Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
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Instituto de Letras

Vansan Gonçalves

Obasan, by Joy Kogawa, and *Alias Grace*, by Margaret Atwood: Fictional Representations of Canadian Identity and History

Rio de Janeiro
2013

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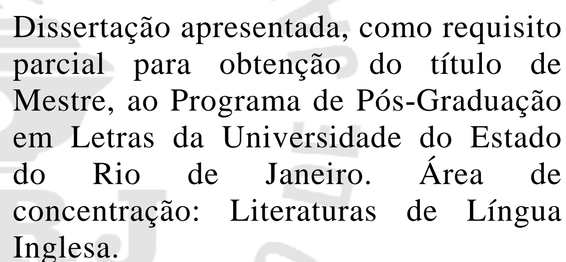

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Rio de Janeiro

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DEDICATÓRIA

Esta conquista, assim como todas as demais, é dedicada àquela responsável por eu ser quem sou: minha véia.

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RESUMO

GONÇALVES, Vansan. *Obasan, by Joy Kogawa, and Alias Grace, by Margaret* Atwood: fictional representations of Canadian identity and History. 2013. 93f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2013.

Esta dissertação investiga de que maneiras a representação do sujeito canadense pode ser encontrada em dois romances representativos da literatura canadense contemporânea: *Obasan*, de Joy Kogawa, e *Alias Grace*, de Margaret Atwood. Esta investigação também demonstra que a busca pela definição da identidade canadense tem sido tema constante e relevante da cultura deste país. A indefinição quanto ao que significa ser canadense também tem permeado a literatura canadense ao longo dos séculos, notadamente desde o século XIX. A fim de observar a representação literária da busca pela definição da identidade canadense, esta investigação aborda os conceitos relativos à representação de grupos subalternos tradicionalmente silenciados. A análise comparativa dos romances citados contempla a relação entre memória e trauma autobiográficos, assim como as semelhanças narrativas entre ficção e história. Esta investigação também verifica de que maneiras a literatura pós-moderna emprega documentação oficial, relatos históricos e dados (auto) biográficos a serviço da reescrita da história através da metaficção historiográfica.

Palavras-chave: Literatura canadense. Identidade. Metaficção Historiográfica.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the ways through which the representation of the Canadian subject might be observed in two representative novels of contemporary Canadian literature: *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa, and *Alias Grace*, by Margaret Atwood. This investigation also demonstrates that the search for the definition of a specific Canadian identity has been a constant and relevant theme to the country's culture. The lack of definition concerning the meaning of being Canadian has also permeated Canadian Literature throughout the centuries, most notably since the XIX century. In order to observe the literary representation of the Canadian search for identity, this investigation makes use of the concepts related to the representation of traditionally silenced subaltern groups. The comparative analysis of the abovementioned novels contemplates the relationship between autobiographical memory and trauma, as well as the narrative similarities between fiction and history. This investigation also verifies the ways postmodern literature employs official documentation, historical accounts and (auto) biographical information in the rewriting of history through historiographic metafiction.

Keywords: Canadian literature. Identity. Historiographic Metafiction.

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INTRODUCTION

It is with human beings as with birds: the creative instinct has a great deal to do with the assertion of territorial rights. The question of identity is primarily a cultural and imaginative question, and there is always something vegetable about the imagination, something sharply limited in range.

Northrop Frye

The first insights for the writing of this dissertation came to me while I was taking a Specialization Course in English Language Literatures, at the Universidade Federal Fluminense in 2008, the same institution where I had graduated in Letters. It was then that, for the first time, I got into contact with issues that would not only become of great interest to me, but would also demand my time and dedication in the course of the following years. It was at that time that I had my first contact with both Canadian literature and the theorists of identity and culture that would play a central role in the development of my academic interest and skills. Unfortunately, I had to quit the Specialization without concluding it. However, the issues studied during that period remained deep in my mind, and, although away from the academic context, I kept reading and thinking about the theories I had come in contact with. In 2010, two years after having left the Specialization Course I decided to take one step further and took the admission exam for the Master's program in Literatures in English at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.

Completely strange and new to this institution, I came in contact with ideas and concepts that would complement what I had previously studied. A whole new perspective was open to me, when, to my utter surprise, I found out there was a subject on Canadian Literature being offered by the graduate program in the first semester of 2011. It was then that I realized I was in the right place, at the right time, and decided to follow the line of research which had fascinated me and made me come back to the academic world. Although I have mentioned there were key concepts and ideas responsible for my entering the Master's program and for the development of the research that would result in this dissertation, I have not yet named these concepts. I must dedicate some space of this introduction to name them, as well as to (at least try) to explain why they have fascinated me.

While still a Specialization student, I enrolled my first course on Canadian Literature. Since my studies of Literatures in English in the undergraduate courses had focused on texts written in England and the United States, it was very exciting to discover a new literature in

English, which had its own characteristics, qualities, needs and questionings. In the same year, I enrolled a course on Cultural Studies. It was quite natural that the theoretical concepts and ideas I was investigating would blend in with the concepts related to Canlit. The Cultural Studies course provided me with issues related to identity, mainly as a collective and national issue. While studying Canadian Literature, I observed that the representation of identity in Canadian novels tended to be unstable and confusing. This conclusion was mainly taken during the reading of the two novels that compose the object of this dissertation: *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa, and *Alias Grace*, by Margaret Atwood.

At that time, I felt the two novels, which had completely different plots and modes of narration, had something similar at their cores, although I could not yet specify what that similarity was. This knowledge eventually came to me after entering the Master's course at UERJ. It was during the course on Canadian Literature that I could observe that the search for the establishment of a distinct Canadian identity was the common feature to both novels. It was also by then that I learned this search for identity would take place, in literature, through the use of narrative strategies typical of postmodern literature and culture, a movement I had started studying during the Specialization's course on Cultural Studies. In the Master's program, I was also taking a course on Postcolonial Studies, which presented me to the notions of power and representation. In the following term, I decided to attend a course on the relationship between literature and history. Of course, I had already observed that the novels I intended to investigate were both based on historical events. This new course, however, provided me with a completely new perspective regarding the very concept of history. I must say I consider myself a very lucky person for having studied all these concepts almost simultaneously, since they offered me the guidelines for the writing of this dissertation.

As I have already mentioned, the first element I found common to both novels was the search for the establishment of a distinct Canadian identity. My chief objective in this investigation is to analyze the ways this search might be observed in two novels that deal with historical moments in Canada. In order to do so, my analysis will focus on the comparative study of the two earlier mentioned novels: *Obasan*, by Joy Kogawa, and Alias *Grace*, by Margaret Atwood. It is also relevant to notice that the search for a definition of Canadian identity constitutes a central theme, not only of *Obasan* and *Alias Grace,* but of Canadian culture and literature as a whole. One might argument that, in the XXI century, there are no more established national identities, not only in Canada, but throughout the world. The specificity concerning the Canadian context is that, in that country, identity has *never* been a resolved issue. While many nations in Europe and the United States were proud of their

national identities, represented by their national symbols, Canada remained puzzled concerning this issue. In relation to national symbols, I want to point out that the Canadian flag was only chosen in 1965, and the Canadian anthem was officially adopted as late as 1980. The search for a representation of Canadian identity permeates that country's literature at least since the XIX century and remains relevant, however unsolved, to our days.

Historically, the search for what might be called Canadianism might be related to the very origins of modern Canada: from its mixture of varied indigenous peoples and the first English and French settlers, to the coming of immigrants from various parts of the world in the XIX century, as well as the new immigration wave from the end of XX century. Nowadays, the question of Canadian identity might as well be related to the country's position concerning the rich and powerful southern neighbor, the United States. As observed by Carl F. Klinck, more than 45 years ago, in "Literary Activity in the Canadas: 1812-1841", "a Canadian is one who is increasingly aware of being American in the continental sense without being American in the national sense." (KLINCK, 1966, p. 125). As it may be observed through the epigraph to this introduction, Northrop Frye, one of Canada's most prominent literary critics, believes there is a relation between the assertion of national identity and the physical territory of a nation. In *The Bush Garden – Essays on the Canadian Imagination*, Frye observes Canada's territory has historically developed with no relation to a tradition. The theorist and critic claims the question of Canadian identity is to remain unsolved as long as the geographical space is not clearly culturally defined:

> Cultural history […] has its own rhythms. It is possible that one of these rhythms is very like an organic rhythm: that there must be a period, of a certain magnitude, as Aristotle would say, in which a social imagination can take root and establish a tradition. […] Canada has never had it. […] It seems to me that Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question 'Who am I?' than by some such riddle as 'Where is here?' (FRYE, 1971, p. 220).

Regarding the literary representations of Canadianism, Peonia Guedes, in "Mapeando Espaços Ficcionais e Autobiográficos: Novas Versões de Identidade Canadense na Obra de Alice Munro", argues Canadian contemporary authors have their works depply marked by identity isssues. According to the scholar, the Canadian identity issue has recently been approached through a perspective which privileges innovative and traditionally excluded representations:

> Canadian literature produced during the last fifty years records and represents, in many ways, issues related to the deletion or appropriation of voice by marginalized communities or

> individuals, to systemic racism and, in general, demonstrates to foster ethnic, regional, gender, and class diversities. (GUEDES, 2011, p. 65 – my translation)[1].

Concerning the abovementioned plurality of the Canadian identity, we may also observe Margaret Atwood's comments. In her "Introduction" to the *Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories*, Atwood asks herself what would distinguish Canadian literature from the writing of other countries. The writer's answer to her self-imposed question is an emphatic one: "There is no essence of Canada that, sprinkled on a piece of prose fiction, will magically transform it. […] Nor is the place of origin any necessary clue. […] The definition of Canadian itself has a hard core with fuzzy edges." (ATWOOD, 1986, p. xv).

In order to approach and investigate these "fuzzy edges", I divided this dissertation into three distinct chapters. In the first chapter, "Guiding Principles", I seek to establish the theoretical guideline of my research. In this chapter, I make a brief approach to the many and varied concepts that have been of utmost importance for the analysis of the subsequently investigated novels. In order to organize this approach, the chapter is subdivided into three sections. The first one focus on the analysis of postmodern concepts and ideas related to the issue of representation, according to diverse views on the postmodern, expressed by some important theoretical authors. Some concepts were fundamental to the development of this section. Among them, I would highlight Linda Hutcheon's didactic definitions concerning postmodern culture, as well as Priyamvada Gopal's and Gayatri Spivak's studies on subaltern representation. In the second section, I counterpoise different perspectives, ranging from literary to medical ones, concerning the importance and relevance of memory for the narration of traumatic issues. In order to do so, I briefly analyze the concepts developed by Maurice Halbwachs, Dominick LaCapra and Leigh Gilmore, among others. This section also presents an innovative mode concerning written autobiography, proposed by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, which challenges the traditional autobiography model proposed by Georges Gusdorf and Phillip Lejeune. In the last section of the first chapter, based on the concepts proposed by Peter Burke, Edward Carr and Hayden White, among others, I focus my attention on the similarities between the narrative modes presented by factual and fictional accounts. This study leads me to the analysis of historiographic metafiction, as defined by Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh.

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[1] Original Text: A literatura canadense produzida durante os últimos cinquenta anos registra e representa, de diversas maneiras, questões ligadas ao apagamento ou apropriação da voz de comunidades ou indivíduos marginalizados, ao racismo sistêmico e, de maneira geral, demonstra favorecer a diversidade étnica, regional, de gênero, e de classe.

The second chapter, "*Obasan*: Overcoming National Trauma", deals mainly with the analysis of Joy Kogawa's famous novel, and it is subdivided into four parts. Initially, I briefly introduce some facts concerning the author's life, works and critical acclaim. Then, I present an overview of the historical racism and oppression Japanese-Canadians have faced in Canada, concerning mainly the period coinciding with the one narrated in the novel: the period in which World War II took place, as well as its preceding and following years. A brief summary of the novel is then presented, so as to better situate the reader in relation to my analysis. The last section of this chapter intends to analyze *Obasan* as a fictional collective autobiography. In order to do so, I recall some of the concepts and theories that had been mentioned in the first chapter, such as the postmodern representation of traumatic events.

The third chapter, "*Alias Grace*: A Fiction-History Patchwork", concentrates on the investigation of Margaret Atwood's novel, and is also divided into four sections. The first one presents an overview of the author's biography, including works produced by Atwood and the critical acclaim she has received. The second part seeks to historically contextualize the events depicted by Atwood in her novel. In order to do this, I analyze the historical events concerning a double murder that has become legend in Canada through one of its first narratives: Susanna Moodie's *Life in the Clearings versus the Bush.* Afterward, I present a brief summary of Atwood's novel, along with the initial impressions that will compose the basis for the analysis of the novel, presented in the last part of this chapter. In this last section, under the influence of theoretical concepts studied in the first chapter, I analyze the new perspectives proposed by Margaret Atwood and use them in relation a specific historical event.

