. We fight with the armour we have at hand. It would be dangerous, thus, to make Canadian authors liable for the damage, for the artist is never isolated in a glass globe whence he/she would be capable of looking at the object described completely extradiagetically.

What happens is precisely the opposite, as Atwood herself would later admit (1972, p. 147): “Far from thinking of writers as totally isolated individuals, I see them as inescapably connected with their society, though the nature of the connection will vary.” The nature of

such connection is, indeed, doomed to vary depending on how the writer positions him/herself before the Canadian context. Affected and responsive towards the society wherein one lives, literature provides authors with the very channel whereby hegemonic thinking might be reinforced or put into question. Canada and Brazil, facing globalisation such as any other country, are spaces that literature might rethink – precisely in terms of identity. In this sense, one could say the writer might consciously or unconsciously reflect the society, examining and projecting manners for changing it or for reinforcing such society. Likewise, “the connection between writer and society will increase in intensity as the society (rather than, for instance, the writer’s love-life or his meditations on roses) becomes the subject of the writer” (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 148). Again, what is pivotal for one to think is not simply about “the subject of the writer”, but also, and perhaps more important, about how he/she came to talk about such subject in this or that manner, and what are the likely outcomes of his/her comments. Isolation does not exist; no identity that excludes the image of the other proves to be effective, insomuch as this other – the negative self – shall always remain there, regardless of our will.

Moreover, the contributions of several of the writers brought and criticised by Atwood are not negative on the whole. When one thinks of Canada, it is not stereotypical to believe that rural images such as the ones she questions represent an important aspect of its identity. That is, it is not that the animals or the possible absence of a completely urban space is something to be criticised, what is to be criticised is the fact that such images are supposedly doomed to be thought and reflected upon in either romanticised or scornful manners. The *sertão* is a pivotal piece of Brazilian historical context, but the romantic idea of the *sertão* is a problem for such context to be scrutinised. Canadian literature, like Brazilian literature, can evolve without necessarily abandoning its roots, just like it can evolve without overlooking its biodiversity or the importance of its natives. In fact, the development of any national identity, but here specially in the case of Brazil and Canada, can only take place if its own images are enabled to face those images which have been formulated by other varying sources which have, in their turn, their own interests. To be heterogeneous, for instance, is not a liability, but actually a very evocative asset. Heterogeneity is in this case imperative for a reflection upon national identity inasmuch as Canada, like Brazil, is marked by its hybrid culture, by the hand of the coloniser and the colonised, of the New and Old World. Within this ontological allegedly ambivalent dialogue distinct perceptions come out; it is by putting the Canadian local against the supposed universal that such spheres shall have their frontiers as fragmented as possible. Hence to abandon the local and embrace the universal or to

abandon the universal and embrace the local would be, thus, misguided and unfeasible attempts of cultural repositioning:

The desire to reject everything foreign, to isolate and destroy the bacteria that have invaded the national host in order to leave it pure and free of disease, was the motivating idea behind Brazilian cultural and economic nationalism in the 1960s, just as it was in Canada during the same period. Not surprisingly, in neither case was nationalism successful in eliminating the contagion of the foreign and leaving behind a healthy body that could be identified as purely Brazilian or Canadian: from the beginning, the opposition between the national and the foreign at work in cultural nationalism was an unreal one that did not allow us to see the share of the foreign in the nationally specific, or the imitative in the original and of the original in the imitative. On the other side of this dialectic, rejecting nationalism while embracing what might be seen as a more cosmopolitan perspective is equally problematic (SZEMAN, 2001, p. 31).

What Szeman (2001) endorses here is the possibility, for Brazil and Canada, of allowing both perspectives to enter into an epistemological dialogue. The traditions mentioned by the author, marked by “rejecting the national” or “rejecting the cosmopolitan”, might not be the most advisable archetypes for one to resort to when dealing with the local versus universal and self versus other ambivalences. Historically, in the author’s view, these kinds of cultural isolationisms have proved to be unrealistic and unmanageable, for after one touches or is touched by the foreign the emergence of diasporic and fragmented identities can no longer be avoided. The “imitative in the original” and “the original in the imitative” are side effects of cultural transition. The nationalist desires which assume xenophobic lineaments are, in this sense, obstacles in the path of both Brazilian and Canadian endeavours to situate their culture against those who have marginalised such cultures. Then, for the creation of this fresh but healthy cultural body one must be aware that s/he can never be “successful in eliminating the contagion of the foreign”. Moreover, and perhaps specially, one must accept that such attempts would bring no benefits for a tradition whose will is to be seen as different when compared to hegemonic culture, since this is exactly what hegemony has always been trying to do.

