Selected Essays on Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

This book is the result of my long-standing research interest and love for Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and other literatures in English since the early 1990s, often, albeit not always, considered within the post-colonial paradigm. The fourteen essays published here, mostly on some of the most prominent literary authors of the day, have been written during the past decade or so. They discuss primarily modern Canadian, Australian and New Zealand literatures, i.e. texts from the former British dominions, which have to date all fully established themselves internationally in their own right. Putting aside the many (Man) Booker Prizes and other major international awards for literature given to writers writing in English, the Nobel Prize in Literature was first awarded to the Australian writer Patrick White in 1973 and the first Canadian author Alice Munro only received it this year, in 2013. This book of essays is yet another critical homage to the fascinating body of writing in English produced all over the globe nowadays.

PART I:

CANADA

CHAPTER ONE

LITERARY ALLUSIONS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *PAYBACK: DEBT AND THE SHADOW SIDE OF WEALTH*

In her recent creative non-fiction work *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, Margaret Atwood examines the intellectual history of debt, balance and revenge in history, society and literature, debt as a driving force in (Western) fiction, debt in the realm of law, business, religion, and ultimately environment. She wrote it for the 2008 Massey Lectures and each of the five chapters in the book was delivered as a one-hour lecture in a different Canadian city. These lectures were also broadcast on CBC Radio One in November 2008. Atwood's book *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* was followed by her speculative dystopian novel *The Year of the Flood*, which continues the trajectory and characters introduced in *Oryx and Crake* and invites the reader to join its interactive website. Atwood wants to transgress the traditional novel genre into the virtual hypertext reading realm of the growing after-effects of her book, including music, her own blog and donation incentives for all sorts of ecologically-aware projects and organizations. In 2013 she published the final part of her dystopian trilogy, the novel entitled *MaddAddam*.

Payback (2008) certainly is a most provocative and thought-engaging book, which addresses the topical matter of debt at the time of the world economic crisis. Debt is considered as a philosophical, historical, political, economic and religious issue over the centuries: the author truly provides an intellectual history of debt. The book is divided into five chapters, titled "Ancient Balances", "Debt and Sin", "Debt as Plot", "The Shadow Side" and "Payback". In Chapter One the author clearly defines the subject-matter of her book: "… it's about debt as a human construct – thus an imaginative construct – and how this constructs mirrors and magnifies both voracious human desire and ferocious human fear" (*Payback* 2). The writer traces the feminine principle of balance/scale in the concept of justice (Iustitia) from ancient history onwards, including Ma'at, Themis,

Nemesis, Sekhmet, Astrea, and significantly asks herself why, "with the exception of the Christian and the Muslim ones, the supernatural justice figures … are all female" (34). In relation to the ancient Egyptian goddess Ma'at, she writes that she meant

> truth, justice, balance, the governing principles of nature and the universe, the stately progression of time – days, months, seasons, years. … Its opposite was physical chaos, selfishness, falsehood, evil behaviour – any sort of upset in the divinely ordained pattern of things. (27)

She maintains that the female Justice figures has persisted to this day, because the period of the Great Goddesses was followed by several thousand years of rigorous misogyny, during which goddesses were replaced by gods and women were downgraded. The ancient balance of the scales was thus broken.

In the second chapter Atwood dwells on debt and sin and says that the borrowing and lending process is something of an obscure transaction, partly theft and partly trade, provided that a reasonable and not exaggerated interest is paid and the money eventually returned to the lender. She refers to Christianity in the Western world and claims that in this religious system Christ is called the redeemer. The term is drawn directly from the language of debt and pawning or pledging, scapegoats, "sin-eaters" etc, because the Devil keeps his account books constantly in good order and payback time will surely arrive.

> … the whole of Christianity rests on the notion of spiritual debts and what must be done to repay them, and how you might get out of paying by having someone else pay instead. And it rests, too, on a long pre-Christian history of scapegoat figures – including human sacrifices – who take your sins away for you. (67)

"…and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us…" (The Lord's Prayer, the Bible) In the Slovenian translation of the Bible the noun "trespasses" is rendered as "debts" and consequently refers to debtors, who have to be forgiven. Are we justified in reading this Christian attitude of the lender's forgiving debts as Atwood's version of an underlying Christian principle of a payback or a bailout (especially as regards spiritual debts, of course), payoff and primarily a generous levelling out of balances on either side in the long run?

From the point of view of literary allusiveness, Chapter Three, "Debt as Plot", is particularly relevant. Here Atwood looks at the protestant Reformation and the introduction of interest on loans. When Henry VIII

ascended to the throne, interest-charging was legalized for Christians in England, which gave rise to the expansion of the market and in the nineteenth century and the explosion of capitalism in the West. In this light, Atwood alludes to the work of Charles Dickens, Christopher Marlowe, Washington Irving, W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and even the novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Atwood's debt-reading of the all-time classic *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is very much to the point here:

> Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights* loves Cathy passionately and hates his rival, Linton, but the weapon with which he is able to act out his love and his hate is money, and the screw he twists is debt: he becomes the owner of the estate called Wuthering Heights by putting its owner in debt to him. (*Payback* 100)

The Victorian novel *Vanity Fair* (1847-48) is especially about goods, material and spiritual, and, as Atwood observes, we watch the grim business of Amelia Sedley's family bankruptcy. But we also follow the brilliant but socially inferior gold-digger, Becky Sharp, climb her way up the social ladder. Everything that can be bought and sold, rent or lent is *vanitas*, Thackeray teaches us. Flaubert's bored provincial wife Emma Bovary, too, is eventually punished for her "shopaholicism" rather than extramarital sex, because her overspending and consequent debt catches up and exposes her secret life. Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's novel *House of Mirth* (1905) is not versed in debt-managing, which brings her down. She should have known better that "if a man lends you money and charges no interest, he's going to want payment of some other kind" (106).

