

## EN ROUTE: NARRATIVES OF TRAVEL AND DISPLACEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN WRITING

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*ABSTRACT. From a fictional as well as a theoretical point of view, the present interest in travel is a consequence of the increasing relevance of postcolonial discourses and the ongoing processes of cultural transference and globalisation. These phenomena have resulted in a re-conceptualisation of notions of identity, location, place and site, which foster, in turn, the rethinking of terms like home, margin and periphery. Most of these have been targeted by post-structuralist and postcolonial theories in their attempt at disrupting unified and imperialist conceptions of subjectivity and place. In Canadian fiction, the abiding relativism affecting notions of culture and nation elaborated on binary pairs is laid bare by physical and metaphorical displacement.*

*This paper examines the arena of de/re-territorialisation provided by travel and displacement in a number of Canadian fictions. Many contemporary Canadian narratives are cohesively joined by the recurrent motifs of travel and displacement, paralleling the geographical movement to a re-organisation of identity paradigms at personal, cultural and national levels. Hence, the sample of Canadian writing presented here exhibits a concern with journeying as destabilization of unified subjectivity, mirroring, in this way, much of the debate of contemporary theory.*

Once you cross a border,  
the border is not the same any longer.  
-Erin Mouré

In her book *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (2000 [1996]), Caren Kaplan claims that the contemporary emphasis on

movement and travel has been prompted by the increasing relevance of postcolonial discourses (2000: 2)<sup>1</sup>. Such an impulse triggers the ongoing negotiation of terms like identity, location, place and site, provoking a demystification of precepts like home, inside, outside, centre, margin and periphery. Most of these concepts have been interrogated by the episodes of global circulation of capital and people. Additionally, they have come to be the target of post-structuralist and postcolonial theories in their attempt at avoiding the consolidation of structures of systematised knowledge vis-à-vis unified and imperialist conceptions of subjectivity and place. Questions of displacement feature prominently in contemporary postcolonial fiction all over the world, and Canadian writing is not an exception<sup>2</sup>. The relevance of space as deeply influential on paradigms of personal and national identity is widely deployed by novels like Aritha van Herk's *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* (1986), *Places far from Ellesmere* (1990) or *Restlessness* (1998); Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) and *The English Patient* (1992), Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* (1991), Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* (1995) or Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, not Here* (1997)<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, many of these texts seem to incorporate Kaplan's (2000: 7) assertion that, "for many of us there is no possibility of staying at home, in the conversational sense, the word has changed to the point that these domestic, national or marked spaces no longer exist".

From the intersection of the postcolonial and post-structuralist axes, this paper explores how travel and displacement provide in a number of Canadian narratives the arena for the de/re-territorialisation of notions of national identity, unified subjectivity and home. The lack of consensus on what constitutes the Canadian nation and Canadian culture is the groundwork for a

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1. A shorter, slightly different version of this paper was presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> Conference on Canadian Studies held at the Centre for Canadian Studies in the University of La Laguna. December, 2001.

2. The postcolonial condition of Canada has been, and still is, a matter of debate. Linda Hutcheon (1991) opines that the only people deserving to be labelled 'postcolonial' in Canada are the First Nations, since it is they that have suffered a vicious displacement and deprivation of their history. In contrast, neither Diana Brydon (1991; 1995) nor Donna Bennett (1993-94) hesitate in considering Canada as a postcolonial territory undergoing that stage of difference and complicity with the cultural modes of the European mother countries. Between one pole and the other, Alan Lawson (1995) speaks of a 'second world', more attentive to the Canadian specificity between coloniser and colonised.

3. I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pointing out the importance of some of these titles for the study of the interrelation between space and identity proposed here. His/her comments greatly contributed to my rereading of the works included and helped in a reorganisation of the information provided in the following pages.

first displacement in these narratives, one that moves the national identity/culture problematic onto a terrain of regional and/or international peculiarities. In these pages, therefore, displacement is both metaphorical and literal, since many contemporary Canadian fictions also echo a postmodern geography that emphasises shiftiness, tense locations and mobility (see Peach 1997), in other words, they opt for an en route dynamics. From diverse angles, Canadian writing problematises postulates of inheritance and tradition through travel and displacement, since as Iain Chambers (1995: 115) writes,

Travel, migration and movement invariably bring us up against the limits of our inheritance. We may choose to withdraw from this impact and only select a confirmation of our initial views. [...] We could, however, opt to slacken control to let ourselves go, and respond to the challenge of a world that is more extensive than the one we have been accustomed to inhabiting. To choose the second path involves undoing the ties and directions that once held us to a particular centre. It is to disturb and interrupt our sense of place with a set of questions.