In the national sphere this creation of a supposedly healthy culture and/or identity takes place departing from a very simple question but that requires a not so simple answer: “What of the search for Canada? This search comprises the endeavours in the journey towards recognising, and perhaps, but not necessarily, understanding the intangible Canada within the tangible one” (ITWARU, 1990, p. 19). Again, we return to the argument that there is no

brand-new starting point for identities to emerge; identities have emerged, are emerging, and will emerge, with no temporal or spatial constraints for this to happen, it is happening all the time. We cannot describe a nation, but the nation does exist. Understanding “the intangible Canada” is, nonetheless, essential for the tangible one to be acknowledged. In this sense, Itwaru (1990) advocates for what he calls “the dialectics of invention and meaning-making” wherefrom what is abstract, idealised, desired, and reflected upon are allowed to speak with that which is lived, experienced, and concrete. This is so for there is no possible division between materiality and immateriality, the immeasurable dualism takes place through a permeable plasma membrane that allows subject’s identities to be interwoven.

In this never-ending journey there is no exact point of departure or point of arrival since “‘that which one becomes’ is the arrival at a point of departure in the continual search of meaning” (ITWARU, 1990, p. 20). As I have said, and herein reiterate, the issue of national identity has been thoroughly discussed in humanities, but the discussion is hardly tiresome or innocuous inasmuch as this is a theme of paramount importance in contemporaneity. Within such picture of a national establishment and questioning, discourse – literary and nonliterary – emerges as an essential tool for contributing to distinct agendas in the process of the construction of a nation. In the article “The discursive construction of national identities” (1999), by Rudolf de Cillia *et al*, discourse can in this sense actually play rather distinct roles in what regards the (de) construction of nation; in their view “[t]he very interrelated but conflicting processes of nationalist regression and emancipating, supranational humanitarianism manifest themselves discursively in different modes of legitimising and delegitimising” (151). Discourse, therefore, can be deployed as a means to reinforce universal approaches towards nation – those that entail the construction of a homogeneous and all-embracing social organisation – just as it can also be used as a tool to put such approaches into question – a device for allowing more marginal versions of national reviewed scenes to come into place. “National identities – conceived as specific forms of social identities – are discursively, by means of language and other semiotic systems, produced, reproduced, transformed and destructed”.

The manipulation of national identities has, in this sense, always been an intricate and multifaceted one whose emergence dates back in history. The idea of nation as a “community of congenial similars and regarded as sovereign can be traced back to its secular ‘roots’ in the era of Enlightenment and of the French Revolution when the sovereign state came to equate and symbolize the concept of liberty” (CILLIA, 1999, p. 154). After its carefully prearranged emergence, subjects began to mistakenly assume that their national

identity is a synonym of their personal freedom – even though it has actually often meant the very opposite. The role of discourse is thus one that cannot be overlooked – it is the channel whereby specific peoples are united or turned against one another in a national macrostructure. As a matter of fact, mostly, it is through the very effective dissemination of hegemonic discourses and the suppression of marginal ones that “nations are represented in the minds and memories of the nationalized subjects as sovereign and limited political units and can become very influential guiding ideas with sometimes tremendously serious and destructive consequences” (CILLIA, 1999, p. 153). The consequences of these political and social ideas that portray the nation as a specific sovereign and encompassing sphere – one that requires the subject to be proud and/or confident about his or her national identity – are inserted within the minds of these nationalised subjects. Ultimately, “the idea of a specific national community becomes reality in the realm of convictions and beliefs through reifying, figurative discourses launched continually” (CILLIA, 1999, p. 153).

Discursively, therefore, subjects are convinced that they share one single identity – that they live within the very same “Imagined Community”, as Anderson (1996) would demonstrate – which is concrete, stable, and essentialising. This, as one could easily identify, has not taken place randomly; the construction of national identity is part of the hegemonic political agenda to convince us that we are brothers and sisters of the ones who are restrained within the same frontiers that are only hardly liable to be transgressed. This is so because “nations are perceived as limited by boundaries and thereby cut off from the surrounding nations, because no nation identifies with humanity in its entirety” (ANDERSON, 1996, p. 171). Nevertheless, when one sheds a light on the process of national reinforcement – rather than just absorbing the discourses surrounding it – s/he would actually be capable of realising that things are not so simple. There is no such thing as “the one and only national identity in an essentialising sense, but rather different identities are discursively constructed according to context, to the social field, the situational setting of the discursive act and the topic being discussed” (ANDERSON, 1996, p. 180). A nation might be seen differently depending on what response is needed from its inhabitants in different contextual moments; this detail per se, it seems, clearly demystifies national homogeneity and is in itself an evidence that “national identities are actually not completely consistent, stable and immutable” (CILLIA, 1999, p. 154).