Millers are often rendered in folklore as thieves and cheats who supposedly steal from peasants by weighing short and using some of their flour to their own benefit. If you are a miller's daughter like Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) you are likely to suffer the consequences of the miller's misdeeds. Mr. Tulliver, however, is an honest miller who finds himself in financial difficulties. Because of that his adversary buys his mill: he loses his final lawsuit and runs his family into debt. Margaret Atwood turns the established "proto-feminist" readings of the novel, with Maggie as a clever independent but thwarted woman born before her time, upside down and asks herself:

> But what if we read it as the story of Mr. Tulliver's debt? For it's this debt that's the engine of the novel: it shoves the plot along, changes the mental states of the characters, and determines their scope of action. (116)

Tom and Maggie suffer the consequences of their father's deeds greatly and eventually drown in a flood, reconciled at the very end. Tulliver's adversary Wakem is saved in the end, which Atwood rightly sees as the turning-point and the proof of the emerging Victorian materialism constituted in Law: "Power has moved from those who process material goods to those who process the contracts that govern them. Hermes – god of commerce, thieves, lies, contrivances, tricks, and mechanisms – has switched allegiances" (119). The novels alluded to by Atwood are thus essentially about money, debt and payback, albeit not exclusively of course, with payback not always achieved in full. The allusions to nineteenth and early twentieth-century novels she draws upon lend a totally new dimension to the notion of debt Atwood deals with in *Payback.*

Atwood may have borrowed the ideas related to the "transactional analysis" from the bestselling Canadian psychiatrist Eric Berne (1910-1970), whom she refers to in her book in several instances. In his ground-breaking book *Games People Play* (1864), Berne postulates that games are in fact ritualistic transactions or behaviour patterns between individuals that can indicate hidden feelings or emotions, in her case the spiritual twinship of debtors and lenders. According to this neo-Freudian interpretation of human behaviour, a game is a series of reciprocal transactions and leads to a predictable outcome; by extension this includes the "game" between the lender and the debtor. Games are often characterized by a switch in the roles of players towards the end. Each game has a payoff (cf. Atwood idea of payback) on either side, for those playing it, for example the aim of earning sympathy, satisfaction, vindication, something that reinforces their lives. Atwood refers to Berne's concept of life games, "patterns of behaviour that can occupy an individual's entire lifespan, often destructively, but with hidden psychological benefits or payoffs that keep the games going" (83). And then there is also the question of gift-giving within the context of the "life games" people play. The constant give-and-take process, which is the essence of social life, cannot be aborted by either party: "Gifts are rendered, received and repaid both obligatorily and in one's own interest, in magnanimity, for repayment of services, or as challenges or pledges" (Mauss 27, qtd. in Zabus 123). In a post-colonial context, however, the concept of gift may be just the opposite of hospitality, help and generosity. It may have the meaning of "poison" (cf. the German *Gift*), for the debtor is expected to pay back with subordination.

The main literary work of Atwood"s brilliant allusions in *Payback* is Charles Dickens's extremely popular book *A Christmas Carol* (1843), an open nineteenth-century criticism of the emerging Victorian materialistic

self-satisfaction and containment, which helped to establish the Western non-religious concept of Christmas. The loan-sharking lender Ebenezer Scrooge is transformed into a beneficent forgiving character, who is taken directly from the London Stock Exchange and whose main concern and value in life is business. During Christmas he is visited by a ghost and three spirits and utterly changed thereafter. The tale is generally seen as an indictment of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism and Dickens got the idea form his own humiliating experience of debt in his childhood. When his father John Dickens was arrested for debt and put in prison, he had to leave school, sell all of his books and take up a job in a blacking factory. At the beginning of the tale Ebenezer (cf. Squeezer) Scrooge's nephew reminds him that "Merry Christmas" time has come, Scrooge is very cross:

> "What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What a Christmas–time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer, a time for balancing your books, and having every item in'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you?" (Dickens 19)

At the end of the book Scrooge-the miser is much changed, ready to share money with others especially on Christmas, but also helping people for a change. In Atwood's terms, this could qualify as writing off debts: this will only make him happy and redeem him. He shouts his newfound happiness from the rooftops:

> "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A Merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here!" (201)