This investigation is the result of years of questioning and studies concerning the issue of Canadian identity representation. All the authors, concepts, theories, teachers, friends and colleagues I met during this period have contributed to the production of this dissertation. I sincerely hope that while reading it you may have at least part of the pleasure I felt while writing it.

1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1.1 Postmodern Representation

The postmodern appears to coincide with a general cultural awareness of the existence and power of systems of representation which do not reflect *society so much as* grant *meaning and value within a particular society.*

Linda Hutcheon

The epigraph above was taken from Linda Hutcheon's *The Politics of Postmodernism* (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 8). Reading it, we may observe the theorist's position, establishing the postmodern as a cultural movement where the power of representation plays a central issue. In this chapter, we intend to briefly observe the ways through which the postmodern may be accessed as a site in which representation issues may be approached and divulged. More important, we aim at observing the ways the postmodern makes self-representation available to those who have traditionally been silent and silenced regarding their roles in society. Moreover, we intend to investigate the ways the postmodern plays a central role in the development of a new cultural awareness related to self-representation, especially through the use of fiction as a means one may use to achieve self-expression.

Before moving to the analysis of the relationship between postmodern culture and the power of fictional representation, it is important to consider a few of the multiple and varied possible definitions of postmodernism, before defining which of them we are going to deal with. As many theorists and critics have observed, the prefix "post" in "postmodernism" may have at least two different and confronting positions when related to modernism. As pointed by critics Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, in their book *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, modernism privileges the master narratives of the past as well as the established and official representations of history. According to this perspective, the individual would be self-centered, and his/her group's history would be defined and narrated by those with the power to represent others, obviously according to the perspective of and from the viewpoint of the dominant classes. As argued by Best and Kellner, modernity entered our lives through the emergence of new technologies that contributed to

institutionalize the oppression of those individuals marginal to that process. As the authors argue:

> Modernity entered everyday life through the dissemination of modern art, the products of consumer society, new technologies, and new modes of transportation and communication. The dynamics by which modernity produced a new industrial and colonial world can be described as 'modernization' – a term denoting these processes of individualization, secularization, industrialization, cultural differentiation, commodification, urbanization, bureaucratization, and rationalization which together have constituted the modern world.
> Yet the construction of modernity produced untold suffering and misery for its victims, ranging from the peasantry, proletariat and artisans oppressed by capitalist industrialization to the exclusion of women from the public sphere, to the genocide of imperialist colonization. Modernity also produced a set of disciplinary institutions, practices, and discourses which legitimate its modes of domination and control. (BEST; KELLNER, 1991, p. 3).

The postmodern impulse can be considered a reaction against the abovementioned totalizing and oppressing practices of modernity. Of course, the very definition and purpose of postmodernism was never (and we believe it will never be) a consensus among theorists and critics. Some of them – for instance, Jameson (1991) and Eagleton (1996) – have criticized the postmodern for constituting a continuation of modern proceedings, thus reinforcing subjugating practices. On the other hand, other critics – such as Baudrillard (1993) and Lyotard (1984) – have praised postmodernism exactly for promoting access to knowledge and information to a greater number of people (including those excluded by modernist strategies), who might now, for the first time in centuries, not only access historical discourse, but also narrate their own version of historical events.

The confusion regarding the very definition of the postmodern is one of the key features of the movement. Postmodernism seeks to reject totalizing theories, including those which attempt to define postmodernism itself. Therefore, the postmodern tends to value fragmentation and subversion over which was once conventional and centered. The postmodern multiple subjects are not isolated beings; rather, they constitute parts of varied communities. The culture produced by this community would encompass what was once divided into "high" and "low" cultures. Art itself is then demassified, viewed as local and representative of varied identities. As Linda Hutcheon, in her comprehensive study of the postmodern, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, argues, multiplicity, and even contradiction, are intrinsic components of the postmodern, which may be said to be many things, but natural:

> Postmodernism manifests itself in many fields of cultural endeavor – architecture, literature, photography, film, painting, video, dance, music, and elsewhere. In general terms it takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or 'highlight', and to subvert, or 'subvert', and the mode is therefore a 'knowing' and an ironic – or even 'ironic' – one. Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in

> this kind of wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity. In many ways it is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn't grow on trees. (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 1-2).

From the above quote, we may understand the postmodern as a self-conscious process, which may enable traditionally excluded groups (denominated as "ex-centric" by Linda Hutcheon and "subaltern" by other theorists such as Gayatri Spivak) to voice their own ideas and express themselves, without submitting to the filter provided and controlled by the ones who have traditionally ruled the ways these groups had access to and were accessed by society in general. It is relevant to highlight that Hutcheon's proposition regarding the postmodern and the challenge it may posit to the entities we traditionally used to believe as natural is based on the doubleness of the postmodern condition. As Hutcheon demonstrates, this doubleness is usually exercised by the use of strategies such as irony and parody, two key elements of the postmodern. As a result, we may view the postmodern as a complex cultural movement, which, by no means, may escape a political agenda. In order to de-naturalize and defy traditionally established institutions (be they economic, political or cultural ones), all postmodern art must respond to a certain self-conscious political representation. As Linda Hutcheon points out: "Postmodern art cannot but be political, at least in the sense that its representations – its images and stories – are anything but neutral, however 'aestheticized' they may appear to be in their parodic self-reflexivity." (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 3).

Bearing in mind that the postmodern operates from within the very institutions and systems it intends to ironically criticize and destabilize, questioning their very nature, we may understand the postmodern as the suitable cultural location for innovative representations of traditionally misrepresented groups. The postmodern itself is a self-conscious representation, since it does not view itself as existing out of certain systems. These assumptions contribute for the appropriation of postmodern features by those who deal with representation issues. According to the postmodern perspective, all representation must be consciously political. In the introduction to her study *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, Linda Hutcheon reflects on the ex-centric position in postmodern culture, more specifically in the Canadian context:

> Canada's own particular moment of cultural history does seem to make it ripe for the paradoxes of postmodernism, by which I mean those contradictory acts of establishing and then undercutting prevailing values and conventions in order to provoke a questioning, a

> challenging of 'what goes without saying in our culture'. Whether postmodern writers be Canadian or Latin American, British, American, Italian, or German, they are always in a sense 'agents provocateurs' – taking pot-shots at the culture of which they know they are unavoidably a part but that they still wish to criticize. This almost inevitably puts the postmodern writer into a marginal or 'ex-centric' position with regard to the central or dominant culture, because the paradox of underlining cultural 'universals' (of revealing their grounding in the 'particular') implicitly challenges any notions of centrality in (and centralization of) culture. Since the periphery or the margin might also describe Canada's perceived position in international terms, perhaps the postmodern ex-centric is very much part of the identity of the nation. In postmodernism, though, the centre and the periphery do not simply change places. Nor is the margin conceived of as only a place of transgression. The periphery is also the frontier, the place of possibility. (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 3).

Although Linda Hutcheon's connection between the postmodern and ex-centric representation concentrates in the Canadian setting, it might be argued that similar assumptions may be used to the analysis of the influence postmodern concepts have achieved concerning the representation of varied oppressed subjects throughout the world. As we have seen, the very questioning of who would bear the responsibility over the representation of others constitutes a postmodern feature. As a matter of fact, this questioning is a central element in postmodern representation, although the answers provided might not be singular, but complex ones. The aforementioned questioning is proposed by theorist Priyamvada Gopal, who relates subaltern representation to the interpretation of historical events. In her book chapter "Reading Subaltern History", Gopal questions:

> Who is the 'one' who interprets historical events and how does the mediation of that 'investigative consciousness' influence the writing of history? What *documents* and *archives* have been overlooked? When documents and archives have been consulted, how have they been *read*? What does it mean to *reclaim*? Last but not least, what is *history* and to what ends is it *written*? (GOPAL, 2008, p. 139 – author's italics).

Gopal's interrogations seem to reinforce Linda Hutcheon's definitions concerning the de-naturalization of traditional institutions, since they question the established and fixed portrayal of historical events. The fact that Gopal offers many questions, but no single and definite answer to them is itself postmodern. Under the postmodern scrutiny, history, as any other concept, is culturally constructed, thus it must have a referent, but not a direct link to our experiences in the world. That means history is constituted by the representation of past events. Again according to Linda Hutcheon, the de-naturalization of traditional concepts usually departs from fictional representations of events related to our lives. Hence, fiction may work towards the representation of past events not as they happened, but as we view them, according to the meanings different societies and communities grant to them. As observed by Hutcheon:

> In challenging the seamless quality of the history/fiction (or world/art) join implied by realist narrative, postmodern fiction does not, however, disconnect itself from history or the world. It foregrounds and thus contests the conventionality and unacknowledged ideology of that assumption of seamlessness and asks its readers to question the processes by which we represent our selves and our world to ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we *make* sense of and *construct* order out of experience in our particular culture. We cannot avoid representation. We *can* try to avoid fixing our notion of it and assuming it to be transhistorical and transcultural. We can also study how representation legitimizes and privileges certain kinds of historical knowledge. […] Our access through narrative to the world of experience – past or present – is always mediated by the powers and limits of our representations of it. This is as true of historiographical narrative as it is of fictional. (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 53-4 – author's italics).

The unavoidability of representation might result in at least two different and opposing constructions of the subaltern subject. The first, traditional and modernist definition of the subaltern, would define this subject in terms of the dominant's view, according to which the subaltern would be regarded as an "object", instead of as a proper "subject". In her article "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", theorist and critic Gayatri Spivak remarks that, traditionally, the subaltern has been viewed as the "object for enthusiastic information-retrieval" (SPIVAK, 1985, p. 245). Under this perspective, the subaltern subject does not express his/her own ideas and opinions, much less his/her own culture. The subaltern is merely an informant, an object of study and analysis of dominant groups. Nevertheless, as claimed by Spivak in her most controversial and influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", the proper representation of subaltern groups is a rather problematic issue, since it might depend upon the interest of the representing intellectual:

> For the 'true' subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation. The problem is that the subject's itinerary has not been traced so as to offer an object of seduction to the representing intellectual. […] [T]he question becomes 'How can we touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak? (SPIVAK, 1988, p. 80).

Spivak's answer to the question she poses at the title of her above mentioned article is a negative one. As proposed by critic Deepika Bahri, in "Feminism in/and Postcolonialism", subaltern groups would not be able to speak, since the subaltern "was inevitably consigned to being either misunderstood or misrepresented through the self-interest of those with the power to represent". (BAHRI, 2008, p. 199). However, this assertion should not be viewed as discouraging to the search of an appropriate self-representation of traditionally excluded groups. Actually, it should be analyzed as a supportive element for the appropriation of representational tools by the subaltern, or ex-centric, groups. As observed by Priyamvada Gopal, in "Reading Subaltern History", "[t]he fact that the subaltern does not speak in any unmediated or immediately accessible ways, far from foreclosing the possibility of

knowledge, invests the search for better understanding with greater urgency." (GOPAL, 2008, p. 151).

The urgency mentioned by Gopal is related to the postmodern (therefore, relatively recent) awareness of the importance and relevance of an accurate representation of ex-centric groups. The lack of this self-conscious representation contributes to the oppression these groups have traditionally suffered under the hands of long-established dominant rulers. Postmodern ex-centric representation may work as a means towards the effective independence of subaltern groups. Being able to voice their opinions and feelings as well as to stand for themselves may finally give traditionally marginalized minorities the means to the obtaining of self-assertion. Deepika Bahri comments on the effects the lack of self-representation might have upon the lives of people belonging to different ex-centric groups:

> Fields such as women's studies and postcolonial studies have arisen in part in response to the absence or unavailability of the perspectives of women, racial minorities, and marginalized cultures or communities in historical accounts or literary annals. This lack of representation is paralleled in the political, economic, and legal spheres. Those 'other' to the dominant discourse have no voice or say in their portrayal; they are consigned to be 'spoken for' by those who command the authority and means to speak. (BAHRI, 2008, p. 204).

However anxious one might be to assert the adequate subaltern representation, it is relevant to notice that such a thing simply does not exist, under the postmodern perspective. It so happens because, as we have previously observed, the postmodern values multiplicity rather than singularity. Since the postmodern is such an unstable and complex cultural concept, it would be inaccurate to believe a single model of representation would work for all subaltern groups. Therefore, we shall not consider a singular representation of a specific subaltern group as representative of an entire culture because subaltern groups are composed by varied 'challenging cultures', and each of them has its own specific plights and demands. As observed by Linda Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, subaltern groups represent difference not only towards the dominant culture, but also among themselves:

> What is always important to recall, however, is that difference operates *within* each of these challenging cultures as well as against the dominant. Blacks and feminists, ethnics and gays, native and 'Third World' cultures, do not form monolithic movements, but constitute a multiplicity of responses to a commonly perceived situation of marginality and ex-centricity. And there have been liberating effects of moving from the language of alienation (otherness) to that of decentering (difference), because the center used to function as the pivot between binary opposites which always privileged one half: white/black, male/female, self/other, intellect/body, west/east, objectivity/subjectivity – the list is now well known. But if the center is seen as a construct, a fiction, not a fixed and unchangeable reality, the old either-or begins to break down and the new and-also of multiplicity and difference opens up new possibilities. (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 62 – author's italics).

