Racial, Ethnic, Gender and Class Representations in Margaret Laurence's Writings

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With deep love to my husband and my family for bearing with me and accepting my moods during the writing process.

Cu profundă dragoste soțului meu și familiei mele pentru că m-au suportat și mi-au acceptat stările de spirit în timpul procesului de scriere.

The margin speaks its one small chance
against the design of the centre,
and on that speaking everything turns.
—Robert Kroetsch, *A Likely Story*

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This book could not have been completed and become reality without the patience, dedication and expertise in Canadian Studies of several persons and without some favourable circumstances in my professional development.

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But there was so much more to find out about this world! This resulted in my Ph.D. research at the University of Bucharest (2008-2011), where Professor Bottez supervised the thesis which was the basis for the book you are about to read.

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FOREWORD

Racial, Ethnic, Gender and Class Representations in Margaret Laurence's Writings is a long journey through different genres, continents, cultures, critical approaches and mentalities. It is the joined result of several important factors. As a Romanian, my background and education have significantly influenced my mentality and perceptions of literature. With a degree in English and French, an M.A. in British Cultural Studies and a career in English teaching, I wanted to pursue my interest in Canada. It is, I admit, quite an unexpected "recipe": a Romanian studying Canada in Romania and Great Britain in order to depict the African and Canadian-set works of Margaret Laurence.

Racial, Ethnic, Gender and Class Representations in Margaret Laurence's Writings is a study on Canada and Canadian literature, and Laurence's writings in particular, thus addressing various kinds of readership. Focusing exclusively on Canada, this book may be viewed as being intended mainly for Canadianists. Since it offers a thorough analysis of various literary genres, the book may be of interest to all literature lovers. With its exploration of the parallelism between life and fiction and its emphasis on Laurence's biographic and realist elements and their influence on the author's fictional writing, the book reveals real and imaginary worlds potentially appealing to anybody's literary needs.

At this point, I would like to stress that parts of my initial thesis have been already published in various journals (proceedings of national and international conferences) and collective volumes in Romania and abroad.

Many attributes have been associated with the name of Canadian author Margaret Laurence. Still, I will only give a brief description of her here.

Margaret Laurence (1926-1987) is considered "a founding mother of Canadian literature" (Gunnars 1988, viii), or "the First Lady of Manawaka", as the Canadian National Film Board deemed her in the movie dedicated to her life. For at least three decades, from the 1960s to the 1980s, she was one of the best loved English-Canadian writers, often referred to as "the 'godmother' of contemporary Canadian women's writing" (Howells 2005, 199), twice winner of the Governor General's Literary Award (in 1967 for *A Jest of God* and in 1975 for *The Diviners*) and of Companion of the Order of Canada (1971). She was considered

"the most significant creative writer in Canadian literature" (Wainwright vii), "the shaman … [who] brought … together" (Don Bailey qtd. in Wainwright 16) Canadian authors, whom she encouraged, supported, recommended and corresponded with. Her childhood spent on the Canadian prairie, her Presbyterian education and her willingness to help, her African experience, her increasing social and political activity, and her involvement in the Writers' Union, as reflected in her own writing, turned Margaret Laurence into a veritable "beginning of everything" (Alice Munro qtd. in Wainwright 144) for many subsequently successful Canadian writers.

At a more personal level, I feel that a bond has been created between Margaret Laurence's work and myself. In July 2009, I had just bought a biography of Laurence. I started reading the book late in the evening, anxious as I was to discover more about her background. To be more accurate, it was July 17, one day before the writer's birthday (July 18) and coincidentally also my sister's birthday. What is more, I was extremely lucky to be accepted as Visiting Research Academic by the University of Birmingham. Later on, while still living in England, I was to discover that Laurence had spent part of her life in Penn, Buckinghamshire, quite close to Birmingham. To add to this increasingly personal connection with Laurence, her daughter went to University to Birmingham for a while, before dropping out.

At a literary level, on the one hand, I was very impressed by and became quite involved in the lives of the Manawaka women characters, as though I were a direct participant. I probably read the Manawaka cycle at the appropriate age, almost the age of most of Margaret Laurence's white heroines, when no answers can be found, no solutions can be given by anybody, be it author or friend, and the mere discovery that you are not alone in this world is sheer revelation. The girlfriend/ wife, mother or daughter's worries and experiences depicted in Laurence's novels appeared to be my own and, to a certain extent, every woman's dilemmas.