Margaret Atwood claims that Dickens deliberately created a reverse Faustus from Christopher Marlowe's figure. Scrooge had symbolically made a pact with the devil, this malevolent creditor who tempts people with material benefits in exchange for their spiritual health and moral integrity, and Scrooge is such an extreme miser that he does not spend any money even on himself. When at the beginning Scrooge sees the ghost of his former business partner Marley, it warns him that his soul will be in fetters for eternity unless he changes his greedy behaviour and announces other ghosts to visit him that very Christmas night. This symbolizes Scrooge's forced transformation that is ultimately seen, even today, as a blessing and more broadly the restoration of social harmony and Victorian order. Dickens's book redefined and reintroduced the spirit of Christmas

as a seasonal merriment after the Puritan authorities in seventeenth-century England and America suppressed pre-Christian rituals associated with it. The religious and social implications of the book helped significantly to reinvent Christmas with emphasis on family, goodwill, and compassion. In her book Atwood traces the roots of Dickens's Scrooge in Goethe's and Marlowe's versions of *Dr Faustus*, where Marlowe's character is a bon-vivant, a big-spender, who shares his wealth around very much like the reformed Scrooge at the end of Dickens's book. Atwood likewise insightfully traces the Faustian figure who is prepared to do everything for money in Washington Irving's story "The Devil and Tom Walker", where Walker represents utter stinginess, ruthlessly grinding the people in need to the ground. Scrooge in Dickens, however, after being visited by Marley's ghost and the three spirits of Christmas, is a changed man, he is

> set free from his own heavy chain of cash-boxes at the end of the book, when, instead of sitting on his pile of money, he begins to spend it. …: the post-ghost Scrooge, for instance, doesn't give up his business, though whether it remained in part a moneylending business we aren't told. No, it's what you do with your riches that really counts. (98)

Atwood's latter-day literary character Scrooge Nouveau in a modernized Dickens's book *A Christmas Carol* appears in the fifth chapter of the book and he is like humanity today, at the time of global warming and ruthless depletion of natural resources. He is faced with two options: an eco-friendly world or a typically Atwoodian dystopian future with all kinds of disasters befalling the natural environment. It is pay-up time for humanity as a whole, Atwood warns us.

As always, the author knows just how to provide the right amount of humour on the most serious of issues such as debt, sin and payback, whether we see *Payback* as, "smart, funny and clever" (Liss) or "by no means the highlight of the book" (Ashenburg). John Gray in *The New York Review of Books* typically reads the book against the current US recession and writes that it "can be read as a defence of traditional beliefs about the hazards of debt" (Gray). He is right in surmising that in Atwood's book there is an implicit notion that we may now have to return to older and simpler practices of thrift and saving. However, Atwood is no economist and the solution to the problem of debt is not provided, and when it is, it seems somewhat naive. Her vast knowledge and erudition is, however, always formidable: she convincingly shows in a cultural materialist vein how debt as a *leitmotif* and literary figures concerned with money predominate in Western fiction, "no matter how much the virtues of love

may be waved idealistically aloft" (100) and how in her youth she thought the nineteenth-century novel was driven by love, but now that she is older she sees that it was essentially driven by money. Margaret Atwood shows clearly the perils of debt and hints at the (im)possibility of a utopian future without greed. She demonstrates how debt has indeed been a driving force in Western/Anglo-American fiction. She is perhaps a more successful writer of fiction than non-fiction, as some reviewers suggest, but she certainly is always very timely in her views and captures extremely well the spirit of the period. Louis Bayard, among others, complains in his review article of the book that

> Atwood never really distinguishes between "bad debt" (credit cards) and "good debt" (college loans, mortgages). The niceties of Keynesian economics, of microfinancing ventures, of the ways in which financial entities act as both borrowers and lenders … these are either beneath or beyond her. (Bayard, cf. also Massie)

The writer's conclusion is far from being truly conclusive. She is nonetheless able to introduce the theme of eco-politics and global bailout which only can ensure our physical survival on Earth, which some critics have found contrived and banal at the end of the book. As Atwood declares, all wealth comes from Nature and the only "serious" debts are those humanity owes to Mother Earth, i.e. ecological debts. Consequently the planet Earth will reclaim the payback that humanity owes it or else "Nature would be a lifeless desert… and the resulting debt to Nature would be infinite" (202). This urgent and timely eco-political statement is perhaps Atwood's strongest point in this creative non-fiction work, where especially the multiple and well-chosen literary allusions and references are most engaging. To conclude on a light Canadian note, in the last chapter of *Payback* Margaret Atwood mentions a Canadian saying about the weather. She notes, however, that some people believe it is simply Presbyterian, one that shows the allegedly Canadian belief that the enjoyable things in life are only on loan or acquired on credit, and sooner or later they will have to be paid for in one way or another: "First person: 'Lovely weather we're having'. Second person: 'We'll pay for it later'" (165).

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CHAPTER TWO

DIASPORIC LITERATURE IN A POST-ETHNIC CANADA

The processes of globalization, cross-fertilization and transculturation make diasporic literature and culture particularly important today, in Canada and elsewhere. Diaspora, the dispersal of various peoples around the world (Cohen 1997), often caused by major historical and political changes, carries with it the collective cultural memory and capital of the past, overseas or across borders, as well as the acknowledgement of the *old country* as a concept deeply embedded in an individual language, religion, customs and folklore. Diasporic writing connects the past and the present and forges new notions of fluid and transnational identities; it opens up spaces for new expressions of a transnational global culture. Thus it seriously challenges the centre-periphery positioning central to 'traditional' post-colonial studies.