In this context, postcolonial Canadian fiction bears witness to the unsettling of colonial geography as part of the impulse to ‘write back’ that has been complicated by postmodern placelessness (Smethurst 1997: 373). Accordingly, the postcolonial and postmodern text unveils concepts like place, site and home as dependent on binaries of outside/inside. These, in turn, rely on the contrast between the known and the unknowable (Smethurst 1997: 374). It is in the interstitial zone between one and the other that the potential for the re-negotiation of identities resides, and consequently, many Canadian texts offer continuous re-definitions and re-territorialisations of culture, personal and national identity. In doing so, they confirm James Clifford’s opinion that “a location [...] is an itinerary rather than a bounded site, a series of encounters and translations”. (1999 [1997]: 11)

Showing an overt complicity with post-structuralist deterritorialisations, reterritorialisations and nomadic thought (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987), many Canadian texts written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are presided over by a concern with movement and multiple locations, an interest in avoiding ossification at various levels. Yet travelling and the changing positions that it delineates are apt for the idealisation of figures like the nomad, which, as Kaplan cautions (2000: 66), can only be presented through a colonialist discourse of orientalist overtones. Its frames conceal that any deterritorialisation is followed by a subsequent reterritorialisation likely to veil the partiality of the critic’s position. Furthermore, even when it tries to lay bare any dual and Manichean systematisation, nomadic thought implies a centre of subjectivity and a marginal area, reproducing the very lay-out that it intends to expose (Kaplan 2000: 86). Here and elsewhere in this paper, the nomadic is a critical consciousness that fosters the deconstruction of fixed identities, the

rejection of essentialism and the hierarchies established for the interpreting and decoding of identity binaries. With these ideas in mind, the readings that follow try to shed some light on the relevance of spatial considerations for the construction of identity in texts hardly studied for this regard. From the 1940s to the late 1990s, the Canadian novels and short stories we now turn to are never indifferent to the potentially productive interrelation between identity, movement and space, and show that “the struggle to define geography is a question of being. Where in the world are we? We yearn for a familiar perspective. We need geography, it seems. We invent. Geography as history; and history, geography. Place marking time, and time in place” (Moss 1994: 2).

Historically, Canadian fiction has been quite aware of the complexity of supporting pairs like inside/outside, centre/margin, home/away, which might account for the number of narratives that employ travel to undermine the solidification of these categories. The continuous flights to nature in novels like Marian Engel’s *Bear* (1978), the unmapped north and the hostile northwest and their imagery in Aritha van Herk’s *The Tent Peg* (1981) are representative of the effort to create Canadianness on binary pairs, establishing a strong –sometimes reverse, sometimes parallel– connection between nation and nature (see Mackey 1999: 40–49). The nationalist discourse of the Group of Seven or that of Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1995a [1972]) is equally impregnated by the voyage to a presumed Canadian essence located in a inhospitable, northern nature (see Bordo 1992). In Atwood’s novel, for instance, with the affirmation “I can’t believe I’m on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they have now sea-planes for hire. But this is still near the city limits” (1995a: 1), the female unnamed protagonist escapes back to her home of wild forests. There, the narrator alerts us to the beginning of an imminent quest that is introspective and literal, for the Canadian, for the protagonist’s father. Paradoxically, her search for the father resembles a pre-Symbolic process of return to the mother that equates her to J.L. in *The Tent Peg* and Lou in *Bear*, and thus the novel counteracts the symbolic effects of civilisation, colonisation and US neo-colonisation. In any of these novels, then, the return to nature is similar to an extreme liberation in which movement and travel provoke the collapse of the women’s former and constrained selves, as evidenced in the aura of madness that taints all of them.