On the other hand, after reading Laurence's African fiction and then her non-fiction, I discovered the wider context of the author's concerns. I consequently chose a different path for my research: it would deal not only with the white female protagonists present in Manawaka, but also with the racial, ethnic and class representations present in all her writings. What I had discovered was, in fact, a new Margaret Laurence! I fell in love with her "humanism" (Fulton), with her genuine concern for people, with her courage to be outspoken and, finally, with her characters, with the impressive world they manage to create. The woman author's "earthy, yet lyrical, compassion for mankind, for family, for friends, for her tribe of

writers, for her fictional creations" (Fraser 286), swiftly emerges from her novels, as "… she spoke for us" (Johnston 55), leaving deep traces in the hearts of the people who knew her or … are currently reading her:

remembering how alive
she lit up the rooms she occupied
like flowers do sometimes and the sun always
in a way visible only to friends
and she had nothing else.
(Purdy xxxvii)

PREFACE

This book discusses Margaret Laurence's portrayals of the "people largely ignored for lack of interest" (Gunnars 1988, ix), the ones who were even more neglected because of their race, ethnicity, gender or class. These portrayals are born from the oppositions between the different worlds she depicts: whites and Africans in the Africa-related writings; the white British settlers and the racial (e.g. Metis) and ethnic minorities (e.g. Germans, Asians, Greeks, Ukrainians, and Jews) of the Manawaka society; men and women; the rich founders of the community and the poor, lower class of the imaginary prairie town.

The challenge of this approach is that few critical studies focus on how Laurence's fiction represents these encounters, these groups not being commonly analysed according to the community within which they are inscribed. My research suggests a different perspective. It cannot be ignored that some of the above-mentioned characters remain secondary fictional figures throughout Laurence's fiction (with some exceptions), or that the issue of voice appropriation could constitute an argument against Laurence's portrayal of African people or Metis. Ethnic minorities lack proper representation in the Manawaka books, sometimes being depicted in extremely short paragraphs. Despite all these, from the viewpoint of the present-day cultural policies, this book argues that a fair and balanced representation of identity, or rather identities, allows for a re-evaluation of the various voices articulated within these texts. I consider that neglecting such characters would determine a new injustice, and their sometimes thinly sketched portraits, as secondary or marginalised people, triggered my particular interest in Laurence's portrayals. At the same time, an appraisal of the author's African writings, including fictional and non-fictional works, demonstrates the realism with which the author depicts the African world. Furthermore, I should acknowledge from the beginning that gender representation is related to the white female protagonists of Manawaka, as well as to the African and Metis women, connecting once more the protagonists with the secondary characters.

I also propose to show how the interactions between different communities can further generate anxiety, rejection, contempt, pity, or love and how these feelings combine to shape the identity of the fictional characters. To this end, I consider how, for Margaret Laurence, geographical

boundaries had never reinforced cultural ones, her depictions of both Africa and Canada being deliberately true to life.

I consider that a more personal contribution to the already existing criticism of Margaret Laurence's works is the analysis of her work as an entity, balancing both terms of the common binary oppositions: fiction vs. non-fiction, Africa vs. Canada, white vs. Black or Metis. However, in spite of critical comments which might be raised, I undertake here to comment on how the voice of the marginal, the subaltern makes itself heard throughout her books, underlying Laurence's emphasis on characterisation. Therefore, I examine how her imagination swiftly shifted from the African to the Canadian background, from adults' to children's literature, from novels to short stories, from essays to letters, in order to challenge readers' perceptions of race, ethnicity, gender and class. For this purpose, particularly enlightening ideas by literary critics are also referred to in this book, as they provided the critical backup that I needed for some of my associations and gave substance to my own considerations.

Fiction and non-fiction

The assumption I start from, firstly in *Heart of a Stranger* and later on in *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, is that these non-fictional works enable a complete understanding of Laurence's fiction by opening wider horizons. These writings shed a new light on her fictional work, an opinion shared by Nora Foster Stovel (2008), who uses *Heart of a Stranger* in her discussion of Manawaka. W.H. New also, in his article on Laurence's African stories, resorts to the same method, considering the author's autobiographical writing "in a theoretical perspective" (129) and thus, an explanatory source of her fictional writing.

Secondly, it became obvious that her gallery of African portraits had to include her memoir protagonists in order to allow the voice of "the Other" to be fully articulated. From the same perspective, the articles in *Heart of a Stranger* provide illustrations of one of the Ghanaians whom Laurence met and befriended ("The Very Best Intentions"), develop on the author's particular interest in Metis history - her article on Gabriel Dumont ("Man of Our People") adding up to the portrait of Riel in *The Diviners* - and finally, explain her prairie origins.