Contemporary Canadian diasporic authors have increasingly come to be seen as transcultural and transnational authors, the writers of two homelands, figuring in the global cross-border English-speaking cultural collage space and in the Canadian multi-ethnic, post-ethnic society. In Canada, the so-called minority literature is now part of the mainstream and no longer merely a veneer of the much coveted and publicly proclaimed, albeit not always practically effectual, multiculturalism. Also, one has to consider Canadian diasporic writing with all of its constitutive ethnic identities within the context of a new inter-American transnationalism and integration. This substantially changes the field of identity politics, the very concept of ethnicity and the need for its redefinition, as well as the various cultural/literary practices of a collective and individual dynamic identity construction in Canada today.

Canada has developed substantially from the 1970s model of the Canadian cultural mosaic, a cliché used to express the much sought unity through diversity, and it is today quite proud of its self-image as a multicultural country. While some writers and critics are clearly supportive of the policy of multiculturalism, others find it has reached its limits in

fostering some sort of self-imposed ghettoization. They call this phenomenon the multicultural fallacy, which may, in fact, fragment Canadian society rather than create a Canadian nation in the global world. There is also the question of the exotic ethnic Other which, according to some critics, emerges when the marginalized minority ethnic writers emphasize exoticism to create a certain ethnic stereotype. Native Canadian authors (e.g. Thomas King in *Medicine River*, 1987; Lee Maracle in *Ravesong*, 1993; Eden Robinson in *Monkey Beach*, 2000), on the other hand, have revisioned the multiculturalism issue critically from their own standpoint of native representation and have written against exotic stereotyping, or have written on rather than just back to and against the white-settler mainstream.

One example of the literary developments of the recent ethnic Canadians since the 1960s are the Caribbean expatriate writers. They have, among many others, also helped to reshape Canadian literary landscape(s) and other scapes, while drawing on their place of origin for inspiration or simply dealing with quintessentially Canadian (=ethnic?) themes and locales. Prominent in this process have been the writer Austin Clarke from Barbados (*The Polished Hoe*, 2003), Neil Bissoondath from Trinidad (*Doing the Heart Good* (2002), *The Unyielding Clamour of the Night* (2005), Dionne Brand with her poetry and novels from Trinidad (*Land to Light On*, 1997), Olive Senior with her poetry and short stories, Dany Laferrière from Haiti (*How to Make Love to a Negro*, 1987), Nalo Hopkinson originally from Jamaica (*Skinfolk*, 2001; *Midnight Robber*, 2000) and many more. These Canadian authors of Caribbean descent mostly object to a single label to categorize them, so as to avoid literary and cultural ghettoization, and they would also distance themselves from a hyphenated identity (Canadian-and something). The same holds true of some of the Canadian authors of Indian, generally South Asian, South American and even Slovenian and other writers of Central European descent: e.g. John Krizanc who has made it into the mainstream with his plays *Tamara* (1981) and *Prague* (1983), for the latter of which he has been given the Governor-General Award for Drama, Tom Ložar that has contributed regularly to eminent Canadian literary journals, and Ted Kramolc, who lives in Canada but writes in Slovenian, and was awarded one of the most prestigious prizes for Slovenian literature for his novel written in Slovenian *Tango in Silk Wooden Shoes* (*Tango v svilenih coklah*, 2002).

The innovative and groundbreaking analyses of Chicano/a intellectuals in the U.S.A. (Gutiérrez-Jones) gave rise to the theorists of the border with Gloria Anzaldúa at the forefront. In her seminal book *Borderlands/La*

frontera: The New Mestiza (Anzaldúa 1987) she examined the suppressed and often violent aspects of the Texas and Mexico border and introduced the spatial metaphor of the *frontera* or borderlands. *Frontera* is thus in her view the border(land) space which enables one to essentially accept the various contradictions *per se* and to refuse the impossible attempt to unify and synthesize them, hence it turns all the existing social, racial, ethnic and gender contradictions into a source of strength and unity. This concept of the *frontera* has since enabled many writers, in Canada as well, to see their own culture not as a dominant narrative but rather from the point of view of heterogeneity and messiness, subalternity and hybridity. It has enabled them to focus on the various conceptual possibilities and consequences related to borders, border-crossings, and borderlands, frequently not even a geographical but an imaginary space of contact.

A major contemporary Canadian author representative for diasporic/ borderland subjectivity, originally from Argentina, who came to Canada as a small child, is Guillermo Verdecchia. His most significant work in this respect, albeit not the only one, is his monodrama *Fronteras Americanas/ American Borders*, which won a Chalmers Award and the 1993 Governor General's Award for Drama. In the play a displaced diasporic subject struggles to de- and re-construct a home between two cultures, while re-examining with great humour the images and renegotiating clichés of Latinos and Latin America not only in Canada but the USA as well. This essay addresses Verdecchia's usage of Latino images and the unmistakable all-pervading colour of Latino music through the entire play. The protagonist is split in two personas, 'Wideload' McKennah/Verdecchia, 'Anglo' vs. 'Latino'. He wittily ponders 'Saxonian' attitudes as well as the cultural shock he experiences upon his return to South America, crossing the *frontera* yet again, only to come to the paradoxical conclusion in his poetic imagination that it is really the border within himself that must be crossed and embraced, for maps are really always just metaphors and not the territory: "And you? Did you change your name somewhere along the way? Does a part of you live hundreds or thousands of kilometres away? Do you have two countries, two memories? Do you have a border zone?" (Verdecchia 78). Verdecchia uses stereotyping in order to reduce cultural differences and even resorts to a simplistic caricature of the Canadian Latino identity, which he subsequently tries to deconstruct. This instance of border-zone Canadian literature and his innovative use of 'Hispanish', as a language of resistance, reveals the fact that he is lost, which began