Using the historiographic and metafictional mood of much contemporary Canadian fiction (see Hutcheon 1988; 1992 [1989]), Atwood traces a creative path between the early nationalist discourse of *Surfacing* and its critical revision in more recent fictions. The travel to the wilderness and the savage north serves to set them against themselves and demystify their genealogy in short stories like “The Age of Lead” (1998 [1991]). Linking the white north and the colonial past in an alliance of death and dereliction, the story revisits the poisoning of the Franklin expedition in 1845 in their search of the Northwest

Passage, a sortie in the British colonialist travels to India<sup>4</sup>. Jane, a contemporary Canadian, enters in contact with the historical fact through a TV report that delves into the reason of the expedition's failure. She continually parallels the reported events to her daily life, her break-up with Vincent and his eventual death by AIDS. The contrast between the micronarrative and the grand-narrative, the obscurity surrounding Vincent's death and that of the sailors, the voyage of discovery through the Canadian north and Jane's introspective journey, unveil how travel helps her re-locate coordinates of identity and tradition, always looking back onto the 19<sup>th</sup> century to look forward to the 20<sup>th</sup>, from the early 1960's to the 1980's. In the story, the cause of Vincent's demise and the archaeological research on Jane's past constitute a parallel labour of exploration, literal and metaphorical. "The idea of exploration", we know, "appealed to her then: to get onto a boat and just go somewhere, somewhere mapless, off into the unknown. To launch yourself into fright [...]. It was like having sex, in high school, in those days before the Pill [...]" (1998: 162).

While the northern territory wields in the Canadian imaginary a two-fold power of fear and temptation (Goldie 1993 [1989]), the wild West has generated notions of difference and unity within. Without reaching the defining potential of the US west (see Burchell and Gray 1989 [1981]), the Canadian west is a frontier zone that contributed to create by contrast an image of homogeneity and civilisation on the East. The ontological uncertainty resulting from the lack of cartographic descriptions, the hostility of the natural environment and the narrative of western expansion epitomised by the spawning of the transcontinental railway, turn the westward voyage into the ground for the continuous deconstruction and reconstruction of personal and national identity. In this sense, George Bowering's *Caprice* (1987 [1994]) ironically mocks the predicaments of a homogeneous and fixed culture and identity, adopting for that purpose the generic shape of the dime novel of the west<sup>5</sup>. The Quebecois poet whom we know as Caprice, a name that conveys

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4. Apart from being deeply inserted in the historical context of Canada, the story is profoundly rooted in the traditional literary context. As Atwood explains (1995b), poets like Robert W. Service or E.J. Pratt sang the poignant fate of the Franklyn expedition. Similarly, Gwendolyn MacEwen dramatised the event in the play *Terror and Erebos* (1987), and her tracks were followed by Al Purdy, Graeme Gibson and, more recently, Rudi Wiebe and Mordecai Richler in *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989).

5. Frank Davey (1993) has seen how Caprice intends to create positions that enter in conflict with each other. The East/West position, for instance, undermines itself since the Canadian East looks at further East, the European tradition, and so does the Canadian West with the US West. The novel is plagued with identity fissures like Caprice's, a Quebecois educated in the German Romantic tradition crossing the Canadian West as a cow-boy deeply rooted in the US mythology. Contradicting Davey, who contends that the two Indians are stereotypical figures, I would argue that they are aware of their typical representation, act from inside the optic through which the East decodes the West and reverse it. Bowering's novel is aware of the constructedness of any cultural text and deconstructs the narrative of colonisation and civilisation, undoubtedly the main intertext in the story.

the uncertain direction of her itinerary, leaves her eastern residence to chase and bring to justice her brother's murderer, Frank Spencer. Riding a black Spanish stallion named Cabayo and handling a whip as her only weapon, Caprice's mobility through and mastery of the physical space is echoed by continuous hide-and-peek identity games. Their effect is the destabilisation of a unique identity, (hi)story and culture. The avenger Caprice, also known as Capreece or Caprizia, criss-crosses the Canadian West, going up and down the US border, beyond the medicine line, behind Spencer's tracks. The latter is also known as Frank Smith, an American and Canadian bandit who loves and hates Caprice; his companion is Strange Loop but also Loop Groulx, a name that "[...] merges the whip-wielding Hollywood cartoon character "Lash-Larou" with the legendary Quebec werewolf, the loup-garou" (Davey 1993: 85). Whereas Caprice's dead brother is Pierre but also Pete Foster, the local restaurant is Canadian and Chinese and Gert the stereotypical saloon prostitute is simultaneously Gertrude, the loving mother of a teenager. The collapse of identity polarities contaminates as well the East/West paradigm, since they both become constructs shifting according to the velocity of the westward expansion. Thus, describing the school for Indian kids where Caprice's boyfriend works, the narrator explains: "[i]t was a way of getting the west to the Indians before the east arrived" (Bowering 1994: 173).