Thirdly, according to Patricia Morley, the reason for juxtaposing fictional and non-fictional genres in her writings is that Laurence's "travel narrative uses fictional techniques and is essential to our understanding of its author. It is one of her major works" (34). Thus, the two genres are perceived as connected by the author's vision and talent.

However, the most important encouragement comes from the author, Laurence leaving traces for us to follow in search of the complex meaning of her fictional work. When publishing in 1976, *Heart of a Stranger*[1], a collection of articles written and published elsewhere between 1964 and 1975, the author added an introductory note to the older articles, in order to explain the initial publication or to express her more mature view ten years later. At the beginning of the article entitled "Road from the Isles", she confessed that this particular essay could be considered "an early working-out, in non-fiction, of a theme I would later, … express in fiction … as though in my fiction I knew exactly where to go, but in my life I didn't, as yet" (*Heart* 158). Thus, she suggested the mental chronology of her writings: non-fiction first and fiction last.

Africa and Canada

Tracing the elements present in both her African writings and in the Manawaka cycle may prove difficult, unless we use again the author's non-fiction. Morley also sees her work connected by common themes, and claims that "Laurence's African writings and her Canadian-based fiction are closely related" (33). In Laurence's own words, the search of these two places for postcolonial identity, for a definition of the self which does not involve others' definition of oneself, is exemplified by the common themes she approached in her work:

> The quest for physical and spiritual freedom, the quest for relationships of equality and communication–these themes run through my fiction and are connected with the theme of survival, not mere physical survival, but a survival of the spirit, with human dignity and the ability to give and receive love.
> ("Ivory Tower or Grassroots?: The Novelist as Socio-Political Being" 24) [2]

To these ones Laurence adds "the theme of dispossession" ("Ivory Tower" 25), mainly exemplified in her references to the Highland Scots and the Metis, but also relevant for Africa and also for the immigrants who come to the New World.

For Konrad Groß as well, it is essential not to distinguish between the two corpuses, as the themes evolve from the African writings to the Manawaka cycle, the relation between coloniser and colonised becoming a relation of dominance and subordination at various levels (78).

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[1] The abbreviation used for *Heart of a Stranger* will be *Heart*.
[2] The article will be henceforth abbreviated to "Ivory Tower".

In the article mentioned above, "Ivory Tower or Grassroots?: The Novelist as Socio-Political Being", Laurence even associates herself, as a Canadian writer, to the Nigerian Chinua Achebe, both belonging to the "Third World novelists" group ("Ivory Tower"17) and connecting once more the two continents. The article (discussed in Chapter One) also looks for the similarities shared by two spaces, despite having been colonised differently, and explores the common colonial feeling of inferiority of Africa and Canada, analysing in detail the ties of kinship between the author and Achebe, and also Canada's colonial status.

The margin/centre relationship is valid in the Laurentian writing whether we discuss the African vs. the white, the Metis vs. the white protagonists, or the Scots Presbyterian patriarchal tradition vs. the traditions, life style, and ideology of the other ethnic groups of the prairie town. Again, what connects Margaret Laurence's African and Canadian writings is the inappropriateness of the imperial values, the lack of relevance of British art, literature or history to the far-away places that they colonised. From Laurence's perspective, the postcolonial liberation of the two continents, "the need for resistance to the European history and culture imposed on (ex-)colonies" (Moss 8) has some common features. She remarked that, as a child, she had resented not being given a full account of prairie history ("Books That Mattered to Me" 245)[3] and found similarities with Africans' problem. A comparable confession of the Ghanaian art historian Nana Apt links Ghana to Canada–"we've not been educated to appreciate our art and culture… almost as if what we natives did wasn't important enough to be studied" (Apt qtd. in Florby 155). Chapter Three, dedicated to the fictional and non-fictional representations of Africa, dwells on the irrelevance of imperial values taught in the colony.

Other critics find common points between Africa and Canada, too. Another extremely encouraging argument for my research is Karen MacFarlane's association of *The Diviners* and "The Rain Child", thus connecting the Manawaka cycle and the African writings under the sign of "(post)colonial identity" and the notion of *heterotopia* (237). Craig Tapping starts from Laurence's translations of Somali poetry and prose, arguing that they were "integral to Laurence's understanding of the Otherness of Somali", and connects them with "renditions of Metis oral traditions" (70). Similarly, both Craig Tapping and Clara Thomas consider that the grotesque portrayals of Mr. Archipelago and Doree in "The Perfume Sea" are similar to those of Christie and Prin Logan in *The*

[3] "Books That Mattered to Me" will henceforth be abbreviated to "Books".