Therefore, in order to approach the possible differences proposed by postmodern subaltern representation, the present investigation will question rather than judge varied modes of representation present in the novels to be investigated. To achieve this objective, we will try to follow Linda Hutcheon's proposal in relation to the postmodern questioning of traditional concepts, as defined by the theorist in her article *Feminism and Postmodernism*:

> To put these concepts into question, however, is not to deny them – only to interrogate their relation to experience. The particular process by which this is done in postmodernism is a process of installing and then withdrawing (or of using and abusing) those very same contested notions. You set it up – and *then* question it. In other words, criticism does not necessarily imply destruction, and postmodern critique, in particular, is a paradoxical and questioning beast. (HUTCHEON, 1989a, p. 27 – author's italics).

1.2 Autobiographical Memory and Trauma

A memória é uma ilha de edição.
Waly Salomão

If, based on the concepts and theories we have just presented, we are correct in affirming that the postmodern has provided the site for the development of new representations of the subaltern, we would be equally accurate in asserting that in postmodern literature this representation has been displayed through the increasing use of autobiography. This narrative mode has been used in diverse forms, and has dealt with a great variety of subjects. Although autobiography as a narrative mode has been known to literary scholars for a long time (at least since the XIX century), it is relevant to remark that the autobiographical genre we are dealing with in this investigation has some differences when compared to traditional autobiography, the object of study of scholars such as Philippe Lejeune and Georges Gusdorf. Postmodern autobiography, as we may name it, has been employed by varied authors and to different purposes. However diverse this new autobiography may be, we might consider that many of its representations share some features, including the innovative ways they deal with memory and trauma.

Memory has been studied and analyzed by many theorists, scholars and critics of varied fields of knowledge, from arts to science to religion. The relationship between one's memory and his/her own culture has also been widely studied. Of interest to this investigation is the relationship between memory and its narrative representation. As early as 1936, Walter Benjamin had already established that memory has historically played a crucial role to the

development of human narratives. According to Benjamin, memory is related to the roots of all narrative representations. In "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov", one of Benjamin's most important essays, the theorist claims that memory would have accompanied the evolution of narrative, and thus continued to have a representative status in the predominant fictional narrative genre of the twentieth century, the novel:

> It has seldom been realized that the listener's naïve relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story. […]
> Mnemosyne, the rememberer, was the Muse of the epic art among the Greeks. This name takes the observer back to a parting of the ways in world history. For if the record kept by memory – historiography – constitutes the creative matrix of the various epic forms (as great prose is the creative matrix of the various metrical forms), its oldest form, the epic, by virtue of being a kind of common denominator includes the story and the novel. When in the course of centuries the novel began to emerge from the womb of the epic, it turned out that in the novel the element of the epic mind that is derived from the Muse – that is, memory – manifests itself in a form quite different from the way it manifests itself in the story. (BENJAMIN, 1968, p. 89).

It is important to notice the use of the term "story" in Benjamin's words. When differentiating the narrative modes portrayed by the "story" and the "novel", we understand Benjamin seeks to distinguish non-fictional accounts from fictional ones. What Benjamin names "story", we refer to as "history", that is, the established, official, and many times capitalized version of past events that are kept recorded by and subject to the interests of dominant classes. Although the confrontation between postmodern fictional writing and traditional history will be dealt with in more details in the next section of this chapter, it is relevant to spare some time to observe the relationship between history and memory. As we might infer from the end of the previous quote, memory manifests itself in different ways when we consider historical and fictional accounts.

Even though the mentioned differentiation has been asserted to exist since the very origins of both narrative modes, it is remarkable to notice that only in the nineteenth century narratives based on memories were to be distinguished and given diverse values. It was then that the first professional historians started to privilege written and documented accounts rather than oral and traditional ones. These first professionals of history might be said to have had a fundamental role in the underestimation of non-written accounts to the privilege of written documents. Kerwin Lee Klein, in his article "On the Emergency of *Memory* in Historical Discourse", claims that the recent expanding interest from both the general public and specialized criticism concerning memory and its narrative functions come from a desire of our contemporary society to reunite again memory, history, and even religious culture:

> Memory appeals to us partly because it projects an immediacy we feel has been lost from history. At a time when other such categories – Man, History, Spirit – have lost much of their shine, memory is ideally suited for elevation. One of the reasons that memory promises auratic returns is that its traditional association with religious context and meanings is so much older and heavier than the comparatively recent effort of the early professional historians to define memorial practice as a vestigial prehistory. When historians began professionalizing in the nineteenth century, they commonly identified memories as a dubious source for the verification of historical facts. Written documents seemed less amenable to distortion and thus preferable to memories. We can also imagine their suspicions of memory as part of a painful effort by academics to separate history as a secular practice from a background of cultural religiosity. But as Friedrich Nietzsche contended, that separation was never complete, and the return of memory discourse suggests that at least some of us have lost interest in maintaining the separation. (KLEIN, 2000, p. 129-30).

The longing for memory and its discursive representations as commented on by Klein might be related to the interferences we make, so that our perception of the past becomes a nostalgic one. Due to these interferences, our memories acquire in our minds an esteemed status, when confronted to the harshness we must face in everyday life. This perception is corroborated by Maurice Halbwachs, one of the most studied and influential theorists of memory of the twentieth century. In his essay "The Reconstruction of the Past", Halbwachs affirms:

> Society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess. (HALBWACHS, 1992a, p. 51).

It is important to highlight that, most of the time, the interventions our memories go through are involuntary ones. Remembering the past, as Waly Salomão in the epigraph to this section observes, is a process inexorably connected to its edition. In his prologue to *Cultural Amnesia: American Future and the Crisis of Memory*, Stephen Bertman states:

> Memory is distorted by needs, desires, interests, and fantasies. It is subjective and malleable rather than objective and concrete, memory is emotional, conceptual, contextual, constantly undergoing revision, selection, interpretation, distortion, and reconstruction. (BERTMAN, 2000, p. 27).

According to this perspective, the varied ways memory affects representations of historical events depends on the value society applies to different matters of representation. This standpoint seems to agree with the scientific approach to memory, which argues our memory is nothing more than our mind's understanding of the world. This perception is exposed by journalist Gisela Blanco. In her article "O Que Nunca Aconteceu", Blanco investigates the connections between memory and reality, and comes to the conclusion that "memory is not a register of reality – it is an interpretation constructed by the mind. Our mind invents the

world, from the colors we see to the experiences we live. And it edits this information before recording them." (BLANCO, 2009, p. 59 – my translation)[2].

Although postmodern researchers, such as Klein, claim that there has never been a clear-cut separation between memory and history, some attempts were made in order to create a marked difference between these two concepts. One of the most relevant attempts was made by Maurice Halbwachs. In his book chapter "The Collective Memory of the Family", Halbwachs states:

> The collective memory is not the same of formal history, and 'historical memory' is a rather unfortunate expression because it connects two terms opposed in more than one aspect. […] Undoubtedly, history is a collection of the most notable facts in the memory of man. But past events read about in books and taught and learned in schools are selected, combined, and evaluated in accord with necessities and rules not imposed on the groups that had through time guarded them as a living trust. General history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up. So long as remembrance continues to exist, it is useless to set it down in writing or otherwise fix it in memory. Likewise the need to write the history of a period, a society, or even a person is only aroused when the subject is already too distant in the past to allow for the testimony of those who preserve some remembrance of it. (HALBWACHS, 1992b, p. 54).

Nonetheless, Halbwachs statement might hardly fit the postmodern context and its contemporary concerns. As a matter of fact, since the 1960s, postmodern writers have felt a progressively growing need to (re)write both their own history and the history of their social groups, since in the past restrictions and rules were imposed upon them and their writings. Different from what Halbwachs asserted in 1925, today it is not "useless" for one to write the history of those still living and close to us. Actually, the writing of their multiple histories is what has recently allowed traditionally subaltern (or ex-centric) groups to establish a new perspective through which they might be regarded. As many authors and critics have observed, this innovative representation concerns the community rather than the individual. Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith appear to reinforce this argument. In their article "Feminism and Cultural Memory", the scholars claim that contemporary women authors have reacted against oppressive discourses and attempted to overcome traumatic events through the written representation of cultural memory:

> These editors and authors use the concept of 'memory' to define the field of women's studies as a form of 'countermemory' and feminist scholarship, literature, and art as means of redressing the official 'forgetting' of women's histories. […] Always mediated, cultural memory is the product of fragmentary personal and collective experiences articulated through technologies and media that shape even as they transmit memory. Acts of memory are thus acts of performance, representation, and interpretation. They require agents and specific contexts. They can be conscious and deliberate; at the same time, and this is certainly true in

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[2] Original text: "a memória não é um registro da realidade - é uma interpretação construída pela mente. O nosso cérebro inventa o mundo, das cores que a gente vê às experiências que a gente vive. E edita essas informações antes de gravá-las".

> the case of trauma, they can be involuntary, repetitious, obsessive. (HIRSCH; SMITH, 2002, p. 6-7).

To Hirsch and Smith's epithets "involuntary", "repetitious", and "obsessive", when dealing with trauma writing one might as well add "paradoxical". The written representation of a traumatic event must deal with subjects that have traditionally been considered too painful to be represented. The very act of representing a traumatic event through writing implies the remembering and consequently imaginative reliving of an experience that would be more comfortable to forget. The question is that a traumatic event can not be discarded. Even if one tries to ignore his/her trauma, it will be always there, observing, haunting the subject (LACAPRA, 2001, p. 215). Written representation, thus, is the way found by many authors to voice their own sufferings and those imposed to the communities which they belong to. Therefore, the paradoxical nature of trauma remains an unsolved puzzle and its narrative a fascinating, yet painful, representation. Collective trauma researcher Gabriele Schwab, in her article "Writing against Memory and Forgetting", reflects on the paradox inherent to narratives of trauma:

> What is silenced and what can be said about histories of violence and trauma? To counter silence, the victims of history have produced an abundance of literature of witnessing, testimonials, and memoirs. At the same time, we have a whole body of theories that claim trauma's unrepresentability. There are forms of violence – holocaust, genocide, torture, and rape – that are considered beyond representation. Yet, they also call for speech, testimony, and witnessing. This is an irresolvable paradox at the core of traumatic writing. How then do we write what resists representation? We know that traumatic amnesia can generate other prohibitions on thought and emotion that are fundamentally opposed to narrative and storytelling. And yet we also know that telling and witnessing are necessary for healing trauma. We need, then, a theory of traumatic narrative that deals with the paradox of telling what cannot be told and/or has been silenced. (SCHWAB, 2006, p.102).

Taking into consideration Schwab's words, we may come to the conclusion that the narration of a traumatic event is a very complex issue. Although we may feel tempted to refute this assertion – by affirming that the reader's identification, in a traumatic narrative, would "naturally" concern the victims against whom past oppression was imposed to – as we have seen in the previous section, postmodern culture rejects any "natural" assumptions. Maybe equally complex is the matter of identification concerning traumatic narratives. In reality, contemporary critics and trauma scholars have questioned the identification and consequential empathy and acquired mourning readers of traumatic narratives would be entitled to feel towards oppressed groups. In his encompassing study *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra poses intriguing questions concerning the matter:

> […] how does one either determine the 'right' of people to empathize with and mourn victims or try to understand (without necessarily forgiving) perpetrators? Is mourning, or even empathy, something like an entitlement or at least a right that one has to earn? May certain perpetrators not have earned or deserve mourning (even empathy) but instead warrant modes of understanding insistently related to critique? In more metaphoric terms, one might suggest that the ghosts of the past – symptomatic revenants who have not been laid to rest because of a disturbance in the symbolic order, a deficit in the ritual process, or a death so extreme in its unjustifiability or transgressiveness that in certain ways it exceeds existing modes (perhaps any possible modes) of mourning – roam the post-traumatic world and are not entirely 'owned' as 'one's own' by any individual or group. If they haunt a house (a nation, a group), they come to disturb all who live – perhaps even pass through – that house. How to come to terms with them affects different people or groups in significantly different ways. But just as no group that was not there is entitled to simple identification with victims, so the problem of response and the difficulty of attempts to come to terms with unsettling after effects and haunting presences are not clearly circumscribed or 'properly' the preserve of anyone. (LACAPRA, 2001, p. 215).

