CANADA IN THE MAKING:

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

LE CANADA EN DEVENIR:

perspectives interdisciplinaires sur la diversité culturelle et linguistique

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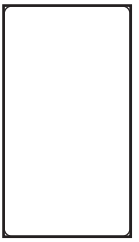

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Alias Canada, the Land of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Mirko Casagranda

In Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), Simon Jordan, an American doctor with an interest in cerebral diseases and nervous affections, is tasked with evaluating the mental health of "celebrated murderess"[1] Grace Marks by Reverend Enoch Verringer. The churchman wishes to set the young woman free by proving that she is either innocent or mentally instable and consequently not to be blamed for the crime she is serving her sentence for at Kingston Penitentiary. Soon after his arrival on the shores of Lake Ontario, Dr. Jordan has a sort of intuition when his landlady's maid opens the door of his room and brusquely lays down the breakfast tray in front of him:

> Simon has a fleeting and unbidden image of her, strung up by the ankles in a butcher-shop window, with cloves stuck into her and a rind on her like a sugared ham. The association of ideas is truly remarkable, he thinks, once one begins to observe its operations in one's own mind. Dora – Pig – Ham, for instance. In order to get from the first term to the third, the second term is essential; though from the first to the second, and from the second to the third, is no great leap. He must make a note of it: *Middle term essential* (Atwood 1996: 69).

Let us also make a note of the concept of middle term, which I would like to further discuss in this introduction, and leave it aside for a moment as it is first necessary to point out a few features of Atwood's novel in support of my hypothesis that it can be read as a metaphor for Canada and its cultural and linguistic diversity.

First of all, Grace Marks the character is based on the historical figure of an Irish immigrant who in 1843 was convicted, togeth-

[1] The epithet was famously introduced by Susanna Moodie in her novel *Life in the Clearings* (1853).

er with James McDermott, of the murders of their master, Captain Thomas Kinnear, and his housekeeper – and rumoured lover – Nancy Montgomery. Both were sentenced to death, but Grace's sentence was converted to life imprisonment due to her young age – she was 16 – and her sex. She was pardoned after nearly 30 years, and there is no historical record of her life after that moment.

In its clever blurring of history and fiction, *Alias Grace* is a compelling example of what Linda Hutcheon defines "historiographic metafiction", i.e. a work where "the theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs [...] is made the grounds for [a] rethinking and reworking of forms and contents of the past" (1988: 5). As a matter of fact, by the parodic use of historical intertextual elements (Staels 2000: 428), Atwood disrupts the realistic conventions of the historical novel, especially the concept of 'truth', and rather than construct her narrative on what is remembered, she privileges what is forgotten and questions the reliability of individual and collective memory.

In *Alias Grace*, there is no one truth only – the reader is never told whether Grace is actually guilty – but a plurality of (possible) truths, and the central historical facts, i.e. the murders, are never fully revealed because they cannot be remembered by the protagonist. Even though it is set between the 1840s and 1860s, *Alias Grace* tells a very contemporary story because it questions the objectivity of history and the linearity of time, i.e. the time of storytelling. Grace the narrator does not say she knows and remembers everything as in the Victorian novel, but she obliquely admits that perhaps she will tell lies, that her vision of the past is blotched, and that her memories are fragmented.

The novel is divided into 15 parts, each introduced by the reproduction and the name of a quilt pattern – which is also the title of each section – and a set of epigraphs from historical documents and literary works[2]. The epigraphs are intertextual references that dialogue with the first and third-person narrative voice in the following chapters and contribute to the interpreta-

[2] Among the historical documents, for instance, there are newspaper articles, excerpts from Grace's confession, and a letter Susanna Moodie, who visited the penitentiary during Grace's stay, wrote to Richard Bentley in 1858. On the other hand, the literary works include, among others, poems by Alfred Tennyson, Christina Rossetti, Robert Browning, and Emily Dickinson.

tion of the text. The whole architecture of the novel can be seen as a metaphorical patchwork whose possibilities in terms of storytelling and characterisation are consciously exploited by Atwood. As pointed out by Sharon Wilson, there is a strong connection between women's handicraft activities and storytelling, and "Grace uses the conversational style characteristic of folktales, and accompanies it with the folk activity of quilting" (2003: 126). Not only is the novel a combination of historical scraps and "narratological variations" (Blanc 2006: 112) but also an 'othering' device that rejects "the mono-vision of traditional histories" (Michael 2001: 421) and represents historical events and figures through juxtaposition, which, in turn, subverts the linearity usually associated with history and storytelling.