Diviners, another element of continuity. (These issues are enlarged upon in Chapters Three and Four.)

I hope that I have amply explained why the two corpuses of works should be analysed together, and that the subsequent demonstration will prove valid.

White, African and Metis

To begin with, my research has led me to the conclusion that the chief common element of all Laurentian fictional writings is the amazing gallery of portraits, mainly of those whom Kristjana Gunnars calls "the most neglected and forgotten among us", but whose presence "show[s] [their] full humanity". Thus, Laurence "raises the value of all sectors of society" (Gunnars 1988, viii). In this research I use most of the materials Margaret Laurence bequeathed to us, her inheritors, with one single purpose in mind - to present those characters who could not "easily become either heroes or anti-heroes" (Gunnars 1988, ix), as they are normal, ordinary fictional characters, deemed not exciting enough to become protagonists, but who are still brought to life by the Canadian woman author.

The author herself looked for the common denominator of the three groups with which my research is concerned: the Africans, the Metis, and the Scots, in reference to a certain moment in each group's history they could all be regarded as "people [who] are faced with an enemy which has not a superior culture but only more efficient weapons, more efficient means of killing" (*Heart* 73). In the essay "The Poem and the Spear" (*Heart of a Stranger*), Laurence explains the similarities she found between the three groups, which I will use in my demonstration in the subchapter "White/ Non-white Dichotomy".

The reasons in favour of such an analysis, to which I will add the ethnic groups, have already been mentioned in the section above. If Laurence herself considers the common themes her writing displays, it is quite natural that her heroes and heroines are in search of freedom and survival, equality, communication, and love ("Ivory Tower 24). Laurence's compassion for the less powerful, the less known, the less accepted connects her entire writing and my emphasis on her portrayals clearly justifies my reading of both the African and the Canadian heroes.

In addition, when juxtaposing white, Black and Metis, this opens up another discussion of Laurence's heroines, of representations of femininity and masculinity, of the oppression of women irrespective of race.

Book Structure

This book is structured into five main chapters and an introductory part, with the "Final Conclusions" and "Bibliography" treated separately.

The first chapter, dedicated to the theoretical framework, presents those particular concepts which I try to define, explain and exemplify with relevant illustrations taken from the critical corpus, and which will be subsequently applied to the literary works. For an academic paper, these definitions and descriptions are essential for creating a background for the subsequent text analyses. For this book, this first part is merely meant to set some guidelines for the inexperienced readers and to provide a wider perspective on the general context of Laurence's life and writing. Therefore, I start with a very short introduction to Canadian history, which explains the present structure of Canadian society: First Nations, people of English and French origin (or the Founding Nations), the Metis, and various other ethnic groups. Secondly, I discuss almost four decades of English Canadian literary productions (from the 1950s to the 1980s), a timeframe which provides both a context for the geographical, social, cultural aspects of Canada and for Margaret Laurence's work. Since they are seen from postcolonial and feminist perspectives, two subchapters are concerned with these two notions. Considering the parallel between women's and colonised people's common experiences of oppression and submission, postcolonialism and feminism are relevant tools in investigating Canadian literature and Laurence's work, especially in a close examination of the writer's African experience. Thus, "Postcolonialism and Feminism in the Canadian Literary Context" covers the critical context, while the fourth one includes the Canadian author's own comments on the two discourses. In addition, "Canada, Settler-invader Colony and/or Colony of Occupation, and the Colonised as Coloniser" provides a supplementary discussion on Canada's debatable status of coloniser/colonised space. Last but not least, the four main notions included in the title are investigated separately, namely: race, ethnicity, and the context of appropriation of voice, as well as gender and class. For easier access to references, I list here the names of some of the critics whose works I found particularly useful: Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Octave Mannoni, Franz Fanon, Linda Hutcheon, Northrop Frye, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Betty Friedan, Luce Irigaray, etc.