> […] in France, Paris, France, the Moveable Feast, the City of light, where I lived for a couple of years. En France ou mes étudiants me disaient que je parlais le français comme une vache Catalan(e)-. En France ou j'étais

> étranger, un anglais, un Argentin-Canadien, un faux touriste. Paris, France where I lived and worked illegally, where I would produce my transit pass whenever policemen asked for my papers. In France, where I was undocumented, extra-legal, marginal and where for some reason, known perhaps only by Carlos Gardel and Julio Cortázar, I felt almost at home. (Ibid., 28)

When the speaker in the play eventually comes back to Calgary in Canada,

> […] this Noah's ark of a nation» from his one-time home, South America, the Other America, as he calls it, it suddenly revealingly strikes him as in an epiphany: «I am not in Canada; I am not in Argentina. I am on the Border. I am Home. Mais zoot alors, je comprends maintenant, mais oui, merde! Je suis Argentin-Canadien! I am a post-Porteño neo-Latino Canadian! I am the Pan-American highway! (Ibid., 75)

Act Two of the monodrama *Fronteras Americanas/American Borders* significantly addresses tango and its music as the quintessential South American/Argentinian contribution to the world that crossed the borders of the Americas as well. Throughout the whole play an important source of auditory imagery is music, an integral part of his diasporic identity, which is perceived by the sense of hearing rather than sight. Music for Verdecchia comes from a host of South American authors and performers (Mano Negra, Los Mariachi, Los Lobos, Atahualpa Yupanquí, Astor Piazzolla and Kronos Quartet, Ramiro's Latin Orchestra, Carlos Santana, Steve Jordan, Milladoiro, Placido Domingo, Dino Saluzzi, Anibal Troilo). Tango, however, perhaps born of the gaucho's crude attempts to waltz, is to him

> […] music for exile, for the preparations, the significations of departure, for the symptoms of migration. It is the languishing music of picking through your belongings and deciding what to take.
>
> Music for men and women thin as bones.
>
> Music for your invisibility.…
>
> Music for a day in the fall when you buy a new coat and think perhaps you will live here for the rest of your life, perhaps it will be possible, you have changed so much, would they recognize you? Would you recognize your country? Would you recognize yourself?
>
> Wideload: Basically, tango is music for fucked-up people.
>
> (Ibid., 59-60)

The author concludes that the tango was only reluctantly accepted in Europe, but that it has not been entirely domesticated outside of Argentina,

since it is impossible to shop or aerobicize to tango "porque el tango es un sentimiento que se baila" (Ibid.).

Verdecchia's monodrama ends on a prophetic note (*somos todos Americanos*), directly addressing the audience, his fellow Canadians, who all live in the border zone of the Americas, where the border line between Canada and the U.S. is not perceived as so radical as the one with Latin America that begins at the Mexican border:

> Every North American, before this century is over, will find that he or she has a personal frontier with Latin America.
>
> This is a living frontier, which can be nourished by information but, above all, by knowledge, by understanding, by the pursuit of enlightened self-interest on both parts.
>
> Or it can be starved by suspicion, ghost stories, arrogance, ignorance, scorn and violence. (Fuentes, 7)

The movement forward is no longer a movement towards the centre, but rather a future trajectory towards the border, which has in fact become the centre overnight, so that in this case it is the border that 'strikes back': "Ladies and gentlemen, please reset your watches. It is now almost ten o'clock on a Friday night – we still have time. We can go forward. Towards the centre, towards the border" (Verdecchia, 78). Crossing borders (people, capital, information) challenges the notion that a national community is necessarily bound by its geographic borders. This of course also applies to its culture and literature discussed here, for some people's lives unfold in essentially diasporic settings, where class, race and citizenship play an extremely important role. Borders have acquired an increased mobility and multiplicity and there has been their continual dislocation, one that is closely linked with a differential regulation of migration and citizenship. The recent migratory spaces that the new diasporic Canadians inhabit and lend them their distinctive voice mark deterritorialization and increasingly also reterritorialization, which blurs the borders of nations and nation-states, as it can be seen in *Fronteras Americanas*. At the same time these reterritorializations (*somos todos Americanos*) and transnational/borderland diasporic movements seem dangerously close to and are indeed inextricable from the (neocolonialist) reterritorializations of global capital, division of labour, production and profit. Only a few years after the success of his play *Fronteras Americanas/American Borders*, Guillermo Verdecchia, a Canadian of Argentinian provenance, tried his hand at short stories for the first time. They came out under the title *Citizen Suárez* (1998). Like his early play, the stories are essentially about people lost between countries and

languages, in their complex citizenship, caught between desire to run away and to belong. He wrote and starred in a short film adaptation of *Fronteras Americanas* called *Crucero/Crossroads*, which was shown at international film festivals and received several awards: the omnipresent colour of Latino music appears again as the linking and identifying element. Displacement and the fluid transnational and borderland post-ethnic diasporic identity – identity being at the very heart of the concept of Home – show a dynamic global view of some of the best new Canadian diasporic authors. This includes the literary Latino *frontera* world of Guillermo Verdecchia, where his pronounced auditory sound colouring of South and Central American music serves as a linking element on his spiritual journey and identity search between his two 'homes', Argentina and Canada, respectively, from "La Bamba" to Placido Domingo, with music serving as one of the audible characters in the play.