The already extensive complexity of traumatic narratives increases even more when these narratives overlap autobiographical representation. The narration of distressing events by those who have gone through the referred trauma is highly complicated, since it deals with painful memories. As we have seen, our access to memories is constantly permeated by many issues. In a traumatic narrative, the narrator's memory must go through an intricate web of remembrances, feelings and emotions, in order to reproduce an adequate discourse. Traditional medical reports have consistently suggested that the difficulty one's face to access his/her memories of a traumatic event would be an involuntary strategy these people would employ not to relive past suffering. This strategy, in medical terms, is named "overgenerality". However, recent survey has shown that overgeneral paradigms might not be directly related to traumatic issues. In the scientific article "Overgeneral Autobiographical Memory and Traumatic Events", doctors Sally A. Moore and Lori A. Zoellner simultaneously question and problematize the commonsensical speech that connects trauma to the blocking of memories:

> Many theorists have suggested that the reduced ability to access specific memories of life events, termed *overgenerality*, is a protective mechanism helping attenuate painful emotions associated with trauma.
> […] However, on the basis of recent studies, it appears that trauma is most likely not sufficient to produce overgenerality. […] If trauma is indeed the crucial or primary factor leading to overgenerality development, the pattern of results across studies should be strongly and consistently in that direction; however, this is clearly not the case with the reviewed studies. (MOORE; ZOELLNER, 2007, p. 419 – authors' italics).

Hence, the unblocked, but no less confusing, memories concerning traumatic events might be said to constitute one of the main cores of narratives related to one's trauma and distressful experiences. In *The Limits of Autobiography*, Leigh Gilmore proposes relevant questions to the analysis and study of autobiographical traumatic narratives. It is relevant to observe that Gilmore's interrogations are assumedly provocative, since the theorist studies

narratives that undermine traditional autobiographical representation, in a very postmodern way. As stated (and questioned) by Gilmore:

> When the self-representation entails the representation of trauma, the autobiographical paradox of representativeness is intensified. By definition, trauma names an unprecedented experience, but contemporary writers have revealed trauma's prevalence and capacity to signify representativeness. When self-representation and the representation of trauma coincide, the conflicting demands potentially make autobiography theoretically impossible: How can the exploration of trauma and the burden it imposes on memory be representative? How can the experience of a survivor to stand for many? How can one tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, when facts, truth, and memory combine in the representation of trauma to undermine rather than strengthen representativeness? (GILMORE, 2001, p. 25).

As matter of fact, the questions posed by Gilmore have been answered in practical ways by postmodern contemporary authors. Postmodern culture has enabled the necessary conditions for a new approach to autobiographical writing, as well as innovative perspectives towards the limits of autobiography as literary genre. Traditional autobiography used to obey the parameters established by modernist thought. Critics such as Philippe Lejeune (1989) and Georges Gusdorf (1973) claimed that autobiographical writing would only be viable if the author and the narrator referred to the same person. In Lejeune's words, the narrative relationship between reader and author would operate under a pre-established "pact". In his 1975 "The Autobiographical Pact", Lejeune states that "what defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by a proper name. And this is true also for the one who is writing the text." (LEJEUNE, 1989, p. 119).

However, many contemporary autobiography authors would not fit the "pact" proposed by Lejeune, since they do not seem to respond to any established and stable identity, nor to the model of the "isolated being", as proposed by Gusdorf (1973, p. 30). In fact, these writers work under the concept of "autobiographics", a term coined by Leigh Gilmore in 1994. According to this original perspective, the representation of the self is unstable, and the author's identification is definitely *not* isolated. In "Autobiographics", Gilmore defines her neologism:

> A text's autobiographics consist in the following elements in self-representational writing, or writing that emphasizes the autobiographical *I*: an emphasis on writing itself as constitutive of autobiographical identity, discursive contradictions in the representation of identity (rather than unity), the name as potential site of experimentation rather than contractual sign of identity, and the effects of the gendered of word and body. Autobiographics gives initial conceptual precedence to positioning the subject, to recognizing the shifting sands of identity on which theories of autobiography build, and to describing "identity" and the networks of identification. An exploration of a text's autobiographics allows us to recognize that the *I* is multiply coded in a range of discourses: it is the site of multiple solicitations, multiple markings of "identity", multiple figurations of agency. (GILMORE, 1998, p. 184).

Gilmore's assertion seems to find a parallel in the observations concerning contemporary autobiography by specialists Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Smith and Watson claim that "many contemporary writers deliberately blur the boundary between life writing and the kinds of stories told in the first-person novel". (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 10). The postmodern blurring of autobiographical and fictional writing is paired by another blurring: the one concerning history and fiction.

1.3 Rewriting Historical Discourse: Towards Historiographic Metafiction

The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.
Oscar Wilde

As we have proposed in the end of last section, the postmodern has enabled the intentional and fictional blurring of history and fiction. In this section we will approach the concepts proposed by some authors who claim that the relationship between history and fiction might be concerned through the observation of characteristics they share, rather than by those in which they differ. However, in order to establish initial notions, it is relevant to observe the differences between both concepts. Hayden White, in his extensive book *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, asserts the differences between history and fiction, to then highlight that his main concern (and ours in this investigation is very similar) regards the existing similarities between historical and fictional discourses:

> Historians are concerned with events which can be assigned to specific time-space locations, events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable, whereas imaginative writers – poets, novelists, playwrights – are concerned with both these kinds of events and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones. The nature of the kinds of events with which historians and imaginative writers are concerned is not the issue. What should interest us in the discussion of 'the literature of fact' or, as I have chosen to call it, 'the fictions of factual representation' is the extent to which the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other. (WHITE, 1978, p. 121).

White's analysis of the overlap between history and fiction concentrates mainly on the ways both concepts make use of similar narrative strategies. In his previously mentioned book, as well as in other studies – such as *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (1987) – White emphasizes that, since the beginning of western European civilization, history and fiction, though referring to different fields of knowledge,

were not distinguished based on truth-value principles. Actually, they both assumedly shared imaginative techniques:

> Truth was not equated with fact, but with a combination of fact and the conceptual matrix within which it was appropriately located in the discourse. The imagination no less than the reason had to be engaged in any adequate representation of the truth; and this meant that the techniques of fiction-making were as necessary to the composition of a historical discourse as erudition might be. (WHITE, 1978, p. 123).

However, as already mentioned in this chapter, in the beginning of XIX century, historians started to professionalize, and they highlighted what they saw as the binary opposition between history and fiction. According to this standpoint, history should be concerned with the events that actually took place in the world, while fiction would exclusively regard the imaginable. This distinction established the initial segregation between history and fiction, and the historians' search for a discourse fully and solely compromised with objectivity.

Nonetheless, this division came to be questioned by contemporary postmodern scholars. According to them, history and fiction can not be regarded as completely and inexorably opposing concepts, since they share elements inherent to each other. One of the most important of these shared elements might be said to be the narrative techniques employed by both historical and fictional discourses. As proposed by scholars such as White, LaCapra, Hutcheon and others, both history and fiction employ narrative techniques in order to represent the described events. As argued by Hayden White, narrative is the element responsible for providing coherence to both historical and fictional representations of our experiences:

> A mere list of confirmable singular statements does not add up to an account of reality if there is not some coherence, logical or aesthetic, connecting them one to another. So too every fiction must pass a test of correspondence (it must be 'adequate' as an image of something beyond itself) if is to lay claim to representing an insight into or illumination of the human experience of the world. (WHITE, 1978, p. 122).

The "representation of the human experience" also constitutes one of the main concerns for the studies of Dominick LaCapra, another scholar who has consistently investigated the relationship between history and fiction under postmodern perspectives. In his works, LaCapra continuously comes to the conclusion that history and fiction must rely on narrative techniques. In addition, the scholar claims that the traditional opposition concerning factual and fictive representations of reality must not be seen as an "unproblematic" one. In his essay "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts", Dominick LaCapra posits the issue:

> Analytic distinctions such as those drawn between history and literature, fact and fiction, concept and metaphor, the serious and the ironic, and so forth, do not define realms of discourse that unproblematically characterize or govern extended uses of language. Instead, what should be taken as a problem for inquiry is the nature of the relationships among various analytically defined distinctions in the actual functioning of language. History can never be entirely separated from literature or philosophy or other disciplinary languages, though it can never be identical to those discourses either. (LACAPRA, 1980, p. 254).

Moreover, according to LaCapra, since both history and fiction refer to discourses, the usual definitions concerning these concepts shall not be viewed as natural, but as definitions which have been traditionally established by dominant groups, with specific interests. The presupposition of history as a totalizing concept might be viewed as a possible oppressive tool: "The result is prepossessing and intimidating when a certain historical discourse claims to be a 'total history' or at least the cynosure to which all other historical approaches shall be referred." (LACAPRA, 1980, p. 261).

The social construct of both historical and fictional discourses based on power relations is also analyzed by Roberto Reis, in his article "(Re)Lendo a História". According to the Brazilian critic, the analysis of both historical and fictional discourses must consider the social and therefore ideological circumstances under which these discourses are produced:

> Both historical and fictional narratives […] may be understood as discourses that attempt to ascertain some order to the social fabric, taming and disciplining what is largely spontaneous, chaotic and random. Behind such a route of inquiry is the assumption that all text is produced by a particular social agent, inscribed in a certain historical circumstance and representative of an ideological and class project. (REIS, 1998, p. 233 – my translation)[3].

The postmodern awareness concerning the ways through which power relations may interfere in historical discourse has been the research issue for many scholars and critics who deal with the innovative history-fiction relationship. These authors have observed that, according to the relatively new postmodern perspective, historical discourse, which had been traditionally relegated to the narrative of great political and economic events, is now worried with the accounts of everyday life. One of the first to observe this historical perspective was Peter Burke. In *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Burke mentions the new path unraveled by this "New History":

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[3] Original Text: "Tanto a narrativa histórica como a narrativa ficcional [...] podem ser entendidas como discursos que intentam conferir uma certa ordem ao tecido social, por assim dizer domesticando e disciplinando o que, em larga medida, é espontâneo, caótico e aleatório. Por trás de uma tal via de indagação está o pressuposto de que todo texto é produzido por um determinado agente social, inscrito numa dada circunstância histórica e porta-voz de um projeto, ideológico e de classe".

> The new history […] has come to be concerned with virtually every human activity. […] that is, everything has a past which can in principle be reconstructed and related to the rest of the past. […] The first half of the century witnessed the rise of the history of ideas. In the last thirty years we have seen a number of remarkable histories of topics which had not previously been thought to possess a history, for example, childhood, death, madness, the climate, smells, dirt and cleanliness, gestures, the body femininity, reading, speaking, and even silence. What had previously been considered as unchanging is now viewed as a 'cultural construction', subject to variation over time as well as in space. (BURKE, 1992, p. 11).

It is worth to notice that, similarly to Roberto Reis's claims, Peter Burke acknowledges that this new historical perspective is intrinsically related to social, ideological and cultural issues. The new histories of so far unconcerned topics must be analyzed under what the author names "cultural relativism":

> The cultural relativism implicit here deserves to be emphasized. […] The philosophical foundation of the new history is the idea that reality is socially or culturally constituted. This relativism also undermines the traditional distinction between what is central in history and what is peripheral.
> […] Cultural relativism obviously applies as much to historical writing itself as to its so-called objects. Our minds do not reflect reality directly. We perceive the world only through a network of conventions, schemata and stereotypes, a network which varies from one culture to another. In this situation, our understanding of conflicts is surely enhanced by a presentation of opposite viewpoints, rather than by an attempt to articulate a consensus. We have moved from the ideal of the Voice of History to that of heteroglossia, defined as 'varied and opposing voices'. (BURKE, 1992, p. 13-4).

Therefore, this new history makes possible the writing of new, multiple and, many times, contrasting histories, concerning the lives and experiences of common people. In "From Macro- to Microhistory: The History of Everyday Life", Georg Iggers presents some possible reasons concerning the decline of total history and the simultaneous ascension of everyday history. After analyzing the works of Italian historians Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, Iggers comes to the following conclusion:

> [T]he key reason for the decline of macrohistorical conceptions and with them of social science approaches to history was to be found in the loss of faith in just this optimistic view of the beneficial social and political fruits of technological progress. The arguments made against macrohistorical social science approaches […] were based on political and ethical grounds even more than on methodological ones […]. This process has taken place, so to say, behind the backs of 'little people', who had been neglected as much in social science-oriented history as they had been in the conventional political history that focused on the high and mighty. History must turn to the conditions of everyday life as they are experienced by common people. (IGGERS, 2005, p. 102).