The second chapter dwells on Margaret Laurence's inner and outer journeys which marked the development of her literary career and the diversity of her actual writing. Starting from those biographical elements which inspired her work, I attempt to identify explanations for questions

which otherwise would have remained unsolved. It is important, for instance, to explain how a young Canadian woman, a resident of Africa for seven years, who started publishing seriously for the first time in her life, managed so quickly to secure herself a special place in the eyes of the Africans, although nowadays her Manawaka cycle has a more prominent position for our contemporaries. But it is also important to explore the author's statement that she "came to a greater understanding of the Scots' clan system through a certain amount of knowledge of the tribal system in Africa" (*Heart* 158). All these and many other aspects are revealed in "In Search of a Voice–Margaret Laurence's Journeys", without ignoring the influence on her writing of her upbringing in the Canadian prairie and of her experiences abroad, and her daily struggles with her multiple status of daughter, wife, mother and writer.

The third chapter, "The Centre/Margin Dichotomy in Margaret Laurence's African Writing" is dedicated to Laurence's Africa-set writings and to her heroes' and heroines' search for an identity. Although this section is mainly dedicated to the African characters, the colonised/the marginal ("From British Subject to Independent Citizen–An Introduction to the African Characters"), we cannot ignore the whole context. The white characters, the colonisers/the centre, will therefore be allocated an entire subchapter ("Positive and Negative Portrayals of White Colonisers"). In addition, I will demonstrate that Laurence's African works have intrinsic value, which makes them the natural predecessors of the more famous Manawaka books, and not mere exercises for something better. Considering the arguments I referred to in the "Preface", I would particularly single out the subchapter called "Non-fictional Representations of Africans–Mohamed, Abdi, Hersi, and Arabetto", which details a series of memorable portraits of people whom Laurence actually encountered and who appear in her memoir *The Prophet's Camel Bell* as well as in the article "The Very Best Intentions" from *Heart of a Stranger*. In W.H. New's opinion, "what Africa gave Margaret Laurence was in this sense a kind of instruction in the fertility of Otherness" (134). It was particularly the Africans whom she met during her seven-year stay in Somalia and Ghana that introduced her to the oppressed, the colonised, becoming inspirational models for her fictional characters, at the same time being also considered proper literary characters. Consequently, I also draw a parallel between these characters and their fictional counterparts.

The subchapters dedicated to the characters in the novel *This Side Jordan* (in particular "Mimicry, Hibridity, Authenticity in *This Side Jordan*") and in the short-story volume *The Tomorrow-Tamer* ("The In-between Space in *The Tomorrow-Tamer*") are related to Homi Bhabha's

theories (e.g. hybridity and mimicry). The sixth subchapter introduces three minor characters, Yiammo, Ankrah and Saleh, who are probably considered separately for the first time, demonstrating Laurence's gift for creating characters with a minimum of words, a technique also employed in the Manawaka series (see "Germans in *The Stone Angel*" and "Asians and Greeks in *The Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God* and *The Diviners*").

Although African women are presented in different parts of this chapter, in "The Status of African Women", I particularly focus on their presence in the author's writings, starting again from the personal experiences which she retold in her travelogue, and moving on to the fictional situations that her heroines are cast in.

Having realised that she and her fiction belonged to Canada, and wanting "very **much** … to return home in a kind of spiritual way" (Sullivan 68, *emphasis in the original*) the author returned to her own background, where "my way of viewing … [m]y eyes were formed" (*Heart* 237), to her native prairie town of Neepawa, in Manitoba, which became the fictional Manawaka.

Chapters four and five are dedicated to the five books of the Manawaka cycle, four novels and a collection of short stories, which represent Laurence's attempt at constructing a fictional world mirroring the Canadian prairie society. "Manawaka–A Site of Gender, Class, and Racial Discrimination" will be dedicated to traditional gender roles within the patriarchal society of Manawaka ("The Patriarchal Society of Manawaka"), to the organisation of the prairie town in terms of belonging to different social classes ("Class Representation and the Social Organisation of Manawaka: Christie Logan and Vernon Winkler/Thor Thorlakson") and mainly to the interactions between the Scottish descendants and the Metis inhabitants. Resorting to various sources, the sections refer to historical facts about the Scots' reasons to leave their lands and come all the way to Canada, the Metis fight for rights, and discuss how myths about these events combined with the official version of history provided by Laurence. As with the Africans, the Metis remain the focus but their portrayals are complementary to the Scottish protagonists, and they can only be analysed together, the double perspective offering a richer study. Out of the four divisions in strict connection with the Metis, two are dedicated to the Metis women ("Piquette and Valentine Tonnerre" and "Pique Tonnerre Gunn"), doubly oppressed in terms of race and gender (as were African women).