Canada has been searching for its own national identity for a long time and this ongoing search was compared to "a dog chasing its own tail" (Atwood 8). The concept of the ethnic mosaic within the multicultural paradigm in Canada has resulted in artists of various ethnic backgrounds promoting their own − and thus Canadian culture of the country − as in a kind of Grand Hotel Canada. This includes such internationally renowned authors and Man Booker Prize winners as Michael Ondaatje, Margaret Atwood and Yann Martel. In a recent interview recorded at the launching of the translation of his novel *Life of Pi* into Slovenian, Martel said something that seems an interesting description of the complexity of Canadian literature and its "chameleon-like quality". To him, Canada and its collective flux identity can be perceived as a state of mind:

> A Canadian novel does not necessarily take place in Canada. So maybe it is the chameleon-like quality of Canadian literature that makes it typical. Canadian literature is the chameleon. […] There is something polymorphous about Canadian literature. […] Canada is a state of mind. Canadian is whoever says that he or she is Canadian. (Furlan n.p.)

Neil Bissoondath, who arrived in Canada from Trinidad only in the early 1970s, has in his own words always struggled against the label of a Trinidadian (-Indian) writer. His views on multiculturalism in Canada are much debated; in his literary work he examines the (multi)ethnic landscape of Canada today, straddling the emitive and receptive worlds of the protagonists. In his essays he claims that the policy of multiculturalism (the mosaic theory) has been downright disastrous for the country and for immigrants themselves and that it has now reached a point when it has to be seriously re-examined. Some degree of integration is today necessary

and legitimate to expect, he claims, for ethnic/migrant groups have tended to isolate themselves, one way or another, too much from the majority population in the midst of which they live. Bissoondath writes that Canadians encounter each other's multicultural mosaic tiles mainly at festivals, which are reduced to "the simplest theatre" at the level of "a folkloric Disneyland". In most of the multicultural literature, he continues, ethnic stereotypes are only reinforced:

> There are those who find pleasure in playing to the theme, those whose ethnicity ripens with the years. Yet to play the ethnic, deracinated and costumed, is to play the stereotype. It is to abdicate one's full humanity in one of its exotic features. To accept the role of ethnic is also to accept a gentle marginalization. It is to accept that one will never be just a part of the landscape but always a little apart from it, not quite belonging. In exoticizing and trivializing cultures, often thousands of years old, by sanctifying the mentality of the mosaic-tile, we have succeeded in creating mental ghettos for the various communities. (Bissoondath 2006)

Bissoondath feels that such a situation only resulted in an identity crisis for Canadians of a different ethnic descent that it emphasized (cultural) difference. In so doing it allegedly delayed the integration of immigrants into the Canadian mainstream and thus unwillingly damaged Canada's national sense of a (unified) collective self. The immigrants' reintegration and (re)construction of identity and cultural adjustment after the initial trauma caused by their sudden displacement from their original cultural and linguistic setting (Sapir) is facilitated through communication, primarily through the language (and literature), but also other means of creative self-expression, such as art and even science or other forms of knowledge that enable communication and hence integration into the new milieu.

Some ten years ago the American critic Stanley Fish tried to distinguish between two versions of multiculturalism. The first one of these is similar to Bissoondath's understanding, namely boutique multiculturalism, exemplified "in a celebratory but only cosmetic way as ethnic restaurants /and/ weekend festivals, and /by/ high profile flirtations with the other in the manner satirized by Tom Wolfe under the rubric of radical chic" (Fish 378). The other type, the so-called strong multiculturalism, in his view, really has "a *deep* respect to all cultures at their core, for he believes that each has the right to form its own identity" (Fish 378). Fish concludes by quoting Taylor, however, that paradoxically neither of these multiculturalisms does in fact come to terms with the cultural differences they wish to maintain., This does not mean that multiculturalism does not exist, for "all

societies are becoming increasingly multicultural in a rapidly evolving global process" (Taylor in Fish 385). The institutionalized multiculturalism in Canada, whether perceived as a boutique or a strong type of multiculturalism has, at least so far, represented a relatively viable mechanism and model for civic tolerance, even if, as Graham Huggan rightly points out,

> [it] continues to operate as a form of willfully aestheticising exoticist discourse which inadvertently serves to disguise persistent racial tensions within the nation; and one which, in affecting a respect for the other as a reified object of cultural difference, deflects attention away from social issues – discrimination, unequal access, hierarchies of ethnic privilege – that are very far from being resolved. (Huggan 126)