If one posits that 1) handcrafting is associated with storytelling and the representation of history as a narrative account; 2) "the patchwork quilt comes to represent the determining paradox of the novel: that of making present meaning from traces of the past" (Murray 2001: 66); and 3) Grace as an ambiguous and untrustworthy narrator can be read through the patchwork quilt metaphor (Rogerson 1998: 5), one can safely claim that there is indeed a correspondence between Grace – the storyteller, the fictional character, the historical figure – and the novel. Going back to Dr. Jordan's intuition, one could easily draw the following association: "novel – patchwork quilt – Grace". However, given Grace's role as one of the narrators, it could be said that from the first to the third term there is no big leap.

It is by considering other elements in the text that I believe it is possible to take a bigger hermeneutical leap. Another feature of historiographic metafiction to be found in *Alias Grace* is the combination of a realistic narrative with fantastic intertexts, motifs, and archetypal images deriving from ancient myths, the gothic novel, the folktale, and the occult. Together with the poems quoted at the beginning of each section, they contribute to the creation of meaning within the novel. The fact that historical episodes – be them part of the epigraphs or the plot (e.g. the 1837-1838 Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada and the American Civil War) – are presented together with literary intertexts seems to suggest not only that they are a – or possibly *the* – key to interpret the novel, but also that the novel itself is an adaptation of the intertexts (Hutcheon 2013). The epigraph to part XIII, "Pandora's

Box", is of particular interest in this regard as it includes the following poem by Emily Dickinson:

> I felt a Cleaving in my Mind –
> As if my Brain had split –
> I tried to match it – Seam by Seam –
> But could not make it fit.
> (Atwood 1996: 458)

Together with excerpts from a letter by Susanna Moodie and Tennyson's poem "Maud", it introduces the part where Grace is hypnotised by Jeremiah the Peddler, alias Monsieur DuPont, and she seems to be possessed by the spirit of her old friend Mary Whitney, as if after her death she 'lived' inside Grace and controlled her when the murders took place. From a paranormal perspective, Mary Whitney did participate in the murders of Nancy and Mr. Kinnear and her spirit pushed James McDermott to kill them – "'I told James to do it. I urged him to. I was there all along!'" (*ibid*: 468). The very same scene can also be read from a scientific and psychoanalytic point of view (as DuPont and Jordan do), according to which Grace's would be a case of double personality, which explains why she has no memory of what happened[3]. The inclusion of Dickinson's poem hints at such a 'split identity' – the "Cleaving" in the poem echoes Grace/Mary's words, "'Cleft for me… Let me hide myself, in thee…'" (*ibid*.: 467) – and Grace's struggle to reconcile the two parts.

If one thinks of the history of Canada and the 'cleavage' between Francophones and Anglophones, a parallel between Grace and the country can be drawn by applying the association mechanism devised by Dr. Jordan as follows: "Grace – split identity – Canada". The overlapping of Grace's body, the novel's body,

[3] The episode can also be interpreted from a class perspective as Mary Whitney was a supporter of the 1837-1838 Rebellions. The murder of a symbol of British colonial power in North America – Captain Thomas Kinnear – by two lower-class members of Irish origin would thus be a kind of actualisation of the failed uprisings with the spirit of Mary Whitney taking action through Grace Marks's body. In this respect, it is no coincidence that when Grace and James McDermott flee to the United States she uses her late friend's name and that the label "Grace Marks alias Mary Whitney" is found on the cover of her "Confession" under her portrait, which reinforces the overlapping of the two characters/identities Atwood explores and unfolds at several levels in the novel.

and Canada's body, i.e. the novel as a patchwork quilt of historical documents, literary intertexts, and narratives stitched together, and the novel as a metaphor for Canada as a mosaic of languages, cultures, and histories, is validated by the inclusion of another text type that mimics real-life documents, i.e. the letter. As a matter of fact, in some sections of the text the first- and third-person narrative is complemented by an epistolary exchange between Dr. Jordan and other doctors, members of his family, or other characters.

Following the genre stylistic conventions, each letter is introduced by the name and address of the receiver, the name and address of the sender, and the date. Putting this information together, it is possible to trace the making of Canada as a political entity between 1859, when the narrative begins, and the 1870s, when Grace if finally pardoned and moves to the state of New York. One must remember that after the 1837-1838 failed Rebellions, the Durham Report on the Affairs of British North America (1839) suggested the unification of the two Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, which was eventually set forth the following year by the *Act of Union* (1840) and the creation of the Province of Canada, which, in turn, was divided into Canada West and Canada East (Bothwell 2006: 183-186).