The last chapter of text analysis, also set in the Canadian prairie, tries to speculate on the roots of the immigration and exemplifies the persistence of the immigrants' connections with their mother countries and

their efforts to accommodate to the New World. As far as the Ukrainians are concerned, Laurence mentions a whole family but hints at the presence of a larger community. In the case of the Germans and the Greeks, Laurence only mentions a single character, who becomes representative for an entire ethnic group. The author refers to two different Asian characters, and the Jews are again represented by a family. What I will try to demonstrate is that the choice of these characters is clearly not accidental and that their presence reflects historical realities.

The conclusions include my final comments, after having argued that "the margin speaks" (Gunilla Florby's *The Margin Speaks. A Study of Margaret Laurence and Robert Kroetsch from a Post-Colonial Point of View*, 1997) in Laurence's travel memoirs, essays and especially in her fiction. I consider that probing into Laurence's gallery of portraits with feminist and postcolonial tools and looking for the racial, ethnic, gender and class representations provide a viable reading.

A complete list of references, primary sources (Margaret Laurence's own work) and secondary sources (criticism on her work), is included at the end.

CHAPTER ONE

A CRITICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This first chapter is fundamental, as it creates the frame for the entire analysis, providing the necessary arguments for my choices, for the subsequent biographical and literary analyses. From general to particular, it first proposes two brief presentations, one which is clearly far from exhaustive on Canadian history and another one on Canadian literature in English, covering mainly Margaret Laurence's predecessors and her own generation of writers.

The brief references to Canadian history are meant as an introduction to the postcolonial and feminist approaches mentioned further on. Since the 1970s, cultural studies have combined the above-mentioned approaches and various disciplines (i.e. New Historicism, gender studies, studies of race and ethnicity, sociology, etc.) in an interdisciplinary form of criticism (as suggested by Guerin and Labor, mentioned in Bottez 2007, 308-9). Thus, a historical survey would only facilitate a wider perspective. As far as literature is concerned, I start from the statement that literary works are the best means of transmission of a sense of identity, national values, and of mirroring specific social, political and economic realities in a particular timeframe. Joep Leerssen affirms that literature has the ability to formulate, perpetuate and disseminate (Leerssen 26) "a nation's specific world-view at a given moment of its development", strictly related to a language (352). Therefore, this starting point foregrounds the following references to the Canadian literary field.

The third subchapter focuses on postcolonialism and feminism in Canada, hence meant to offer a frame to Laurence's writing. I do not only define and discuss the two critical approaches but I also refer to some of the experiences that colonisers and women have in common. Considering that the Canadian author herself expressed her own opinions on the above-mentioned intellectual discourses, I also emphasise some of her opinions and comments, focusing on Laurence's own experiences as a woman in Africa and as a Canadian in England. In addition, the dual status of Canada as colonised and coloniser, which is referred to in the dichotomy settler-invader colony vs. colony of occupation, is also explained. Last but

not least, other terminological tools which are employed are identified and defined, such as: race, ethnicity, appropriation of voice, gender and class.

Canadian History–A Very Short Introduction

According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Canada, the name of this North American country, is rooted in the Huron-Iroquois *kanata*, meaning village or settlement. Although this sentence is quite often used as a starting phrase for an introductory note on Canada, the main reason for my employing it is to mention the original inhabitants of Canada.

The links between Canada and the European continent go back to the 10th century, Canada being a sought-for destination for explorers since the place was first visited by Scandinavian fishermen. Later on, the English and the French colonised and disputed this vast territory, ignoring the First Nations and trying to assimilate the newly found lands to their empires. The first English expeditions were in 1497, when John Cabot reached the north-eastern part of Canada known nowadays as Newfoundland. The French expeditions took place some years later, in 1534 and 1535, led by Jacques Cartier, who reached Anticosti Island and Saint Lawrence gulf and river, which prompted Cartier to call the place "land God gave to Cain". Both the English and the French continued their penetration into the heart of the continent, the former establishing outposts in Newfoundland and the Thirteen Colonies along the Atlantic Coast, which later became part of the United States of America, while the latter settling in New France and Acadia, currently called Montreal and Nova Scotia, and then in Quebec (1608).

Considering that obtaining economic profit was the impetus behind all these expeditions, the French engaged mainly in fur trade, while the English, in order to catch up with their rivals, created the Hudson's Bay Company. The rivalry between the two European countries was also visible in their fight for supremacy over land, and "sometimes regions changed hands" (Bottez 2004, 10). One of the most famous examples of changing the ruling system, and not least of a tragic destiny, was the colony of Acadia. Settled by the French in 1604, it was taken over by the English, who changed its name into Nova Scotia in 1621. Between 1632 and 1773, France and Britain exchanged supremacy over this region several times, until it was finally passed on to the English. In the meantime, the English had decided, since 1755, to deport the Acadians, sending them to colonies in the South or to England. Unfortunately, many of the former Acadians did not reach their final destination.