In the novel, the incessant movement acts as a catalyst to generically rework the quest narrative, whose defining features are proved inadequate by gender considerations (see Carrera Suárez 1994). In this sense, the classic wanderer and the reward exchange their sexual gender, mobility is more prominent than a return to the primary stage of stasis, and thus, the end of the novel does not bring a return to Quebec and the domesticity of marriage. Riding towards the rising sun, as the end of the novel portrays her (see van Herk 1991), the heroine Caprice manifests her intention to endlessly defer the conclusion of her travel, so that the end of the novel implies the beginning of her new adventures. This emphasis on motion and process impedes in addition the final consolidation of an identitary inscription to favour, instead, a de-scription that blurs Caprice's identity and renders irrelevant her final destiny. After we leave her "rid[ing] eastward through the west that was becoming nearly as narrow as her trail" (Bowering 1994: 266), we never know whether she lives or dies in the Canadian west.

Caprice loses her exquisite sophistication as she goes west, but within the national geography, the reverse migration from west to east is usually associated with a transformation of identity in which the acquisition of higher cultural levels directly implies a personal transformation. Going from west to east is a return to the basis of a presumed European refinement lost in the colonisation of the western territories. Hence Bowering's heroine describes a movement that contradicts the vital route designed by Morag Currie in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* (1987 [1964]), the second of the five

novels in the Manawaka cycle. Morag travels from the mythical Manawaka to Toronto, where she studies to be a school-teacher. Yet her stay far from the patriarchal rule of her father reaches an end when shortly after being back home she marries Brampton Shipley. In Bram she finds the continuation of the iron-fisted dominance imposed by Jason Currie. In the novel, Toronto and Morag's access to higher education are brought to light as the means to counteract the dependence on and submission to the patriarchy that rules the Manawaka community and the Currie family. The east, nevertheless, leaves its imprint on Morag who realises that her femininity sentences her to a constrained space out of which she would be considered an outsider. Though she does not rebel initially against the discourses that tie her, she is aware of their existence and expresses it in these terms: "[...] I knew embroidery and French, and menu-planning for a five-course meal, and poetry, and how to take a firm hand with servants, and the most becoming way of dressing my hair [...]. I was Pharaoh's daughter reluctantly returning to his roof, the square brick palace so oddly antimacassared in the wilderness" (Laurence 1987: 35).

Like the eastward or northward movement, the crossing of a literal or ideological frontier brings about a loosening of identity constraints and the opening of new dimensions for the individual's identity. Whereas the traversing of physical space directly implies the rethinking of notions like home, culture and identity as in *Caprice*, going across any border, be it geopolitical or metaphorical, signifies a negotiation of the poles between coloniser and colonised, the civilised and the uncivilised, the global and the local, engendering a powerful relativism that questions the very border. Crossing is, therefore, a strategic parallax for the articulation of a multi-layered revision as the one articulated in Kristjana Gunnars' *The Substance of Forgetting* (1992). In this novel, the elusive female narrator's continuous departures from and returns to a home of blossoming peach tress, situated in the Canadian Okanagan Valley, implants an ideal of locality jeopardised by the processes of globalisation. In this state of affairs, the local is disrupted by the continuous journeys to the US territory, defied by the frequent transgressions of the US/Canada limit and the westward movement that the narrator and her Quebecois lover, Jules, undertake. This conflict between the local and the global results in the deterritorialisation of the notion of home and the creation of provisional homes marked by their lack of familiarity. Hence, home is no longer "[...] a place where you knock and enter at the same time", fostering then "[a] sense that you may be separating at any moment. The erosion of certainty" (Gunnars 1992: 100).

This erosion of certainty, also an erosion of the familiar ground of home, contrasts with the intention to perpetuate the binary English-French, a duality of self and other within. This dual structural split within the Canadian national

frame reproduces a pattern of biculturalism as an impossible conciliation that plays on Lacanian ideas of identity formation as separation from the (m)other. In this sense, the affirmation of the self requires the negation of the other and the suppression of the desire for the maternal body. Similarly, the existence and prevalence of either of the two sides of the national Canadian spectrum relies on the exclusion of its counterpart. The novel portrays these two sides as two lovers aiming at an eventual communion, the same communion with the mother for which the child longs, and, however, represses, in the Lacanian model. As happens between the separate stances of self and other, the English-French union is impossible, and, as the novel implies, the process of national signification seems to depend on the continuity of this two-fold dynamics of desire and suppression. In Gunnars' novel, this poetics of perpetual displacement of the poles implies staying in the middle, a rhizomatic attitude that, as Kaplan proposes (2000: 87), resists and interrogates the nation-state apparatus.