Concerning such conflict between the consistency and concreteness of national identity, which flies in the face of its more likely fragmentation and fluidity, we now move back to the specific case of Canada – also conscious that, in many terms, it is rather distant

from the Brazilian case. After this brief contextualization on the issue of national identity, one could ask him/herself how literature can be thought of as a discursive means either to reinforce a homogeneous approach to nation or to allow other, more hybrid, perceptions towards it, to be shaped. Attempts to create “a national literature in Canada have developed on the interface of metropolis and hinterland, of written and oral literary models, pitting high European cultural models against the oral narrative of North American experience” (GODARD, 2001, p. 59). Therefore, to say that a Canadian writer who emphasises the hinterland or the rural is acting condescendingly is, perhaps, misleading. Canadian writing does not need to turn itself completely to the urban, civilised, hegemonic models, for it has developed on the interface of metropolis and hinterland, it does not need to have an extremely noble language and/or accent – for whatever that means – since its linguistic tradition has developed on the interface of written and oral literary models. What has indeed is to change is the questionably and excessively judgmental eye that is generally directed to those literary devices that are usually deemed a “flaw” symptomatic of “inferior productions” just because their linear development takes place in a distinct way when compared to already institutionalised literary structures.

Nevertheless, in order to question a traditional view deemed essentially inaccurate and/or imprecise, anyone would agree that a distinct view has, consequently, to be proposed. And it is here that we return to the matter of Canadian geographical and temporal condition as put forth by Itwaru (1990), who agrees that the search for a tangible nation requires new epistemes for the social meaning entailed by such inquiry. “The search for Canada is the search for that which constitutes an arrival at some dimension of social meaning within the contours of the geographically tangible landscape named Canada” (ITWARU, 1990, p. 18). Such query stands for a fundamental process of identity positioning in a world that aims at imposing preconceived roles for the marginalised subjects. It is in this sense that, if the national imaginary has been able to endorse central perceptions concerning the creation of idealised identity, it is also a reconceptualisation of the national imaginary that might ultimately help subjects to be actively recreated and to actively recreate. “Canada, out there, that land mass, this terrain, is also here, in us uncreated, evolving; it is *our* invention which invents us” (ITWARU, 1990, p. 19). This act of creation thus takes place throughout an unending process of inventing and being invented, wherein a new look towards regional and universal ideals are required as not to neglect or overstress such notions. That is, if the nation invents the subject as well as the subject invents his/her nation, after realising how the process of national identity elaboration has taken place throughout history as to serve the needs of

hegemonic interests, one could endeavour to make amends for swerving the direction of such process.

If more marginal and hybrid discourses are allowed not only to take place but actually to be listened as carefully as the hegemonic perception of nation has traditionally occurred, the nation could very likely be reinvented as a heterogeneous sphere; one which embraces the different, regional, specific not as to assimilate it but to learn from it. One can get to the conclusion that, in the logic of the nation there is only otherisation; political sovereignty has invented an idea of “self” that does not exist, it has created an image of abstract ideal inhabitant to which every real inhabitants are “others”. On the other hand, and even though Canada does not have to turn a blind eye to all regional features that are part of its history, the country’s identity reconstruction should, indeed, be redesigned against the so common stereotypes that became globally responsible for misrepresenting its temporal and spatial atmosphere through the misinterpretation of the regional sphere. Apropos, this preconceived Canadian prototype is out there also because, and just like it happened in Brazil (specially during the 18th century), “historically, most of the earliest records of Canada were explorers’ accounts, the best-known of which appeared in London at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (ITWARU, 1990, p. 17). This issue of having anyone or anything described through the accounts of explorers who materially place themselves in the space they are depicting is something that deserves special attention. This is because the language of the explorer is capable of granting fictional characters and tales with an “authentic armour”; that is, the scientific status of travel writing provides images which are stronger than “simple literature”.