Another representative episode of the English-French enmity was the battle on the Plains of Abraham, or the Battle of Quebec, a crucial battle in the Seven Years' War. According to Kenneth Pryke, on September 18, 1759, the forces led by General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm had to surrender to General James Wolfe, after besieging Quebec (Pryke 27). Both generals were killed on the battle field, Benjamin West immortalising this tragic ending on canvas (the painting will be discussed and immortalised in Chapter 4).

The structure of the population changed again as a consequence of the American Revolution (which began in 1763, fighting breaking out in 1775), when the Loyalists left the colonies for the north of the continent. Loyalists, also called Tories, Royalists, or King's Men, remained loyal to the British Monarchy and when their cause was defeated by the Patriots, supporters of the revolution, it is estimated that between 50,000 and 100,000 left. Approximately half of them went north to Canada, in 1784, some settling in a part of Nova Scotia called New Brunswick and some in Quebec. Also in 1763, the Treaty of Paris established British control over Quebec, the colony being divided, in 1791, into Upper and Lower Canada, which would be reunited only in 1841. The upper, predominantly English-speaking part was later to be named Ontario, while the lower part, inhabited by French-speaking people, became Quebec.

In strict connection with my interest in Native Peoples, now usually called First Nations, I would like to mention Tecumseh, a Shawnee chief, a renowned leader with a significant role in the American War of 1812, an ally of the British and the Canadians (Bottez 2004, 13). His efforts to organise sparse groups of Indians are reminiscent of those of the Metis leader Louis Riel. A full description of the events between 1867 and 1873 will be covered in Chapter Four, in connection to the later Metis fight for rights over their land, in both historical and fictional terms (subchapter "Metis Historical Heroes and Scottish Mythical Creations").

It should be also mentioned that during the same period, precisely on July 1, 1867, the Dominion of Canada came into existence as an initial confederation of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. While other provinces joined the Confederation in the years to follow, this marked a period of expansion in Canadian history towards the present-day structure of ten provinces and two territories. To keep pace with this expansion, the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway began in 1875, finally completed in 1885, another episode which I touch upon later, in relation to the fate of the Chinese immigrants (subchapter "Asians and Greeks in *The Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God* and *The Diviners*").

Canada's participation in the World War I, automatically triggered by Great Britain's declaration of war, created another moment of crisis between the French and the English concerning the conscription act, artistically articulated by Hugh MacLennan in *Two Solitudes* (1945)[1]. Pryke also reminds us of the major drought that followed the war, in 1927, and the Great Depression (which began in 1929), moments crucially related to Laurence's Manawaka cycle and the difficult life of the people in the prairie.

Another important moment in its history was the year 1931, when Canada was "granted full powers" through the Statute of Westminster, with the exception of the amendments to the Canadian constitution that the British Parliament could still make (Pryke 28).

For Canadians, the most tragic event of World War II was the Battle of Dieppe (August 19, 1942), a test for landing troops from the sea across the English Channel. The battle ended dramatically and it is estimated that approximately 1,000 Canadians died and almost double were taken prisoners. Again, the reason for mentioning this event in particular is its connection with Laurence's own life and work. The regiment the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders composed of young men from Neepawa, Laurence's native town, people the author knew or went to school with, became a common presence in her writings. As Margaret Atwood remarked, "[t]his event recurs in one form or another in every one of her novels, running like a tragic leitmotif through the lives of her characters" (22). The role played by Canada was unique, as this country was "part of a world-circling empire, its railways filling the gap in communication between Europe and the East, … its young men taking part in the only social activity they were really wanted for outside Canada, imperial wars" (Frye 1982, 43). An important role, indeed, which only a country like Canada could have played.

The post-war period was characterised by massive immigration from Europe and fewer restrictions for the immigrant groups generally called "Asiatics". This migration justified the creation, in 1950, of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, which has striven ever since to serve people from diverse cultures "fairly, efficiently and with integrity" (according to the official website of Citizenship and Immigration Canada)[2]. However, public attention was more focused on the English-French tensions. Attempting to find solutions, the federal government appointed a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963, which, in

[1] Hugh MacLennan's seminal work defined Canada as "the two solitudes", understood as French and English Canada, leaving out the First Nations.
[2] http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/index.asp/ (accessed June 16, 2011).