Whereas Gunnars' autobiographical fiction is intent on the preservation of a dual model of culture and identity that the novel's attention to displacement does not preclude, personal identity is subdued to the affirmation of the national identity in those fictions that dramatise the conspicuously Canadian experience of trespassing the border of civilisation, travelling to the unknown to open a clearing in the wild. Travel is then to a world in which the struggle between men and nature occurs in the realm of daily existence, where the validity of testimony loses its power to make room for the dominance of uncertainty. Such is the case, for instance, of Jane Urquhart's *Away* (1993), and very especially of Alice Munro's short fiction "A Wilderness Station" (1995 [1994]), a narrative that employs the romance of the wild as frame for the 19<sup>th</sup> century westward expansion, and significantly resorts to travel, displacement and movement as structuring motives. "A Wilderness Station" is a tale of colonisation in the wilds of Canada that, indirectly, includes references to other longer displacements, like the crossing of the Atlantic by the Irish. Munro's characters are of Irish origin and, in search of fortune, journey to "the wilds of Huron and Bruce, as wilds they were then thought to be" (Munro 1995: 224).

Through an accumulation of historical documents, letters and testimonies collected by a contemporary historian, Leopold Henry, "A Wilderness Station" traces the dispersion of subjectivity undergone by Annie McKillop, a 19<sup>th</sup> century pioneer woman. Annie appears by chance in Henry's research on Herron Treece, a local politician, and shifts from the footnote she initially occupies to the textual centre. Though we hardly hear Annie's voice, the first epistles that we encounter announce that she was offered for marriage to the highest bidder, left her Torontonion orphanage in 1820, and, after her marriage to Simon Herron, travelled with his brother, George, to their homestead. The succession of documents shaping the story point out that



George died while opening a clearing. From here on, the accounts given by George, Rev. McBain, the vicar in charge of Annie's parish, and the clerk of peace responsible for Walley Prison, only agree on Annie's admitting to have killed George, and, voluntarily, asking for her internment in prison<sup>6</sup>. Though no one believes her version, and the charges of self-delusion notwithstanding, Annie is incarcerated, reduced to the physical and textual margin, and maintained in a condition of otherness, which permits by opposition the consolidation of a discourse of communal and national union reinforced by the patriarchal complicity of the Presbyterian clergy.

In a "Wilderness Station", the travel beyond the boundary of civilisation contributes to present the early efforts to create Canadianness and exposes it as a duality of inclusion versus exclusion. As in Atwood's *Surfacing*, Annie's increasing communion with the natural world goes parallel to the dismissal of any social behaviour, being this the main cause to conclude that Atwood's protagonist and Annie have gone mad. Annie's madness others and expels her from the community of pioneers, who strengthen their cohesion in this way. In one of his letters, Rev. McBain explains to his fellow in Walley:

She stopped appearing at services, and the deterioration of her property showed the state of her mind and spirit. [...] She did not chop down the wild vines around her door. [...] When I visited her, the door was open and it was evident that animals came and went in her house [...]. Those who caught sight of her said that her clothes was filthy and torn from scrambling in the bushes, and she was scratched by thorns and bitten by the mosquito insects and let her hair go uncombed or plaited. (Munro 1995: 232)

The easy identification between the irrational and the natural displaces Annie from the clearing into the forest, unveiling in the process the complication of her several journeys from civilisation into the wild. Whereas the ongoing alliances that reinvent continuous others for the perpetuation of the same are uncovered, we discover that women, nature and their equation

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6. There are at least four versions on what happened to Simon in the clearing. The official story told by George Herron in his "Recollections of Pioneering" explains that he and Simon were cutting a tree that, unexpectedly, fell down on Simon and killed him. In a second version, Annie prepared some food for the two men and took it to the clearing. On her way to the forest, the things she had prepared mixed with each other, which enraged Simon. He quarrelled with Annie, hit her, she defended and stroke him back with a stone. Contradicting this, in a letter from prison to an intimate friend, Annie explains that George killed Simon in the clearing and took his corpse back home, where she realised that Simon had been axed. Apparently, Simon frequently abused George. The last story, told by Annie once released from prison, attributes Simon's death to the attack of a bear.

with the passionate and the irrational allow a phallogocentric nationalist discourse to survive. This unmasks in parallel the constructedness of the discourse of nation, here destabilised by movement and displacement.