This occurs in the sense of the readers’ mistaken sensation of absence of fiction and emergence of truth when what is assumed in travel writing is compared with more evidently fictitious genres – such as that of poetry or novel – even though, in the fictive sense, there is no difference in level among such genres whatsoever. I dare that, like the poet, the travel writer creates and describes an elusive image of what he/she sees – no interpretation is synonymic of truth for every interpreter is doomed to let its contextual parameters influence (both conscious and unconsciously) any process of meaning-making. The object gazed depends on the eyes of the gazer. Today, nonetheless, we are aware that explorers’ accounts are not generally worried about becoming “faithful” representations of their experiences, but the romantic imaginary created in the past is already there. Notwithstanding the fact that there are no real representations since any representation is already an interpretation, in what concerns the political and social air which usually permeates the context of production of

travel accounts one has to be pretty careful not to be deceived by the explorers' questionable agendas. As it happened in Brazil when travellers like Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) came to the Amazon looking for exotic images and enchanted tales to mesmerise their readers, the European and U.S.A. explorers who visited Canada wanted to impress their readers with magic, exuberant, and idiosyncratic sagas which did not need, necessarily, to be based on "reality".

George Munro Grant's *Ocean to Ocean: Sandford Fleming's Expedition Through Canada* (1872) was originally published in Toronto by the Rose Belford Publishing Company. After a close reading of the book, with particular attention to its narrative method, its structure, and its recurring themes, any reader should identify its fictional and inventive apparatuses. Grant "was no mere diarist but rather a prose writer of some considerable talent who has produced an important document in Canadian cultural history" (JACKEL, 1979, p. 5). Not simply a portrait of Canada, "*Ocean to Ocean* gives us a vision of social and political relationships akin to that afforded by the major Victorian novelists, an expression of the aspirations and ideals of an influential segment of nineteenth-century Canada" (JACKEL, 1979, p. 7). Therefore, and as well observed by Jackel, what we see in Grant's work is not so much a vision of the west as it was in 1872 but of the west as Canada of the post-Confederation period wanted it to be. The book, it seems, is a compilation of Grant's (1872) versions of what he saw – a fictional experience of the atmosphere surrounding him similar to that of a romantic poet. Nevertheless, "Grant himself insisted that *Ocean to Ocean* was not a work of art; for him, the book was simply a Diary" (JACKEL, 1979, p. 15). Jackel brings up the fact that, in his introduction, "Grant says that the book consists of notes presented to the public just as they were written so that his readers might see, as far as possible, a photograph of what we saw and thought from day to day" (JACKEL, 1979, p. 9). We now know nonetheless that any diary is biased; and that the photograph of a landscape taken by the travel writer is one that has been painted through his/her subjective and personal experience therein.

Paul Kane's *Wanderings of an artist among the Indians of North America: from Canada to Vancouver's Island and Oregon through the Hudson's Bay Company's territory and back again* (1859) was originally published in London by Longman Publishing House. The book "is modest in appearance, yet it has an interesting and important place in the history of Canadian art and ethnography" (DAVIS, 1986, p. 16) because it successfully combines elements of travel literature, ethnography and art. In the travel book, Kane (1859) records in the form of a diary, and with dozens of paintings made by himself, "incidents and interactions he has with both white and aboriginal peoples in the western parts of what is now Canada and

the north western parts of what is now the United States” (DAVIS, 1986, p. 18). The publishing of the book made Kane an acknowledged celebrity at the time, reason why he is contemporaneously widely considered to be one of Canada’s first artists of national significance. As mentioned, besides his notes the book included portraits, clothes, sacred and everyday objects and live aboriginal models – the last being quite problematic and surprising in the contemporaneity but, as a matter of fact, quite common in the XVIII century. For writing the book Kane’s motivation, like that of most travel writers from the period, was rather straightforward; he “packed up his artists' materials as well as his gun and headed into the ‘pathless forest’ to see ‘the aboriginals of this country in their original state’ and ‘study their native manners and customs’” (DAVIS, 1986, p. 19). Likewise, even though the idea was – as it often is – to describe a “real” image of the travel writer’s trip, Kane consciously adopts romantic artistic conventions and presents the environment as a vital component. He does so “incorporating great banks of stormy clouds, dramatic patches of sunlight, and carefully executed details of flora – all contributing in an important way to the total effect” (DAVIS, 1986, p. 13). The setting, once again, becomes much more fictional than it was supposedly believed to be. Much of the landscape in his paintings is in soft focus – much more atmospheric than realistic. The features of the landscape and trees are not so finely rendered as to make them discernible as a particular type or to mark them as distinctly “Canadian”. In the end, the portraits especially interpret aboriginal people in a manner sympathetic with British and continental views of the exotic other – which is also a process Brazilians are rather accustomed to. In the travel book there is no innovation in the manner whereby Canadian space and natives were understood; going to the same direction that most travel writers have gone, “*Wanderings* certainly reveals more about what westerners’ thought than what aboriginal people were” (DAVIS, 1986, p. 19).