The letters between 1859 and 1862 include "Kingston, Canada West" as the receiver's or sender's address. Those are the years in which Grace's 'split identity' emerges during hypnosis (1859) and she is confirmed guilty of the double murder (1863). At the end of the novel, however, the letters dating October 15, 1867, and November 1, 1867, refer to "Toronto, Ontario, The Dominion of Canada", marking the shift to the new political configuration of the country. A few years later, in 1872, Grace is released from prison and her narrative ends in "The Tree of Paradise" section with the description of a patchwork quilt in which three of the triangles composing the Tree represent Mary Whitney, Nancy Montgomery and herself, i.e. the female characters of the novel that at different levels and with different outcomes had to face patriarchy and fight to let their voices be heard:

> But three of the triangles in my Tree will be different. One will be white, from the petticoat I still have that was Mary Whitney's; one will be faded yellowish, from the prison nightdress I begged as a keepsake when I left there. And the third will be a pale cot-

> ton, a pink and white floral, cut from the dress of Nancy's that she had on the first day I was at Mr. Kinnear's, and that I wore on the ferry to Lewiston, when I was running away.
> I will embroider around each one of them with red feather-stitching, to blend them in as part of the pattern.
> And so we will be all together (Atwood 1996: 534).

In her last handicraft work, Grace unifies the female identities of her story and turns them into a tapestry that recalls the mosaic metaphor used to describe Canada in the 20th century. If we posit the validity of the association "Grace – split identity – Canada", I believe that the confederation of the provinces of British North America in 1867 is echoed by the unification of the different identities/voices/spirits that frantically coexisted within Grace Marks until the 1860s, and her finally coming to terms with them. The Tree of Paradise she stitches together has a therapeutic function as she finally finds peace – "paradise" – only by reconciling those fragmented selves and memories in a cohesive new whole[4].

Hence, the imagery of the patchwork quilt, which is pivotal in the novel but also in Canadian history, stands for the plurality of female voices in the text and their reappropriation of oral history and storytelling. The juxtaposition between Grace's narrative and the intertexts at the beginning of each section levels out their authority as

> [t]he various texts come to occupy equal status as neither/both valid and fiction/fabrication. By being placed side by side, all the texts that make up the novel begin to challenge one another's authority as well as any universal notion of the 'truth' (Michael 2001: 421).

Extending the association between the novel, Grace, and Canada a little bit further, the equal status of the textual elements theorised by Michel is paralleled by the supposedly equal status of the provinces in the Canadian confederation at its foundation and in the years to come. As the federal policies of the last

[4] The symbolic association between a character's mental health and a country seems to be confirmed in *Alias Grace* by the fact that after his return home and his participation in the American Civil War, Dr. Jordan suffers from a mental breakdown that reflects the laceration of the United States during the war.

150 years testify to, such an equality is sought after and (more or less successfully) promoted among the several communities of Canada that used to be compared to the pieces of a multicultural and multilingual mosaic with diversity as its fundamental glue[5]. Stretching the symbolism of the three triangles even further, I like to think of them as the 'founding peoples' of Canada: Indigenous Peoples, Francophones, and Anglophones. I believe that this image is particularly fitting also in terms of reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples because an additional parallel can be drawn between Grace's 'split identity' and her role in the murder of Nancy Montgomery, on the one hand, and the double European colonisation and the annihilation of Indigenous communities it caused, on the other. However, whereas Grace adds the piece of fabric symbolising Nancy soon after she starts her new life as a free woman, Canada as a country waited way too long before it was able to acknowledge its role in the systematic erasure of Indigenous cultures and to take action to change the Government's relationship with Indigenous People.

Canada's recent steps in this direction are to be seen as a manifestation of a quality that Will Kymlicka deems very Canadian, i.e. the ability to rely on, accommodate to, and take advantage of its intrinsic diversity:

> Canada's stability and prosperity – and indeed its very survival – depended on being able to respond constructively to new forms of diversity, and to develop new relationships of coexistence and cooperation, without undermining the (often-fragile) accommodations of older forms of diversity, which are themselves continually being contested and renegotiated (Kymlicka 2010: 302).

The emphasis on the role of diversity – be it ethnic, linguistic, cultural – has permeated Canada's public discourse since its foundation, first through an institutional and legislative formula that allowed the acknowledgement of the legacy of les Canadiens in the administration of the Dominion, then through policies that officially recognised multiculturalism and bilingualism as defining elements of Canadian society, and more recently through In-

[5] Over the last decade, however, the multicultural policies of Canada have been criticised for their inability to effectively impact society. In this regard, see, among others, Fleras (2015).

digenous reconciliation initiatives aimed at expanding the representativeness and participation of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities in the political life of the country.