Since, as we have observed, history and fiction are both narrative discourses, there are certain elements that play relevant roles in both of them. According to Lloyd S. Kramer, in *Literature, Criticism, and Historical Imagination*, imagination plays a central role not only on the production of fictional discourses, recognizably imaginative, but also on the writing of historical accounts of real events. In the mentioned essay, Kramer asserts:

> The fictive, imaginary dimension in all accounts of events does not mean that the events did not actually happen, but it does mean that any attempt to *describe* events (even as they are occurring) must rely on various forms of imagination. Furthermore, all accounts of historical realities must inevitably rely on a philosophy of history. In other words, one cannot write history without both philosophy and fictional narratives, and one cannot simply affirm the disciplinary distinction that historians use to separate themselves from philosophers and literary authors. (KRAMER, 1989, p. 101-2).

Considering that imagination plays a central role in both historical and fictional discourses, we might as well turn to the investigation of historical discourses with new questions. A new concept is proposed by E. H. Carr, in his book *What is History?*. As argued by Carr, we should not worry so much as to *why* certain events have happened, but to *how* these events took place. However, this proposition is a paradoxical one:

> Some people therefore speak not of 'cause' in history, but of 'explanation' or 'interpretation', or of 'the logic of the situation', or of 'the inner logic of events', or reject the causal approach (why it happened) in favour of the functional approach (how it happened), though this seems inevitably to involve the question how it came to happen, and so leads us back to the question 'Why?' (CARR, 2002 p. 53).

In her lecture "In Search of *Alias Grace*", Margaret Atwood confronts the representation of "the little people" – as the author refers to regular people – and their everyday life to the construction of not only history, but also of fiction and autobiography. From Atwood's point of view, all of these elements are dependable of the experiences of the common individuals in the world:

> It's out of such individual particulars that fiction is constructed, and so is autobiography, including the kind of autobiography we are each always writing but haven't yet got around to writing down, and so, too, is history. History may intend to provide us with grand patterns and overall schemes, but without its brick-to-brick, life-by-life, day-by-day foundations, it would collapse. Whoever tells you that history is not about individuals, only about large trends and movements is lying. […] [M]emory, history, and story all intersect: it would take only one step more to bring all of them into the realm of fiction. (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1505).

The conflation of the perspectives investigated in this section, which concern new approaches to historical and fictional discourses within the postmodern cultural context, has made possible the outcome of a new narrative mode concerning fictional past representation. This might be related to what Atwood refers to as the "one step more" and it has come to be known as "historiographic metafiction". The term was coined by Linda Hutcheon, who, in her article *The Postmodern Problematizing of History,* argues:

> Historiographic metafiction refutes the common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth-claim, both by

> questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both are discourses (human constructs or signifying systems) and both derive their 'truth' from that identity. This kind of postmodern fiction also refuses the relegation of the extra-textual past to the realm of history in the name of the autonomy of art. [Historiographic metafiction novels] assert that the past did indeed exist prior to its 'entextualization' into either fiction or history. They also show that both genres unavoidably construct as they textualize the past. The 'real' referent of their languages once existed, but it is only accessible to us today in textualized form: documents, eye-witness accounts, archives. The past is 'archeologized', but its reservoir of available materials is acknowledged as textualized. (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 371).

While stressing that both history and fiction are textualized discourses based on actual referents, Hutcheon also reminds us that historiographic metafiction must be distinguished from the traditional historical fiction. Although both modes of narration constitute fictional representations of the past, the inherent intentions portrayed by each of them are very different. Whereas historical fiction is shaped by traditional totalizing history, historiographic metafiction represents a dialogic and paradoxical project: it simultaneously installs and subverts the traditional representations of historical events. In Hutcheon's words, historiographic metafiction increasingly problematizes the institutionalized opposition between fiction and fact. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Hutcheon states:

> [H]istoriographic metafiction suggests the continuing relevance of such an opposition, even if it be a problematic one. Such novels both install and then blur the line between fiction and history. This kind of generic blurring has been a feature of literature since the classical epic and assertion and crossing of boundaries is more postmodern. [While] historiographic metafiction [displays] intense self-consciousness about the way in which all this is done, [...] I would define historical fiction as that which is modelled on historiography to the extent that it is motivated and made operative by a notion of history as a shaping force. (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 113).

Moreover, Hutcheon claims that, while traditional historical fiction would work towards the synthetically representation of the proper model of individual behavior, as defined by historical discourse, historiographic metafiction portrays representations of those traditionally excluded from official historical accounts:

> The protagonist [of the historical novel], therefore, should be a type, a synthesis of the general and particular, of 'all the humanity and socially essential determinants'. From this definition it is clear that the protagonists of historiographic metafiction are anything but proper types: they are the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history. (HUTCHEON, 1995, p.113-4).

The ex-centric representation by members of the consistently marginalized classes through postmodern historiographic metafiction has also been the object of study of contemporary historians, such as Anna Green and Kathleen Troup. In the book chapter "The

challenge of poststructuralism/postmodernism", the authors argue that the representation of the "other" has been useful to the research of marginalized groups:

> For historians researching those marginalized due to their class, race, gender, sexuality, age, the idea that a sign is distinguished by its difference, by what it is not, by what is 'other', has been helpful. The other, while often implicit, is exposed by the inconsistencies in a set of meanings within a text, so that another meaning is produced by this *différance*, a term referring to absence and difference. (GREEN; TROUP, 1999, p. 300 – author's italics).

Linda Hutcheon also claims that historiographic metafictional novels raise a great number of issues: "the nature of identity and subjectivity; the question of reference and representation; the intertextual nature of the past; and the ideological implications of writing about history" (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 117). However, Hutcheon, similarly to other scholars (such as LaCapra, White and Waugh) acknowledges that the question of narrative has been the issue which encompasses all of these concerns (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 121). Since narrative has been considered the most prominent issue concerning historiographic metafiction and its representations, it is not surprising to find the novel as the representational site of this postmodern self-conscious fiction. According to Patricia Waugh, in the extensive investigation *Metafiction*, the novel is, by its very nature, metafictional. Waugh manages to define the concept of metafiction and relate it to the basic concepts concerning the novel as literary genre:

> *Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. […] All [metafictional works] explore a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction. […] [M]etafiction is a tendency or function inherent in *all* novels. […] By studying metafiction, one is, in effect, studying that which gives the novel its identity. (WAUGH, 1984, p. 3-5]

If the novel is the natural narrative representation of metafiction, something similar might be said concerning the relationship between novel and history. In the opening of his book chapter "Histories", Steven Connor claims that novels are themselves "ways of making history". According to Connor, the relationship between novel and history, though "uneasy", has been a permanent one:

> No historical account of the novel in history can afford to shelve for long the complex question of the relations between novels and history. This is to say that the perspective that takes novels as a resource for history – as a certain kind of historical evidence, for example – must always at some stage acknowledge the uneasy overlap between novels and history as forms of narrative. To study the meanings, functions and pleasures of the novel across different periods is always to be concerned at least in part with the ways in which those periods imagine and narrate their own histories and the histories of others. Novels are, undoubtedly, part of the history of social life; but they are so largely because they provide

> evidence of the ways in which others have themselves constructed history, or historical relations. Novels are therefore, in both senses, ways of making history; they belong to the history of events and they contribute to the historical narrative of those events. (CONNOR, 2001, p. 128).

As we are going to observe in the investigation of *Obasan,* by Joy Kogawa and of *Alias Grace*, by Margaret Atwood, the concepts investigated in this chapter, when employed by great imaginative writers, may result not only in postmodern novels, but also in great literary works.

2 *OBASAN:* OVERCOMING NATIONAL TRAUMA

2.1 Joy Kogawa: Life, Works and Critical Acclaim

Within the Canadian patchwork quilt is a bright little square reserved for Japanese Canadians.
Joy Kogawa

Joy Kogawa[4], née Joy Nozomi Nakayama, is one of the most important Canadian authors and political activists. The writer has her work widely acclaimed by both the general public and the specialized literary criticism, not only in Canada and in Japan (respectively the countries where she was born and where her ascendency comes from), but worldwide. *Obasan*, Kogawa's masterpiece, has been translated into several languages, from Japanese to French to German. According to Kathryn Kilgore, in her review of the novel entitled "A Long Way Away from Home", Kogawa's success is due to the fact that the author tells "not only the experience of an individual, and through that the experiences of a minority culture, but also the delusions of the dominant culture." (KILGORE, 1982, p. 45).

The confrontation between "the experiences of a minority culture" and "the delusions of the dominant culture" has been part of Kogawa's life since she was born. Both Kogawa's parents were *Issei* – Japanese-born immigrants. Kogawa's father, Gordon Nakayama, was an Anglican Church minister, while her mother, Lois Nakayama, was a kindergarten teacher. Joy Kogawa was born on June 6, 1935, in Vancouver, British Columbia. The author was raised as a *Nisei* – child of Japanese immigrants – in a mostly white-Canadian neighborhood. In an interview to the *National Post* reporter Brian Hutchinson, Kogawa remembers her family's social and economic status and points out that, though not wealthy, they had "a big and comfortable house, […] with a beautiful cherry tree in the backyard." (HUTCHINSON, 2006, online).

Kogawa's family's life started to go through drastic changes in 1939, after the Japanese attacks to the United States at Pearl Harbor. Racism towards Japanese immigrants and their descendants – which had been subtly, yet permanently, present in

[4] Information regarding Joy Kogawa's life was mainly taken from *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, edited by Eva-Marie Kröller (2004), *The Routledge Concise History of Canadian Literature*, edited by Richard J. Lane (2011), and *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (online).

Canada – was soon to reach unprecedented levels. In 1942, due to the War Measures Acts, Kogawa, then a six-year-old girl, and her family were moved to an internment camp (officially named "Interior Housing Project") in Slocan. Canadian government then believed there would be traitors among Japanese Canadians[5], and thus justified the removal as a protective measure. As described by King-kok Cheung, in *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa,* Slocan was "a ghost town in the old silver-mining region of eastern British Columbia." (CHEUNG, 1993, p. 129). As to the living conditions offered to Joy Kogawa's family, as well as to thousands of other Japanese-Canadian ones, scholar Ann Sunahara, in her ample study *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the World War II*, argues the interned "were […] overcrowded, […] living and eating communally […] in tents, before all shacks were built." (SUNAHARA, 2000, p. 65).

Kogawa was educated at the schools located at the two detention centers she and her family lived in. She attended elementary school in Slocan and secondary school in Coaldale, Alberta, where her family was moved to work at the sugar beet harvest, in 1945, after the war had ended. In 1954, she attended the University of Alberta, where she studied Education. Kogawa then started working as an elementary school teacher, an activity she would perform until 1974. She returned to school to attend graduate courses at both the University of Toronto and the University of Saskatchewan. In 1957, she married David Kogawa. The couple, which divorced in 1968, has two children.

Kogawa's first position as a writer was at the Prime Minister's Office in Ottawa, Ontario, from 1974 to 1976, where she wrote official letters. The writer's literary career, though, started as early as 1967, with the publication of her first collection of poems, *The Splintered Moon.* Then followed three poetry collections: *A Choice of Dreams* (1974), *Jericho Road* (1977) and *Six Poems* (1980). Other poetry books include *Woman in the Woods* (1985), *A Song of Lilith* (2000), *A Garden of Anchors : Selected Poems* (2003) and *What do I Remember from the Evacuation?* (2006), a graphic poem. Kogawa also wrote two children's books, both featuring the protagonist of her first

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[5] For the purpose of terminological consistency, this dissertation will follow Paul Robert Magocsi's definition concerning the use of hyphen in "Japanese-Canadian", as presented in the *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*:

> In the case of compound nouns like Japanese Canadians, no hyphen is used. Hyphens do appear, however, in adjectival forms such as Japanese-Canadian literature [...]. The use of the hyphen in the latter case is a convention of English grammar and should not be considered – by those sensitive to (and opposed to) being labelled "hyphenated Canadians" – as any kind of ideological stance. (MAGOSCI, 1999, p. ix).

novel, *Obasan* (1981): *Naomi's Road* (1986) and *Naomi's Tree* (2008). Besides *Obasan*, Joy Kogawa has published two other novels: *Itsuka* (1992) – later republished as *Emily Kato* (2005) – and *The Rain Ascends* (1995).

In *Obasan*, Joy Kogawa combines her traumatic experience together with fictional elements to reproduce the sufferings faced by Japanese Canadians in the WWII period and in the years after its ending. The novel was first published in 1981, at a time when Japanese Canadians' struggle for official redress was rising. As observed by scholar Gary Willis, in his essay "Speaking the Silence: Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*":

> The political significance of the book's publication may be what strikes us first: the novel appeared at a time when the question of reparation to Japanese Canadians was beginning to receive exposure in the press; and since the newly elected Prime Minister Mulroney's promise of reparation in 1984, the issue has become "hard news" and receives continuing media attention. (WILLIS, 1987, online).