At the moment when they were written, travel books like *Ocean to Ocean* (GRANT, 1872) and *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America* (KANE, 1859) were understood as genuine representations of the Canadian native population and of its spatial and temporal configuration. We now know that, when it goes to travel writing, this is never the case for any representation is already fictional in its essence. Every travel writer carries with him or her beliefs, principles, and intentions whose impact on his/her writing is far from being minor – if what we see is capable of transforming our eyes, our eyes are also capable of transforming what we see. Moreover, in the specific moment when such trips to Canada were trendily taking place, the exotic character of explorers’ accounts mixed such exoticism and romanticism to moments of a supernatural return to “nature” and to the “animal” human

instincts. These ended up serving another purpose since they created an interest because they coincided with a taste for primitivism occurring as a rebound from what was seen as the excessively sophisticated elegance and artifice of the age of Pope. As a matter of fact, explorers wrote what they knew would sell for it would be read as innovative and different at that moment. In their proposal of a product to satisfy readers, they were not worried about possible side effects of their books (as many other writers still behave today), and now we are compelled to deal with the consequences of such problematic ideals of national identities. For the romanticisation of a nation, literature surfaces then as both the problem and the solution. That shall never change.

FINAL REMARKS: A DIFFERENT INSPIRATION FOR IDENTITY (IES)

Having become a Western industrial nation in the terms of globalisation, and having distanced itself from a more marginal locus into a more central one, the common sense of identity was finally redefined for Canada through the mirror of major nations. In the same period, in parallel, “as Canada was slowly starting establishing itself in the nineteenth century, Europe was experiencing the growth of nationalism, which saw the birth of modern Germany and Italy” (RICHARD, 2012, p. 4). Nationalism proved thus to be an essential tool for the social, political, and economic organisation of a regional unit; the birth of renewed states was only available for those capable of imposing such ideal and of influencing subjects into a homogenous understanding of their conditioning as inhabitants of a given space. Unfortunately, at least in hegemonic terms, “Canada had no equivalent national heritage; if anything, the marriage between traditionally rival cultures in Canada, required a different inspiration for this country” (RICHARD, 2012, p. 5). What Richard names the marriage between these supposedly rival cultures has to do with the Francophone and Anglophone division of Canada that started with its colonial settlements and which continues until the contemporaneity – if any nation has trouble to establish its national identity, such detail makes the task even harder for the Canadian context. The literary text enters the scene here for it is still one of the most effective tools to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct how the nation is idealised.

Literature is an artistic artifact, and as an artistic artifact it constructs meanings which would never be available in other context and by other means. “Art is an important form of conveying national identity as it is often displayed in national museums, meant to embody the country’s history and culture” (RICHARD, 2012, p. 7). Art is the method whereby the

national identity often gains shape without losing its abstract condition; it is the method whereby the national identity becomes presented not as a given but as a representation. Nevertheless, if what makes literature an interesting source of meaning is the fact that it distances itself from more hegemonic and profiteering communication channels, many other instances design the nation based on the profit that can be made out from such designing. This institutionalisation of national identities consists in the process of branding the nation; “‘branding the nation’ has become an important topic of discussion in Canada as many companies are currently relying heavily on using stereotypes and national symbols to sell their products” (RICHARD, 2012, p. 9). Thus, the strength of the capitalist functioning of global interactions has generally guided the necessity of devising homogeneous meanings for national identities that, in the end, are actually useless. There is no need to homogenise meanings, only to allow them to emerge; the ultimate consequence of such process is the rhetoric reality gap. “The ‘rhetoric reality gaps’ that emerge in the formation of Canadian identity are extremely problematic as they paint a false picture for Canadians and the rest of the world of the national myth” (RICHARD, 2012, p. 15). The national myth is nothing but a myth, and as a myth, its reality gaps can only be filled in by its illusory meanings. Myths can destroy us; but they can also help us resurrect as nations.

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Recebido em: 10/02/2017.

Aceito em: 06/04/2017.