1969, led to another key moment, namely the promulgation of the Official Languages Act. This made French and English "equal throughout government" (Hammill 2007, xxii).

Beyond the historical and political events, it is also necessary to have a look at the cultural environment on which artistic creations drew during these decades. The late 1950s witnessed the flourishing of a genuine Canadian cultural life. Artists were encouraged and supported financially by the Canada Council, founded in 1958, and by the availability and eagerness of newly founded Canadian publishing houses, booksellers, theatres and readers themselves to promote Canadian artists. Such presses which also "champion[ed] experimental or non-commercial novels" were: House of Anansi, Oberon, New Press, Coach House, ECW Press, Talonbooks, NeWest Press, etc. (Hutcheon 1990, 74). In 1955, Queen's University hosted discussions about Canadian writing and publishing, the first issue of *Canadian Literature* appeared in 1959, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation literary programme "Anthology" invited Canadian artists to read from their works. All these were setting the ground for the next decade, the 1960s, "the years that saw the flowering of Canadian fiction" (Hutcheon 1988, 1), simultaneously with a "militant cultural nationalism" (New 1986, x) that was emerging in the 1960s and 70s, coinciding with the second wave feminism in North America. This important decade in the literary history of Canada also witnessed the increase of indigenous "popular" novels, sold along with "serious" fiction (Hutcheon 1990, 75). Also initiated in the '60s, Hutcheon remarks "the increasing institutionalization of fiction within the academy" (76) connected with the double role of novelist and academic or writer-in-residence. In the chapter dedicated to the author's life, I will discuss Laurence's case and detail her residency at the University of Toronto, University of Western Ontario and Trend University.

Starting from 1971, when the official multiculturalism policy was declared and implemented, the cultural nationalism that W.H. New was mentioning, which was mainly promoted by the white majority of British extraction, acquired different connotations. The Canadian framework remained bilingual, with strong British and French influences, but ethnic pluralism gained power, thus becoming a matter of public concern, meant to be preserved and developed[3].

On the other hand, we could not ignore one of the most pertinent representations of Canada synthesised in the phrase "two solitudes" coined by Hugh MacLennan, with the implications this had–the absence of the

[3] http://multiculturalcanada.ca/ (accessed June 16, 2011).

First Nations from the greater making of the nation. His novel mirrored the general perception that the predominantly British provinces and Quebec were two entities living separately, their distinct lifestyles and ideologies deepening the process of development of the respective areas. However, around the 1960s, it became obvious that Canada was going through a process of change. Quebec, which "generally shared a rural, Catholic, conservative, and patriarchal conception of the good" (Kymlicka 87), witnessed a rapid period of liberalisation, an effective secularisation of the society, and the rise of nationalism among its citizens similar to the development of the West in general.

The Constitution Act of 1982 was considered an act of patriation of the Canadian constitution, Canada gaining total control over constitutional matters, thus passing the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Canada was entering late modern times as an independent country. Quebec was the only province which did not agree with the new constitution. As a consequence, to be Québécois "simply means being a participant in the francophone society of Quebec" (Frye 1982, 87), Quebec still negotiating its position as a distinct society, a unique status which should be protected by the government, a clause which it has demanded since 1982.

Even nowadays, to the wide world, the image of Canada remains split between its founding nations - on the one hand, English Canada as an influential member of the Commonwealth, on the other hand, the unique nature of French Canada, playing a key role in the founding of *La Francophonie*.

Nevertheless, this brief introduction to Canadian history could not be complete without including the concept of identity. It could be remarked that Canada's search for identity has implied one of the most sinuous courses that we can think of, with so many powerful elements combined in its creation. It took quite a long time until Canada became "a visible object in its own right" refusing to be considered anymore "an obstacle on the way to somewhere more interesting" (Frye 1982, 50). Self-awareness became prominent when Canadians accepted to define themselves against something and somebody else, "a kind of global Switzerland" (84), surrounded by the United States in the south, the European common market in the east, Russia in the north, China and Japan in the west. Canada has "moved through a variety of hyphenated and non-hyphenated attempts to name" itself (Smart, 196), to identify and define the sense of belonging to a vast territory, to the various cultures and languages that its inhabitants associate themselves with.

For many years Canada served as "a tabula rasa on which new European culture could be written" (Seifert 113). Trying hard to demonstrate that it is