Obasan is Joy Kogawa's most critically acclaimed work. It was praised for the ways through which it delicately, yet bravely, denounces mistreats and injustices perpetrated against Japanese Canadians. As argued by critic Ruth Y. Hsu, in her interview with the author, "A Conversation with Joy Kogawa", "*Obasan* is a much-needed, public corrective to official versions that down-play or rationalize the mistreatment of Japanese Canadians during and after the war" (HSU, 1996, p. 208). Mainly told from a child's (Naomi's) perspective, the narrative adopts a poetic and allusive style, which conquers the reader. Although the novel regards the horrors done to Japanese Canadians, through Naomi's standpoint one might see (and feel) beauty. Joy Kogawa published a sequel to the novel in 1992, *Itsuka*, which portrays the adult Naomi's involvement in the struggle for governmental redress. *Obasan* was also published as two children's books, *Naomi's Road*, which was adopted by Japanese elementary schools and adapted into an opera by the Vancouver Opera, and *Naomi's Tree*.

Obasan was awarded the *Books in Canada* First Novel Award and the *Canadian Authors' Association* Book of the Year Award. In 2005, the novel was the *One Book, One Vancouver* selection[6]. Joy Kogawa was made a member of the *Order of Canada* in 1986, and a member of the *Order Of British Columbia* in 2006. She has currently

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[6] "A city-wide book club sponsored by the Vancouver Public Library. Titles are selected by the library staff, who vote for one of four titles presented by the One Book, One Vancouver Organizing Committee" (definition taken from the One Book, One Vancouver website).

received seven honorary doctorates from Canadian universities. In 2008, Kogawa was awarded the *George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award*, for her literary career. In 2010, she was honored with the *Order of the Rising Sun*, by the Japanese government, for her contribution to the preservation of Japanese-Canadian history and culture.

2.2 Historical Background, Historical Racism

It is fortunate that the use of the bomb should have been upon the Japanese rather than upon the white races of Europe.
William Lyon Mackenzie King

Obasan narrates the story of the Nakanes, a Japanese-Canadian family during World War II. Joy Kogawa's novel was the first literary text to offer an account of the horrors and injustices faced by Japanese Canadians during this period of history. Among these injustices, one might highlight the internment of Japanese Canadians in "Interior Housing" and "Work Camps" projects, where they were assigned to either the building of roads or to the harvesting of sugar beets. As already mentioned, the procedures taken against Japanese Canadians were based on the War Measures Acts, which began to be enforced in December 1941, right after the Japanese attack to the United States at Pearl Harbor. The official discourse asserted that the policy against Japanese Canadians was taken as safety measure, since the relocated people lived mostly in the province of British Columbia, by the Pacific Coast. Therefore, in Canadian former Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's words, due to the "proximity" to Japan, they would be more subject to turn into informants to the enemy during the war, betraying Canada, the country which had welcomed them and given them a home (KING, 1941, online).

The fact is that, as argued by many scholars[7], the relations between Asian immigrants and the citizens of Canada had not been good for a long time (ROY, 1991, p. 2). Much before World War II, former Canadian citizens had expressed their worries regarding the increasing number of Asian immigrants among them. Although Canada has traditionally been praised as a nation which encourages and facilitates the entrance and permanence of immigrants in its territory, history has, more than once, shown that

[7] Data concerning Asian people immigration to Canada, as well as the internment of Japanese Canadians, was mainly taken from *Canada and Japan in the Twentieth Century*, a thorough detailed study, edited by Kimitada Miwa and John Schultz (1991), and *Stone Voices*, a collection of Japanese-Canadian writers' wartime recollections, edited by Keibo Oiwa (1991).

the immigration issue in Canada has been a troubled one. The first Asian immigration movement to Canada took place in the second half of the 19th century, way before the first Japanese people set foot in the country. It was led by Chinese laborers, who saw Canada as a country where they could work and prosper. The Canadian government, supported by its people, encouraged the migration, since Chinese labor was necessary for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). As time passed, the first immigrants (mostly men) sent money back to their families in China, together with instructions for their wives and children to come and join them in Canada. Fearing the increase in the number of Asian immigrants in the country, the Canadian government imposed a head tax on Chinese immigrants. The tax value started as Can$ 50 in 1885, and progressively went up to incredible Can$ 500 in 1907, making it virtually impossible for Chinese people to enter the country, consequently severely limiting and ultimately putting an end to the Chinese massive immigration to Canada (MIWA; SCHULTZ, 1991, p. xi).

Something similar was to happen to the Japanese immigrants. At the turn of the 20th century, the first Japanese started to arrive in Canada. Though the vast majority of them were en route to the United States, some Japanese people started to settle in the British Columbia province, working mainly in the fisheries along the coast (OHARA, 1991, p. 66). Being extremely dedicated fishermen, the Japanese immigrants started to worry their Canadian counterparts, who argued that the "Japs" (a pejorative way to refer to Japanese people) would work more for lower incomes, and thus affecting the hiring of Canadian fishermen. As they gathered money and started having their own properties, the first Japanese immigrants, which were almost all males, followed the example of former Chinese immigrants, and made preparations for their families, still in Japan, to come to Canada. The initial steps towards the establishment of Asian people in British Columbia were accompanied by the first registered riot towards Asian immigrants (OIWA, 1991, p. 17). The riot took place on September 7th, 1907, and was primarily aimed at Chinese immigrants (which did not mean much, since most Canadians would consider both the Japanese and the Chinese immigrants as part of the Yellow Peril[8]). Rioters headed to Chinatown and damaged Asian people's properties. Canadian federal government sent William Lyon Mackenzie King, then Deputy Minister of Labour, to investigate the issue and assure the immigrants that the government would pay for all

[8] "The term refers to the skin color of East Asians, and the belief that the mass immigration of Asians threatened white wages and standards of living" (*A Dictionary of American History*).

damaged property. In her essay, "Not All Were Welcome: Canada and the Dilemma of Immigration", scholar Patricia Roy reproduces Mackenzie King's words regarding the situation. The minister understands there was more than a labor agitation against the Japanese immigrants going on, and his words almost seem to justify the riots, since they hint a fear based on the larger threat of the economic development of Japan:

> The people of British Columbia of all classes are pretty generally in favour of restricting the immigration of Japanese simply because they not only fear Japanese competition, but the possibility of complications in the future should the Japanese ever secure too strong a hold in that Province. There is a good deal [...] to indicate that Japan is desirous of becoming a great power on the Pacific, and it is only natural [...] that her statesmen should have an eye upon the western coast of this continent. (KING *apud* ROY, 1991, p. 8).

More than the financial or physical damages caused to the Japanese immigrants, this first riot exposed the real issue behind the alleged labor concerns. After the riot, intolerance and racial hatred towards the Japanese immigrants was made explicit at a level that had not been reached before.

Racist acts performed by Canadian people were not isolated or original. Actually, racism could already be detected in the former immigration propaganda created and divulged by the British Columbia government. As argued by Patricia Roy,

> The 'establishment' of British Columbia, themselves mainly immigrants from the United Kingdom and Eastern Canada, wanted to make their new home a 'white man's country'; they did not want immigrants from Asia no matter how intelligent or industrious they might be. On the contrary, the very intelligence and industry of the Japanese made them people to fear rather than to welcome. (ROY, 1991, p. 3).

In *Obasan*, the character Aunt Emily reminds both her niece, Naomi, and us, readers, that racial hatred against Japanese people had taken place long before World War II: "the war was just an excuse for the racism that was already there. We were rioted against back in 1907, for heaven's sakes! We've always faced prejudice!" (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 35).

Still in 1907, after the insurgence of white Canadians against Japanese immigrants, Canada and Japan settled a series of agreements regarding the number of Japanese people to enter Canada annually. The most representative among these was the "Gentleman's Agreement", which reduced Japanese immigration to 400 people a year. In comparative numbers, before this agreement, "in the first seven months of 1907, 5,571 Japanese [had] landed at British Columbia ports." (ROY: 1991, p. 7). In spite of Canada's and Japan's many measures to control and reduce Japanese immigration, and

the racism faced by Japanese people, before World War II the Japanese were firmly established in British Columbia. This establishment was asserted mainly during World War I, when Japanese people took advantage of a depressed real state market and bought properties to settle not only their houses, but also farms and small business (MIWA, 1991, p. 54).

Many Japanese immigrants then obtained their naturalization papers as Canadian citizens, and the sons and daughters of the first Japanese immigrants were born in Canada. They all lived a period of reduced agitation and of a certain tranquility during and after World War I (in which Japan was allied both to England and the United States). This period of peace and stability ended with the outbreak of World War II. In February 1942, after the December 1941 Japanese attack to the United States at Pearl Harbor, Canada's federal government ordered the evacuation of all Japanese and Japanese Canadians from the Pacific coast. They were to be relocated to at least 100 miles away from the shore. The British Columbia Security Commission was created to perform the relocation of not only first generation Japanese immigrants, but also of their children and grandchildren. It is estimated that out of the total amount of 21,079 evacuated Japanese Canadians, over 17,000 were Canadian-born or naturalized citizens of Canada. The evacuation was part of the War Measures Acts, and as a result of this large and radical displacement, Japanese Canadians were sent to varied "projects" and areas. Most Japanese Canadians, a documented number of 11,694, were allocated to Interior Housing, being sent to ghost towns in inner Canada. Another substantial number of people, 3,988, were sent to Sugar-beet Projects, and 986 to Road Camp Projects. In January 1943, all property belonging to either Japanese people or Canadians of Japanese ascendency was confiscated and then auctioned by Canada's federal government. (LA VIOLLETE, 1948, p. 96).

It is noticeable that, although the procedures at the War Measures Acts were officially taken in order to protect Canadians from war enemies (including not only Japan, but also Italy and Germany, the other members of the Axis), the measures taken against Japanese and Japanese-Canadian citizens were not the same as those taken against German and Italian immigrants and their descendants. This corroborates the idea that racism and prejudice prevailed even in the moment of applying "defensive" measures. As observed by Ann Sunahara,

> Like the German and Italian aliens, all Japanese Canadians had to register with and report bi-weekly to the RCMP, could not travel more than twelve miles from their residence or change their address without permission. In addition, all Japanese Canadians, unlike the German and Italian aliens, were required to observe a dusk-to-dawn curfew and to abandon their homes, farms and businesses for an unknown destination. (SUNAHARA, 2000, p. 46).

The argument of discrimination is at the core of the question asked by Aunt Emily, in *Obasan*: "Why in a time of war with Germany and Japan would our government seize the property and homes of Canadian-born Canadians but not the homes of German-born Germans?" (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 38).

In March 1945, while the war was still going on, RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) officers visited relocated Japanese Canadians and gave them an option whether to remain in Canada or to "return" to Japan (although most of these people were Canadian-born and many of them had never been to Japan). In reality, as pointed by Kazuko Tsurumi, in "The War-Time Experience", the choice was really unfair: "For those who wished to go to Japan, all assistance and expenses would be provided, while those who decided to stay in Canada had to prove they had a formal job proposal east of the Rocky Mountains." (TSURUMI, 1991, p. 20). According to statistical reports provided by Forrest E. La Violette, in his study *The Canadian Japanese and World War II*, although 9,000 had initially agreed to "return" to Japan, only 3,000 effectively went there after the war.

As a matter of fact, it is not so difficult to understand why, in despite of all their suffering, most Japanese Canadians decided to stay in Canada. The most obvious reasons for this permanence seem to be related to Japan's defeat in the war. This defeat allowed Japanese Canadians to be free from what was once known as the "Imperial taboo", "the constant power the Japanese Emperor would have over all Japanese people even when they were abroad" (ROY, 1991, p. 7). After the Emperor's defeat in the war, Japanese people were free from this taboo, and the Japanese Canadians could freely choose whether to stay in Canada or go to Japan. Another relevant issue is related to the fact that, after the Allies' attacks, most Japanese Canadians' properties in Japan were damaged or entirely destroyed. Also, in the post-war period, economy in Canada was progressing, and Japanese Canadians who had effectively decided to stay in the country stopped sending money back to their families in Japan (mainly because they recognized the country was so disrupted, that it would be difficult to get the money to reach them). These factors increased the Japanese Canadians' income and, as a consequence, improved their living conditions.

However, maybe the most influential reasons for the permanence of Japanese Canadians in Canada are related to future prospects for their children, mainly represented in *Obasan* by Naomi Nakane, the protagonist of the novel. Before World War II, Japanese Canadians' children were sent to Japan to finish their studies and find a good job, since prejudice in Canada was so big that, no matter how qualified they were, Japanese Canadians would only be given subaltern jobs. This vision is reproduced by Japanese immigrant Mizutani-san, in an interview to Kazuko Tsurumi:

> Before the war, there was such discrimination against the Japanese Canadians that even the college-educated ones among them were not able to get decent jobs. So most of us sent our children back to Japan to be educated. Now that our children may get white-collar jobs here in Canada, according to their qualifications, they do not wish to go back to Japan. (TSURUMI, 1991, p. 25).