Hence, the focus on diversity in Justin Trudeau's speech for Canada Day in 2017 – the 150th anniversary of Confederation – should come as no surprise. Despite its ecumenical tone, the Prime Minister's address on Parliament Hill was tailored around the need for inclusion and unity stemming from the fundamental value of diversity:

> We know true strength and resilience flows through Canadian diversity. [...] But let's not forget that if Canada is a genuine multicultural nation, open to the world, it's no coincidence. Indeed, the very unity of our country 150 years ago hinged on the acceptance of multiple languages and cultures. It hinged on the peaceful coexistence – and active cooperation – between people who were different from one another. [...] And so, diversity has always been at the very core of Canada over the centuries. It's the foundation upon which our country was built. [...] But we embrace that diversity, while knowing in our hearts that we are all Canadians (Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau 2017).

The centrality of cultural and linguistic diversity in defining Canadian identity over the last 150 years also reverberates in this collection of essays. Far from being a mere celebration of the achievements of a multicultural and multilingual country, the twenty-two papers in this volume question and sometimes challenge the very notion of Canadian identity based on diversity. In so doing, they form a sort of patchwork of interdisciplinary perspectives that I like to imagine as a set of quilt patters corresponding to the four parts the book is divided into.

The papers in the first section, "Making Canada / Faire le Canada", explore the very foundation of the country: from Anne Trépanier's examination of the representations of Confederation before 1867 in satirical newspapers, to Federico Pio Gentile's analysis of the language of the *British North America Acts* and Angela Buono's overview of the names employed to label Canada's several communities, from Mina Benson Hubbard's and Dillon Wallace's explorations of Labrador's waterways in Renata Oggero's article, to community involvement in institutional discourse about the Great Lakes in Marina Niceforo's paper.

The second section, "Future Memories, Past Dreams / Mémoires futures, rêves passes" is devoted to the representations of Canadianness in literary texts. While Biancamaria Rizzardi adopts the *katàbasis* paradigm to read the quintessential nature of 20th-century Canadian poetry, Carmen Concilio employs the narratological features illustrated in Margaret Atwood's *Survival* to frame environmentalism in Alissa York's *Fauna*. The way memory, trauma, family history, and past tragedies intertwine in prose writing is the *fil rouge* connecting Héliane Ventura's article about Alice Munro's short story "What Do You Want to Know For?", Éva Zsizsmann's paper on Tamas Dobozy's collection of short fiction *Siege 13*, and Salvatore Proietti's contribution on A.M. Klein's dystopias between Wells and the Holocaust. This section closes with an essay by Rocco De Leo on Leonard Cohen's 'poetry of defeat' and a paper by Antonella Guarino and Claudia Mignola on the redeeming albeit melancholy power of poetry in Jacques Brault's oeuvre.

The third section, "Languages in the Making / Langues en devenir", opens with Sabrina Francesconi's stylistic analysis of postmodification strategies in Alice Munro's short story "Carried Away". It then moves to tourism discourse with Alessandra De Marco's investigation of Canada as a destination brand exploiting the representations of the country's multicultural identity and Michaela Quadraro's multimodal analysis of a selection of Canadian blogs about Italy as a tourist destination. The discursive possibilities of blogs are explored also by Michele Bevilacqua in a his contribution on Quebecois terms in the posts written by French expatriates. A lexical perspective is adopted by Vincenzo Simoniello as well in his essay about terms of English and Quebecois origin in the language of information technology in French. The last paper in this section is Vittoria Massaro's diachronic investigation of the evolution of bilingualism in the Royal Canadian Navy over the last century.

Bilingualism and the coexistence of more than one language and culture in the same text are further explored in the essays collected in the last section, "Linguistic and Literary Migrations / Migrations linguistiques et littéraires". While Valeria Sperti applies François Jullien's theories on divergence and identity to Nancy Huston's self-translated *Limbes/Limbo* and *Bad Girl*, Alessandra Ferraro reads Françoise De Luca's "roman-par-nou-

velles" *Ving-quatre mille baisers* through the critical lens of *écriture migrante*. A similar perspective is adopted in Maura Felice's analysis of Felicia Mihali's *La bien-aimée de Kandahar* and Micol Forte's overview of Kim Thúy's fiction writing.