The lures of the wild have created an emotional tension in Canadian culture that unfolds a dichotomy of peril and attraction transplanted into fiction through the number of stories that play on the possibility of living on the edge of town. Thus, Munro's short story "Menasetung" in *Friend of my Youth* (1990) locates her poet protagonist, Almeda Roth, on the physical border of town complemented by the emotional and moral border on which she hardly stands, and so do the early episodes of Carol Shields' *The Stone Diaries* (1993) with Mercy Stone. Furthermore, an already classic example is W.O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1982 [1947]), whose characters inhabit in a tiny community of farmers facing the emptiness of the prairie. In the novel, the young Brian O'Connell feels that attraction for the unknown beyond the limit, and, together with his friends, make frequent incursions to test their bravery. When Brian and his chums decide to visit St. Sammy, the local ascetic, Art claims: "he is crazy, crazy as a ground owl". 'Dad says the prairie sent him crazy, he went crazy from it [...]. It is awful lonely out here', said Brian. 'It would be easy for a fellow to go crazy out on prairie - all by himself'" (Mitchell 1982: 187). Paradoxically, the prairie erases one's identity, as it also is the element that provides the locals with a distinct trait of locality as well as Canadianness. In other words, personal and collective identity entail a dialectical conflict in which one of them needs to be subordinated per force to the other. In Mitchell's novel, Brian's sense of locality/nationality is given by the landscape, the same element that erases his tracks when he travels across the prairie.

Whereas the fictions dealt with so far travel north, west, east or south within the boundaries of North America; from Canada to the United States or vice versa, Canadian fiction, especially in the 1990s, has started going beyond the continental frontiers. The reinforcement of this international dimension bespeaks the maturity of Canadian writing, which does not need any longer to centre on Canadian matters or be set in Canada, and draws our attention to its participation in an international scene of travel and movement that Iain Chambers (1995: 24) describes in these terms:

[t]he zone we now inhabit is open, full of gaps: an excess that is irreducible to a single centre, origin or point of view. In these intervals, and the punctuation of our lives, other stories, languages and identities can also be heard, encountered and experienced. Our sense of being, of identity and language is extrapolated from movement [...]. The 'I' is constantly being formed and reformed in such a movement in the world.

The international movement in Canadian fiction is profoundly ingrained in two parallel but different processes to construct culture and nation: the inside out and the outside in. While the former is consonant with the ways in which Canadian fiction has portrayed its interests and exported them abroad, the latter is the opposite. That is to say, a creation of culture and nation that, taking place somewhere but in Canada, impels us to look at Canada from outside its borders. In so doing, this trend is in keeping with the path opened by pioneers in reverse like Mavis Gallant, whose stories hardly touch Canadian ground, and, instead of going west, travel east and back to Europe. Most of Gallant's European stories are guided by this impulse to look at North America from outside in its extreme form: if ever, Canada appears in the distance signifying one's origin but never as a nationality. It is a site where the markers of national culture undo themselves to give way to a multi-coloured mosaic pointing centrifugally in several directions, mostly Europe and the States, and propelling a decentralisation of the Canadian nationalist discourse. In Gallant's short story collection *Overhead in a Balloon: Stories of Paris* (1990 [1979]), the French city erects itself as a centre to which the most diverse personal archetypes come to dwell. Take, for instance, the short story "Rue de Lille", in which the triple locality of the city, the title-street and the protagonist's apartment eclipse the distant presence of North America and its resounding echoes. In this story, the stasis of locality contradicts the motion into an international scene. After the death of Juliette, a French translator of postwar American fiction and responsible for the spreading of such literature to the French public (Gallant 1990: 164), her lover, also a writer and journalist, recalls their life in the apartment at Rue de Lille. From the city of armed resistance against the Nazi invading troops to the 1970s, he reconstructs at a cross-stitch their life together, as presided over by the equilibrium between the extremely local of their existence and the cosmopolitan internationalism of their tastes. While they are reluctant to move to other flat, since "Parisians seldom move until they're driven to" (Gallant 1990: 161), he writes and lectures on Stendhal and she interprets the varied panorama of post 1945 American writing. With Gallant as precedent, this international turn is produced when Canadian literature focuses on the factors of provisionality and diversity defining contemporary culture (Huggan 1991: 132).