In Mizutani-san's opinion, the situation of being able to live among white Canadians at schools, universities, and offices was also a key factor in the improvement of Japanese Canadians' living conditions and professional opportunities. According to her, "thanks to war-time evacuation, which forced us to live among the whites, the second generation Japanese Canadians are now getting good jobs and earning good money." (TSURUMI, 1991, p. 26).

After a 30-year struggle faced by members of the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), official government redress ultimately came in 1988. The official agreement included the following items:

> The Canadian Government recognition that their treatment of Japanese Canadians during and after World War II was unjust; a redress payment of twenty-one thousand dollars (…) to every survivor who is entitled to redress – one who was forced to evacuate or sent to a concentration camp, and whose properties were confiscated; the payment of twelve million dollars through NAJC, to the Japanese-Canadian communities, for the purpose of carrying out educational, social, and cultural activities and projects to promote welfare and protection of their human rights (TSUJI, 1990, p. 23)

It is important to notice that, even after official redress was announced, and although the mentioned redress was only possible due to the struggle of Japanese Canadians, some entitled survivors did not apply for redress payment, thus reinforcing the idea that forgetting the injustices done to them was the best thing to do.

2.3 A Brief Summary and First Impressions

I had to tell a peculiar story of a peculiar people at a specific historical time.
Joy Kogawa

Obasan narrates the story of Megumi Naomi Nakane, a primary schoolteacher who lives in Cecil, Alberta. When the narrative starts, in 1972, Naomi is 36 years old and receives the news of her uncle's death. She then goes to the nearby city of Granton, to visit and care for her widowed aunt, Ayako, whom she simply calls "Obasan"[9] (the term being the Japanese word for "aunt", in this context). At Obasan's house, Naomi finds a parcel containing varied documentation, regarding the period in her childhood when she saw her family split apart due to Canadian federal government's War Measures Acts. While waiting with Obasan for her brother Stephen and her aunt Emily – the owner of the package – to arrive for Uncle's wake and funeral, Naomi remembers and relives her childhood.

From this moment on, the narrative invites the reader to join Naomi's difficult task to come to terms with her painful past. We learn that Naomi belonged to a middle class Japanese-Canadian family. She used to live in Vancouver with her brother (Stephen, three years older than Naomi), mother and father in a mostly white-Canadian neighborhood. Her father used to build boats, together with his cousin, Isamu (simply referred to as "Uncle" by Naomi). Naomi's house was a big and comfortable one, and the visits of her aunt, Emily (Naomi's mother's sister), and Grandparents Nakane (Naomi's father's parents) and Kato (Naomi's mother's parents) were frequent. All her world is completely shaken by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, during World War II, after which Canadian government approves the War Measures Acts. In compliance with the Acts, Naomi's family was relocated to varied places in interior British Columbia. The Acts also demanded that all of her family's properties should be confiscated and then auctioned by Canadian federal government. Naomi's family then is completely disrupted: Grandmother Kato and Mother go to Japan, to care for Naomi's great-grandmother; Grandfather Kato and Aunt Emily manage to move to Toronto; Grandparents Nakane are taken to different sections of Hastings Parks Pool (a former animal shelter, now overcrowded with dislocated people); and Father, and Uncle are

[9] In this dissertation, Obasan refers to Naomi's aunt, Ayako, whom she simply calls "Obasan" throughout the novel. *Obasan*, in italics, refers to Kogawa's novel itself.

assigned to Road Camp Projects, being sent to distinct work camps. In May 1942, Naomi, together with Stephen and Obasan, goes to Slocan, in the southeastern part of British Columbia, one of the "ghost towns" administered by the Interior Housing Projects.

After one year in Slocan, Obasan, Stephen and Naomi are joined by Uncle, who returns from the road-work camp. In 1944, Father joins them, but he is demanded to return to work camp after only a few weeks with his family. Naomi and the others would never see him again. In 1945, with the imminence of the war ending, Obasan, Uncle, Stephen and Naomi are allowed by RCMP officers to move to Lethbridge, Alberta. Young Naomi expects many improvements in her life, abandoning the "ghost town" Slocan and going to a real city. That is not what happens, though. If in Slocan they lived in a "two-roomed log hut at the base of the mountain" (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 118) (which, if not comfortable, had enough room for the four of them), in Lethbridge they must all share a "one-room hut, […] smaller even than the one [they] lived in Slocan, […] [where] dust leap to the walls." (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 192). The mentioned hut is located at the end of a yard where a big white house is situated. The house belongs to the owner of the sugar-beet farm where they all would work. When seeing the house for the first time, Naomi recalls her family's house in Vancouver and the family's change in fortune: "The farmer's house is a real house with a driveway leading into a garage. It makes me think of our house in Vancouver, though this is not as large." (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 192).

In 1951, Uncle starts working at a potato farm, in Granton. The family then moves to this town, and this time to a "real house", where they finally settle. Naomi's detailed description of Granton's house demonstrates how eager the girl was to live in a proper house:

> The new house is at least a house. […] In my house we have a living-room, kitchen, one large bedroom, and one small room that is about twice the size of the pantry we slept in Slocan. Uncle and Obasan have a double bed in the bedroom and I sleep on a cot separated from them by a pink flowered curtain hung from a clothesline wire. Stephen is in the other room with all his musical instruments (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 210).

Naomi remains in Granton and studies to become a schoolteacher. Stephen, on the other hand, leaves Granton in 1952, and moves to Aunt Emily's house in Toronto, where he studies music and works as an acclaimed professional pianist.

From her initial relocation to Slocan, to her final settlement in Granton, Naomi suffers many family losses. Both Nakane grandparents die during the war. Grandfather Kato dies in Toronto, soon after the war ends. Father dies while interned at one of the road-work camps spread across British Columbia. Naomi's family can not even bury him. The moment we, readers, come to know of Naomi's father's death is one of the most moving and touching passages of the novel. The passage is very significant, since it represents the way Naomi is able to understand and react to sad things happening around her, even if she is not able to express her feelings through words:

> I am not sure, as I remember the scene, whether I am told after I come in, or later at night when I am in bed, or if I am even told at all. It's possible the words are never said outright. I know that for years I simply do not believe it. At some point I remember Uncle's hand on my head, stroking it. I remember the strange gentle smile on his face when he sees my two hands raised towards him. (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 206).

In her hands, Naomi was holding a bowl with a tiny green frog named Tad, "short for Tadpole or Tadashi, [her] father's name" (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 206). The narrative accompanies Naomi's pain and suffering regarding her father's death, even though the words are not properly expressed. The frog, similarly to her father, disappears from Naomi's life without leaving any traces:

> One morning, the frog is on the rim of the bowl sitting there ready to leap. Another time it is on the table. Once I find it in a corner of the room covered in fluff. And then it is nowhere. The bowl sits empty on the table. My last letter to Father has received no answer (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 208).

Naomi's mother also leaves the girl with unanswered questions regarding her whereabouts. Since her departure, with Grandma Kato, to Tokyo, in 1941, Naomi keeps wondering what might have happened to her. The moment when her mother goes to Japan to care for Naomi's great-grandmother is one of great confusion and questionings to five-year-old Naomi: "My great-grandmother has need of my mother. Does my mother have need of me? In what market-place of the universe are the bargains made that have traded my need for my great-grandmother's?" (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 67). Once again, Naomi's inquiries are all internal; she does not give voice to her feelings.

Naomi remains silent in relation to her mother's absence. The first moment she really speaks about Mother, she is already a teenager. Together with Stephen, Naomi finally comes to the conclusion that her mother must be dead. Uncertainty regarding Mother's fate remains until the last chapters of the novel, when Naomi, now at the age

of 36, is finally told the truth. We come to know that Mother and Grandma Kato left Tokyo to go to Nagasaki, to care for one of Mother's cousin, who was to deliver a baby. They were both in Nagasaki in 1945, in the time of the atomic bombing, and although Mother survived the attacks, she had gone through utter disfigurement. Grandma Kato had written back to Canada, telling everything that had happened to them, but Mother is emphatic when asking the family to spare Naomi and Stephen the truth, "for the sake of the children" (in Japanese, "kodomo no tame", a recurrent phrase throughout the novel). Although Mother had wished her children to be spared the truth regarding the tragedy imposed onto her, it is only after Naomi learns the distressing facts about her mother's fate that she is able to reconcile herself with her past, and thus move on with her life.

2.4 The Fictional Self as Collective Voice

There is a silence that cannot speak.
There is a silence that will not speak.
Joy Kogawa

The epigraph above constitutes the initial lines of *Obasan*. It differentiates two distinct silences. The first one, the silence that "cannot speak" regards the oppression through which certain minority groups, denominated as "subaltern" by scholar Gayatri Spivak (1988) or "ex-centric" by theorist Linda Hutcheon (1988), like the Japanese Canadians portrayed in the novel, are forced to abide by. When this oppression achieves such striking levels as the ones depicted by Kogawa, it is impossible for the oppressed to express themselves, since they do not have the means and opportunities to voice their sufferings. The second silence, the one that "will not speak" regards the silence which remains even after the high-level, explicit (and, in this case, official) oppression is gone. This silence refers to the unwillingness of the oppressed to express themselves and voice their sufferings. Such reluctance may derive from many factors, ranging from conformity to events which occurred in the past to the fear that giving voice to this past trauma would open "sealed" wounds.

This refusal to speak out on the horrors of a past experience is analyzed by scholar Leigh Gilmore, in her previously mentioned book, *The Limits of Autobiography*. According to Gilmore, the decision to deal with a traumatic event may result in "either a new wound or the reopening of a wound." (GILMORE, 2001, p. 27). This view is

reproduced by Mizutani-san, a victim of the measures taken by the Canadian government against Japanese Canadians during World War II. In the already mentioned interview to Kazuko Tsurumi, Mizutani-san argues: "Our children tell us not to make too much fuss about compensation for the injustices done to us. If we do, they are afraid of losing the chances for them to get ahead in Canadian society." (TSURUMI, 1991, p. 26). This opinion is similar to that of Naomi's uncle, Isamu, in *Obasan*. In a discussion with Aunt Emily, regarding the fight for official government redress, Uncle, who had been assigned to work camp during the war, states: "In the world, there is no better place. […] This country is the best. There is food. There is medicine. There is pension money. Gratitude. Gratitude only" (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 42).

The two different silences exposed in the afore-mentioned epigraph, also constitute the object of study for scholar Arnold Davidson, in his extensive analysis of the novel, *Writing against the Silence: Joy Kogawa's Obasan*. As argued by Davidson, Naomi's mother and Obasan would represent:

> The two silences, in fact, that will loom large in her [Naomi's] story – both the silence of her missing mother and the silence of others, especially the aunt […] who raised her without telling her the full story of the mother's absence and death. 'There is a silence [the mother] that cannot speak. There is a silence [Obasan] that will not speak.' (DAVIDSON, 1993, p. 27).

In her study, "Voices of Stone: the Power of Poetry in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*", Laurie Kruk quotes Bernard Dauenhauer on *muteness* and *silence* in order to better illustrate the difference between the two silences depicted by the novel:

> The power of poetry [in *Obasan*] […] comes in part from its […] tendency […] to draw on brevity's heightened impact and to surround itself with attentive silences. As Dauenhauer notes, the 'difference between muteness and silence is comparable to the difference between being without sight and having one's eyes closed'. (DAUENHAUER *apud* KRUK, 1999, p. 77).

According to this perspective, Mother would be "mute", without any voice, while Obasan would be "silent", opting for not talking about the sinister facts surrounding her (and her family's) traumatic past to Naomi.

In *Obasan*, Joy Kogawa defies the remaining silence regarding the events related to Japanese Canadian subjects born or living in Canada during World War II. Although the book was first published in 1981, more than 35 years after the war had ended, there was still a disturbing, deafening silence regarding the mistreatments imposed on Japanese Canadians during this period of history. This silence that "would not speak"

lasted until the period coinciding with the publication of the novel, the first literary account of the forced interment and relocation of Japanese Canadians. This continuous silence might be related to the Canadians' refusal to remember a past cruelty perpetrated against part of their own people. This might be observed in the book itself. The front-cover caption for the 1985 Penguin edition reads: "A moving novel of a time and a suffering *we* have *tried* to forget" (KOGAWA, 1985, front-cover - my italics). However "trying" might have been carried out, the writing, the critical acclaim and, more relevantly, the ample readership of *Obasan*, demonstrate that it was not possible to completely discard the wartime events from the Canadian collective memory.