In its interdisciplinary exploration of cultural and linguistic diversity as one of the constitutive elements of Canadian identity in the making, this volume finally aims to answer one of Grace Marks's questions as if it were Canada itself posing it: "And I wonder, how can I be all of these different things at once?" (Atwood 1996: 25).

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I
MAKING CANADA / FAIRE LE CANADA

Le Canada, un mariage monstrueux?

Anne Trépanier

1. Introduction

Quel sera l'avenir politique du pays? Comment réconcilier autour d'un projet commun tous les intérêts discordants? Comment préserver les cultures locales dans une citoyenneté englobante? Comment gérer la relation politique et culturelle avec les États-Unis? Comment rendre compte des soixante langues autochtones existantes et des centaines de langues immigrantes que parlent les Canadiens issus de l'immigration récente? De la même façon, ces questions se posaient déjà à l'aube de la Confédération. Comment imaginait-on la Confédération avant qu'elle ne se réalise? Comment se représentait-on le Canada de l'avenir? Quelles inquiétudes ont surgi pendant les années précédant la création du Canada de 1867? Sachant que le Canada est maintenant un pays qui génère des images mentales de grands espaces et de diversité humaine, cet article identifie des représentations communes de ce qu'allait être la Confédération, répondant ainsi à la question centrale de ce recueil: qu'est-ce qui lie les Canadiens depuis plus de 150 ans?

Les journaux de l'époque rendent compte des imaginations des uns et des autres et révèlent, avec des mots et des images, des environnements de pensée, de critique et de rire qui deviennent des traces historiques de représentations passées d'un avenir projeté. Autant les phrases grammaticales sont raccourcies par la forme des nouveaux gabarits imposés par les presses, autant les images sont importantes pour comprendre les formes que prennent les questions, les peurs et les critiques du projet de confédération. En m'intéressant d'abord aux caricatures, je déclare mon intérêt pour les figures de style et en particulier pour les métonymies et synecdoques – princesses des métaphores – qui réussissent à informer les lecteurs d'aujourd'hui sur l'imaginaire d'alors et donnent à voir des opinions, des représentations, des limites et des ambitions. Comment faire un état des lieux de la commu-

nauté d'esprit des habitants des provinces de l'Amérique du Nord britannique qui allaient entrer dans la Confédération le 1er juillet 1867?

Entre 1844 et 1867, sur les cinq territoires de l'Amérique du Nord britannique, les journaux font circuler des illustrations dont les thèmes se répètent: les monstres, dont l'hydre et la pieuvre, la famille, le mariage ou des scènes de ménage. Ces allégories sont nombreuses mais elles n'expriment pas nécessairement la même chose. Aussi, certaines représentations sont-elles parentes, mais les sens qui leur sont donnés divergent selon les intérêts, les craintes et les peurs, le sentiment de droit ou d'injustice du lieu intellectuel, physique et culturel d'où proviennent les journaux, quelque part dans l'espace qui deviendra le Canada.

2. Un pays imaginé

Cet article vise à expliciter un imaginaire dont les thèmes centraux sont imprimés dans les colonnes des journaux du milieu du XIXe siècle. Entre la peur de la Confédération et le rêve d'un royaume du Canada – on ne sait pas encore qu'il deviendra un seul Dominion – les textes et les images de ce Canada-à-naître sont très riches pour rendre "l'humeur générale du pays"[1] en devenir. En effet, le Canada-à-venir imaginé par la presse satirique et la presse d'opinion est un espace habité par un amalgame de tensions où les questions de nationalité, de vertu et d'unité sont personnifiées pour mieux être célébrées ou démolies.

Les caricatures "canadiennes" de différentes époques ont été étudiées de près par plusieurs, et font l'objet de grands travaux de recherche concertés. Mais force est de constater que leur analyse

[1] Je remercie Alexandre Turgeon auquel j'emprunte cette formulation. L'article original "Représentations de la Confédération comme mise en abyme du Canada-à-renaître. Perspectives de recherche" a été publié dans la revue *Recherches sociographiques* (Trépanier 2015). Celui-ci a donné lieu à deux versions ultérieures, la présente et une autre portant plus spécifiquement sur la Conférence de 1864 (Trépanier 2016). Enfin, *De l'hydre au castor, imaginaire et représentations de la Confédération dans la presse de l'Amérique du Nord britannique (1844-1867)*, un livre qui reprend une partie de ce chapitre, a été publié chez Septentrion en 2024. Il a reçu le "Prix du Meilleur livre en études canadiennes 2024".