More recently, the international impulse has become stronger in Canadian writing, definitely breaking up the association between space, national identity and cultural production. Much of this has been contributed by the relevance acquired by immigrant Canadian literature, which has posed a challenge to the canon of CanLit and reworked the changing relation between the coordinates of national belonging, experience, site and place. Consequently, this type of writing has helped transform the postcolonial condition of Canada and turned migrancy into one of its defining features.

Contaminated by the success of transnational literary productions such as M.G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets* (1994), Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999) or Anita Rau Badami's *The Hero's Walk* (2000), many mainstream Canadian writers have incorporated references to an international panorama of travelling identities, improbable accommodation and permanent transit, as seems to be the case of the US writer, long established in Canada Leon Rooke and his story "The Boy from Moogradi and the Woman with the Map to Paradise" (1997). In it, Rooke presents us with a group of stranded Americans who, in their travel to a version of El Dorado, are captured by the guerrilla that opposes the republican forces of an unknown country. Lacking geographical markers that might give a clear spatial indication, the story is framed by the map topos and by the literal map in the hands of Emma, one of the Americans in the expedition. The whole story is a dialogue between the local guide of the American travellers, Toodoo, the boy from the town of Moogradi, and Raoul, the commander of the rebels. At the beginning of the story both of them agree on the falsity of the map and the unreal character of the place to which it leads, Kolooltepec:

"What is the journey of these crazy people?"  
 "Their mission is to find Kolooltepec".  
 "But Kolooltepec does not exist".  
 "I agree".  
 "It does not matter whether you agree. I could agree also, but this would not change the matter".  
 "Yes", the boy said. "Because Kolooltepec still would not exist and you and I would be as crazy as these gringos". (Rooke 1997: 57)

Moreover, Raoul and Toodoo are increasingly prey of a colonialist mimetic fever and come to accept that what is on the map is automatically endowed with existence. The story is, thus, setting of a double displacement: one that moves us beyond the borders of North America and avoids any mention of Canada, and a second one produced by the lack of correspondence between the 'imitated' and the 'natural' object that the map depicts. This discrepancy displaces the western ideology lying underneath the discourses of colonialist expansion and cartography and causes a decolonisation of the map (Huggan 1991: 129). As Graham Huggan (1991: 130) states, "the prevalence of the map topos in contemporary postcolonial texts suggests a link between a de/reconstructive reading of maps and a revisioning of the history of European colonialism", and, in this story, I would argue, a revisioning of American neo-colonialism. Rooke, nevertheless, goes a step further and turns those represented by the colonialist discourse into the colonisers, subjected to the same ideology that represents them and willing to

possess the 'unknown' land. The connection between the illusion of mimetic representation conveyed by the map and the fact that it is the Americans that have it in their grasp provokes a change in Raoul's mind, so that the end of the story presents the so far sceptic rebels undertaking their way to "a figment of the crazy imagination": "Onwards, the officers were shouting. Onwards to Kolooltepec'. Up an down the mountainside came the same cry. "Onwards to Kolooltepec'" (Rooke 1997: 72). "The Boy from Moogradi and the Woman with the Map to Paradise" expresses a desire to deterritorialise and reterritorialise tenets of culture, nation, home and unified subjectivity. Here, additionally, the movement of the travellers counteracts the static closure of the map's representation, now confronted with openness and the unexpected, while it also contests the dominance of the mimetic fallacy.

Through this short sample, it is evident that Canadian texts are increasingly aware of the difficulty of coming home and highly conscious of the mechanisms whereby the illusion of certainty that it reproduces is perpetuated. Travel and displacement bring about in these stories the fulcrum for the revision of structures that help in the construction of ideas of home, and other deceptively unified entities like nation, culture or subjectivity. In emphasising these preoccupations, most of these texts show their complicity with postmodernist, postcolonial and post-structuralist theoretical paradigms. Therefore, they erect themselves as "narratives that transgress, violate and subvert ideas of essentialism, invariance and transhistorical constants" (Bromley 1996: 278). These narratives favour transitional identities and overtly show their predilection for histories *en route*. They inscribe sites and locations that, being in movement, are inflected by a dynamics of provisionality, a form to be attentive to the configuration of new, changing maps of personal, national and cultural identity.

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