In Neil Bissoondath's 1994 book on Canadian multiculturalism, *Selling Illusions: the Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, the author, as in the earlier mentioned essays, defines ethnic stereotypes akin to boutique multiculturalism in the form of Canadian multiculturalism, where ethnicity is seen as a commodity in which "ethnic groups will preserve their distinctiveness in a gentle and insidious form of cultural apartheid" (Bissoondath 89). He brings the supposed multicultural fallacy in close connection with exoticism in a highly theatrical and mostly manipulative way, during which process he paradoxically advertises himself with the aid of the very concepts he originally sets out to criticize. Regardless of how one sees multiculturalism in terms of the perception of the value of non-mainstream literatures of the ethnicized body, today it is clearly a hybrid between the actual practice and policy and the idealized view of a tolerant ethnic plurality within a national framework, thus "a discourse of desire" (Huggan 154). Multiculturalism, clearly some kind of shibboleth in Canada, should perhaps not be dismissed as an entirely unworkable, utopian concept. However, today it is a greatly problematic issue in need of some not only cosmetic revision with a view of transculturalism, "but one which offers the only plausible and workable alternative to the 'two solitudes' monoculturalism that cramped so much creative energy in Canada before 1970s" (Kulyk Keefer 1996: 249-50). In describing the position of racial minority Canadian writers, some critical voices have denounced multiculturalism as not being adequate enough to "address the diverse contexts of historical and current racial inequalities and injustices" (Miki in Kulyk Keefer 1996: 250). Multiculturalism should and has become more all-inclusive as regards the Native, Black and Asian peoples in Canada and in the recent years it has come a long way. As early as 1996, the critic and author Janice Kulyk Keefer pleaded for a transcultural writing which goes beyond immigrant or ethnic production, because "it is

not written exclusively for or read exclusively by the members of a given 'minority' community in Canada" (1996: 254). Such writing crosses the borders between different ethno-racial groups, where Kulyk Keefer sees transculturalism as a defining aesthetic of *strong* multiculturalism. The concept of multiculturalism, of course, greatly varies regarding its deployment in individual national contexts. If in countries like Canada and Australia (since the 1970s) it refers to government programmes designed to equalize and empower minority ethnicities, in Mexico it means the official encouragement of the identities of individual indigenous groups in the country, while in Brazil it is still treated with suspicion and an ambivalent attitude. In France social critics attack it as either "a recycling of 1960s third worldist radicalism". For the Centre/Right and for the left it represents "a cunningly disguised form of American imperialism" (Stam and Shohat 296). The young woman writer Nalo Hopkinson from the Caribbean is just one of the new vibrant voices in Canadian literature, who brings into her writing a new awareness of race and culture, but also gender and sexuality. Her science fiction novels can be described as *post-colonial* fantasy writing set in the Caribbean region (*Midnight Robber*, 2000). The up-and-coming Canadian writing originally from the region recently saw the publication of a successful and resounding anthology of Caribbean writing produced in Canada, *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction* (2000) which shows a rich literary tradition and creative output. These short stories heavily rely on folklore and local Caribbean history. Apart from Hopkinson and other younger writers featured in the book (e.g. Pamela Mordecai), they also make references to such well-known literary figures as Jamaica Kincaid, Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris. In an essay Hopkinson describes her use of Creole in narrative and its hybridity, for example as used in her novel *Midnight Robber*. In addition to that she claims that a diasporic Caribbean culture is based on both the West African deities and Taino values (the Taino are the indigenous people who were living in the Caribbean when Columbus arrived there), rather than taking references from Greek and Roman mythology. In contrast to some other Caribbean writers in Canada she openly acknowledges and embraces her hybridity.

> Hybridity was a strategy for survival and resistance amongst the enslaved and indentured people. They all came from different cultures with different languages and then had an alien culture and speech imposed on them. They had to find ways to use elements of all the cultures in order to continue to exist. That hybridity is reflected in the languaging we've created. I've tried to reflect that in *Midnight Robber*, largely in the way the characters use

> language when they speak, but also in the language of the narrative. (Hopkinson, n. p.)

What is particularly striking in her sci-fi writing is that she is trying to break an imposed language by remixing it to create a special kind of *language of resistance*. Not only using an accent or Creole, but also saying these words out loud is in her view "an act of referencing history and claiming space" (Hopkinson n. p.). This idiosyncratic linguistic *code-sliding* makes her works clearly not an easy reading, using alternatively a relatively standard English, French, Spanish or a deep Creole. The *Caribbean language* is something that Hopkinson sees as a possible evolution of co-existing cultures.

As regards the question of the post-coloniality of Canadian contemporary fiction, one should first ask oneself whether one can at all extend the term's usage to countries which became independent nation states relatively early after colonial rule, like Australia, Canada and even the USA. In her recent book Laura Moss questions, for example, if and how post-colonialism can be applied to Canadian literature. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, she argues, have a different status, because of the same 'imperial' English language and original source of European culture. Non-English speaking cultures in these countries, for that matter, are post-colonial in quite a different way. One of the doyens of post-colonial literary theory, Helen Tiffin, in a review article of the book, writes that the term has been used and abused and signals the "sheer impossibility" of answering the question of whether Canada is post-colonial or not, for the question itself and the book are "quintessentially Canadian and paradigmatically post-colonial" (Tiffin in Maver 2006b: 15.) The term post-colonial can *in extremis* also be regarded as an oversimplified, albeit most convenient theoretical tool needing to be redefined. In its hyphenated form, post-colonialism can be seen, and used, in the original narrow sense to signify a particular historical post-colonial production, that is, largely but not exclusively, post-independence writing. On the other hand, in its non-hyphenated form it can and should be seen in a broader ahistorical sense relating to a set of very different post-colonial, deconstructive, anti-imperial, and anti-Eurocentric methods and discursive practices, as well as political and social struggles. Recently there has emerged

> a shift of scholarly interest away from the original historical post-colonial seen as largely post-independence writing, toward a very different kind of post-colonial, understood as a set of deconstructive discursive practices, and post-colonial cultural studies as an academic discipline as well as a form of political activism. (Maver 2006a: 3)

Post-colonialism has produced a number of very different literary responses, which is why the overgeneralizingly used term post-colonial calls for a detailed rethinking and revisioning now more than ever, especially as regards its future development. Take Canada as an example of contemporary post-colonial writing in English: just as the individual post-colonial (national) literatures written in English today are clearly not homogeneous, although they have been shaped by several common experiences and their shared sociopolitical circumstances as part of the former *Pax Britannica* or today's Commonwealth, they are really extremely diverse.

> Put aside for a moment the possibility that like post-colonialism, multiculturalism is as problematic, contentious, and multifaceted a term as one's likely to meet anywhere; consider only the literary practice of writers such as Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, Anita Rau Badami and Ven Begamudre, Kerri Sakamoto and Wayson Choy, to name just a few prominent Canadian writers, some of then with international reputations. To treat these writers as post-colonial in Ashcroft's terms would be to etiolate both their achievement and their primary concerns as writers. For they are all functioning as Canadian writers who are either immigrants themselves or from families recently dislocated by the fact of exile or expatriation. (Kulyk Keefer 2006: 40)

This is precisely why in recent theoretical debates the concept of diaspora has become increasingly connected with the constructed and transnational nature of identity formation, including Canada, diaspora referring to both the voluntary and involuntary migrations and movements in the past and the present alike. Diasporic literary studies, regional studies, and especially trans/national/cultural studies now face globalization and may represent a viable alternative for the future. Comparing multiculturalism and post-colonialism, it is safe to say that both these two much debated concepts essentially critique Eurocentrism, racism, and colonial discourse. Given its various interpretations, multiculturalism (similarly to post-colonialism) represents a constellation of discourses, which is why it is misleading to make sweeping generalizations about it as holding some kind of "multiculturalism promises" or "multiculturalism claims" (Stam and Shohat 296).

Newly introduced critical concepts in addition to the already well established and much debated freedoms of multiculturalism, are polyvocality, hybridity and also (post-colonial) mimicry. Homi Bhabha argues that the concept of hybridity as a form of cultural difference, while sometimes regarded as manipulative, allows the voices of the Other/migrant, the marginalized and the dominated, to exist within the

language of the dominant group whose voice is never fully in control (Bhabha 1994). In recent theoretical debates diaspora and its writing has been frequently connected with the constructed and transnational nature of identity formation, since the concept refers to both voluntary and involuntary migrations and movements. In the future diasporic writing should also be examined for how it represents (diasporic/ethnic/exotic) otherness in a text and how it brings this otherness to bear on the actual experience of reading. In a significant way the notion of the 'new' diasporas and their literature also challenges the contested formulation of margin vs. centre by post-colonial studies. Contemporary Canadian writing by diasporic authors from a wide variety of diasporic communities traces the connections to various locales in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, South America or Eastern Europe etc. and perceives Home as several locales, liberated of the spatial concept of location, which is, however, at the same time deeply embedded in the collective cultural memory of a migrant and her/his own personal biography (or that of their parents or grand-parents). Indeed, contemporary Canadian diasporic literary production is becoming pluralized and globalized by transcending individual traditional categories of Canadianness especially as regards the Canadian locale as well as the volatility of cultural memory.

There has recently emerged a pronounced shift of emphasis in contemporary Canadian diasporic writing, for many new texts are set outside Canada and feature reversed migration back to a home place by a Westernized/Canadianized protagonist, who does not so much want to return home as to write back home (e.g. Anita Rau Badami, *The Hero's Walk*; Michael Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost*; Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family*; Rohinton Mistry, M. G. Vassanji, etc). This points to the fact that there is no unitary national narrative tradition in Canadian fiction and that Canada today as a culture-in-process, as another diasporic switching-point (Appadurai 171) largely expresses itself today in literary texts as an imagined community. Perhaps this is its current paramount function as an emerging indicator of the significance of place and a translational cultural identity (Weiss) in the global context, one that undergoes consistent transformation in the processes of interpretation and expression. The fluid transnational post-ethnic diasporic identity, where identity is at the very heart of the concept of Home, as well as the changing position of the (transnational) subject in the globalized transnational culture, show a dynamic and shifting global view of some of the best new Canadian diasporic authors. Their increasingly empowered voice and vision have pluralized and globalized contemporary Canadian literary production. This suggests all the variegated pluralist diversity of

Canada today and offers new conceptions of global(ized) identities. The spaces they have created in their diasporic writings are fully open to a constant deconstruction, construction and reconstruction.

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