The time span necessary to approach a traumatic issue is investigated by collective trauma researcher Gabriele Schwab. In her representative article "Writing against Memory and Forgetting", Schwab observes that "human beings have always silenced violent stories. Some stories, collective and personal, are so violent we would not be able to live our daily lives if we did not at least temporarily silence them. [...] Too much silence, however, becomes haunting." (SCHWAB, 2006, p. 110). The mentioned need to access a traumatizing event of a nation's past may be related both to the dominant group (white Canadians) as well as to the minority (Japanese Canadians). This is the perspective proposed by Eva Karpinski in her article "The Book as (Anti) National Heroine: Trauma and Witnessing in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*", in which the author states that

> [s]o-called "minority" literature matters not only because of what it does for the dominant group, but also because it deals with issues of subjectivity and identity relevant to diasporic subjects. Kogawa's novel addresses itself not only to the majority of culture, but also to the Japanese Canadian community traumatized by wartime events and their aftermath. (KARPINSKI, 2006, p. 49).

Events such as the ones narrated in *Obasan*, characterized by the continuing (however involuntary) remembrance of past distressing events, constitute the core of *trauma*. As observed by history and trauma researcher Dominick LaCapra, the key feature of trauma regards its persistence through time: "A crucial issue with respect to traumatic historical events is whether attempts to work through problems [...] can viably come to terms with (without ever fully healing or overcoming) the divided legacies, open wounds, and unspeakable losses of a dire past." (LACAPRA, 2001, p. 45). By voicing the "losses of a dire past", the relevance of *Obasan* ascends from a literary to a broader, political importance. This might be related to the moment in which the novel

was published. Although earlier versions of *Obasan*, including a short story of the same title, had been previously published (LEFEBVRE, 2010, p. 157), when the complete novel was finally released, the discussion over official government redress was at its top. According to Ann Sunahara,

> *Obasan*, introduced thousands of ordinary Canadians to the wartime history of Japanese Canadians by putting them vicariously inside the experience. At the other extreme was a study conducted by the respected accounting firm, Price Waterhouse, which revealed that the economic losses from the wartime property confiscation were $443 million in 1986 dollars. By 1986, polls showed that 63% of Canadians supported redress and 45% favoured individual compensation. (SUNAHARA, 2000, p. 154).

It is relevant to observe that the political and representative relevance achieved by Joy Kogawa comes from a fictional representation portrayed in *Obasan*, since, as observed by the author in the opening of the novel: “Although this novel is based on historical events, and many of the persons named are real, most of the characters are fictional.” (KOGAWA, 1985, title page). The representation of the self through fictional narrative might also be related to scholar bell hooks’s analysis of the representation issue. As argued by hooks, the main concern of autobiography writers should not be exactness or accuracy, but rather the impressions and memories past events may have left upon them: “autobiography is a personal story telling – a unique recounting of events not so much as they have happened but as we remember and invent them.” (hooks, 1998, p. 431). This perspective might be related to Hayden White’s proposal regarding the entanglement of historical and fictional narratives. In *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, White affirms:

> One can produce an imaginary discourse about real events that may not be less “true” for being imaginary. It all depends upon how one construes the function of the faculty of imagination in human nature. The same is true with respect to narrative representations of reality, especially when, as historical discourses, these representations are of the ‘human past’. (WHITE, 1992, p. 57).

Besides contesting conventional autobiographical writing through the use of fiction, Joy Kogawa also contests the established autobiographical tradition in other significant ways. First, the account of the historical traumatizing events regarding the Canadian government’s measures against part of its own people during World War II is portrayed through the perspective of a traditionally *silent* and *silenced* group. Instead of the customary white male dominant group, the narrative in the book is depicted by one

of the oppressed Japanese Canadians families. Such an innovative approach might be related to the assertion proposed by theorist Deepika Bahri: "Those with the power to represent and describe others clearly control how these others will be seen." (BAHRI, 2008, p. 205). The re-writing of history through narratives dealing with trauma is analyzed by Kerwin Lee Klein in his article "On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse". As proposed by Klein, "'trauma' is the key to authentic forms of memory, and memories shaped by trauma are the most likely to subvert totalizing varieties of historicism" (KLEIN, 2000, p. 138). Therefore, by retelling an important period of Canadian history through a new perspective, *Obasan* gives the power over historical narrative to a traditionally excluded minority.

Also, the autobiographical account presented in *Obasan* does not refer just to an individual's life. In the already mentioned "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice", theoretician Susan Stanford Friedman comes to the conclusion that, in traditional autobiography, as proposed by Georges Gusdorf, "man must be an island unto himself" (GUSDORF *apud* FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 72). *Obasan* definitely does not fit Gusdorf's definition, since the novel is not an account of a *male* individual's life, referring to actual events on *his* life. Therefore, since the novel presents *collective* trauma representation through the eyes and feelings of a young girl and later through the point of view of this girl as a grown woman, it would be closer to the definition of autobiography proposed by Susan Friedman, who suggests alterations to Gusdorf's definitions. According to Friedman:

> Autobiography is possible when 'the individual does not feel *herself* to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community… [where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being[10] (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 75).

It is also worth noticing the age of *Obasan*'s protagonist. Predominantly, *Obasan*'s story is narrated through a four-year-old girl's viewpoint. The use of young Naomi's perspective to depict the grievous injustices done to Japanese Canadians might also be analyzed as a necessary and calculated strategy employed by Kogawa. In order to approach lamentable acts and official measures as the ones described in the novel, Naomi's point of view, one without elaborate or assertive comments, may not only make

[10] As argued by Friedman, Gusdorf originally stated that autobiography would *not* develop in societies where "the individual does not feel himself to exist outside of others" (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 73).

the understanding and comprehension of the sufferings the protagonist goes through more bearable to herself, but this strategy also allows the adult readers of the novel to form their own ideas and conclusions about the injustices committed against Japanese Canadians. Throughout the narrative, the reader acknowledges many facts regarding violence, racism, and official segregation through the perspective of young Naomi, and is able to see not only the violence implied in the situation but also the irony of it. The employment of such a strategy might be observed, for instance, when Naomi, still in Vancouver, learns the place her Nakane grandparents had been sent is not exactly a "pool", as she had believed: "the place they called the Pool was not a pool of water, but a prison at the exhibition grounds called Hastings Park in Vancouver. [...] From our family, it was only Grandma and Grandpa Nakane who were imprisoned at the Pool." (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 77). At this moment, Kogawa opts to offer the reader Naomi's plain acknowledgement that Hastings Park was a prison, instead of a pool. A more detailed and rough definition, as the one proposed by Ann Sunahara, states that

> Hastings Park Manning Pool was a holding pen for human beings. [...] The facilities were crude. In the former Women's Building and the livestock barns, rows of bunks had been erected, each equipped with a straw mattress, three army blankets and a small bolster. [...]Most shocking to the inmates, whose culture demanded fastidious personal cleanliness, was the ever-present stink of animals and the maggots and the dirt that encrusted the buildings in Hastings Park. (SUNAHARA, 2000, p. 48).

Through young Naomi's point of view, the reader is also presented to a traumatic event in the girl's childhood other than the one regarding Japanese Canadians forced relocation and internment. When she is four years old, Naomi is sexually abused by her neighbor, referred to as Old Man Gower. It is interesting to observe the way the narrative slyly, yet remarkably, depicts the narration of the abuse from the young girl's viewpoint. At no moment Naomi recognizes Gower's acts as violent or even disgusting. Actually, not only does Naomi not resist Gower, since "it is unthinkable to be held by force" (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 63), but she also goes "to seek Old Man Gower in his hideaway" (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 65). When remembering this event, the adult Naomi can only question when "this fascination and danger that rockets through [her] body begins" (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 61).

The abuse Naomi goes through and is silent about is also relevant to the child's relation to both silence and to her mother. Immediately before remembering the abuse, the adult Naomi mentions she would speak only when in the safety of her house:

> It isn't true of course that I never speak as a child. Inside the house in Vancouver there is confidence and laughter, music and meal times, games and storytelling. But outside, even in the backyard, there is an infinitely, unpredictable, unknown, and often dangerous world. Speech hides within me, watchful and afraid. (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 58).

As children usually do, Naomi talks mainly to her mother, whom she trusts above all others: "I tell her everything. There is nothing about me that my mother does not know, nothing that is not safe to tell." (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 60). The only exception regards Naomi's silence concerning the abuse. This secret is what psychologically separates Naomi from Mother: "If I tell my mother about Mr. Gower, the alarm will send a tremor through our bodies and I will be torn from her. But the secret has already separated us." (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 64). The psychic separation precedes the immediately subsequent physical segregation, when Mother goes to Japan (where she will eventually die) and Naomi can not understand or question her departure: "It is around this time that Mother disappears. I hardly dare to think, let alone ask, why she has to leave." (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 66).

Naomi's silence may also be related to Obasan. As far as she can remember, Naomi recalls Obasan as a woman of no words, speechless. Even during the horrors of the war, Obasan keeps silent. Her reactions to what happens around her are always represented as sighs, looks or little murmurs. Through her silence Obasan manages to raise both Naomi and Stephen. Through her silence Obasan spares them from knowing what exactly is occurring during the war. Uncle also shares this appreciation for silence. Even after being directly affected by the War Measures Acts, being sent to a road-work camp, and then to the sugar-beet farm in Lethbridge, Uncle never intends to argue, fight or complain.

The one who tries to convince Uncle and Obasan to speak about the oppressions they have faced is Aunt Emily. This character is the very opposite of Obasan. During the war, Aunt Emily manages to move to Toronto with her father, Grandpa Kato, thus escaping the forced internment. If Naomi's memories regarding Obasan are always associated to silence and mute reactions, Aunt Emily, through Naomi's standpoint, had always been the personification of the voice and speech against oppression. Extremely active, Aunt Emily becomes politically involved with the defense of not only her family's, but of Japanese Canadians' rights as a whole. During the war, she contests Canadian government's acts towards its "own people", as she emphasizes throughout the novel. After the war ends, Aunt Emily is one of the leaders of the movement to obtain

official redress from the government. This is one of the reasons why she is so eager to make Uncle and Obasan give voice to their suffering.

Although Naomi might be considered both Aunt Emily's and Obasan's niece, she identifies much more with the latter, since she had always been a quiet person. Also contributes to this identification the fact that Obasan was the one with whom Naomi lived through her childhood and adolescence. Due to the family segregation, Naomi remains 12 years without any contact with Aunt Emily. Although both Obasan and Aunt Emily are Japanese Canadians, they belong to different generations. While Obasan was born in Japan, Aunt Emily was born in Canada. Rather than belonging to Japanese moral traditions, Aunt Emily sees herself as Canadian: "I am Canadian." (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 39). More than once Naomi emphasizes the differences between her aunts: "How different my two aunts are. One lives in sound, the other in stone. Obasan's language remains deeply underground but Aunt Emily, BA, MA, is a word warrior." (KOGAWA, 1985, p. 32). The ways both characters are named by Naomi also reflects the manners she views them. Her father's cousin's wife, named Ayako, is simply called "Obasan", the Japanese term for "aunt" or, in a broader context, "woman". On the other hand, her mother's sister is called "Aunt Emily", always having the English noun "aunt" associated to her. In fact, it is interesting to observe that Obasan is the *only* character which Naomi *always* refers to using exclusively the Japanese term.

The protagonist's silence throughout the novel might also be analyzed regarding the way she relates to her family, especially as a child. According to Gabriela Souza, in her dissertation *Obasan, Obachan: Japanese Canadian History, Memory and the Noisy Silences of Joy Kogawa and Hiromi Goto*, Naomi's silence is neither a communication failure nor a free choice, but a strategy adopted by the protagonist since her childhood to deal with the lack of answers to her questions:

> As a child, Naomi was very quiet. So much so that her relatives often thought she was mute. However, she did ask questions, especially about her mother. She never received answers and ceased asking. Similarly, in the chaos of being interned to the camp in Slocan, she lost her doll but only asked about it once because she knew it was lost. This linguistic anxiety clearly marks Naomi throughout the story and even marks the adult Naomi. (SOUZA, 2009, p. 43).

The mentioned silence regarding not only Naomi but also Mother, Obasan, Isamu and the majority of the Japanese Canadians depicted in the novel, (with the remarkable exception of Aunt Emily) is considered by many critics – for instance, Davidson (1993), Karpinski (2006), Kruk (1999), Lefebvre (2010) and Willis (1987) – as one of the key

elements in the novel. We must notice that it is only after the protagonist is 36 years old and, by accident, finds Aunt Emily's parcel containing varied documentation regarding the traumatic experiences she had gone through as a child and early-teenager, that Naomi is able to remember and retell her experiences, not only to herself but also to us, readers acquainted or not to the mentioned traumatic incidents. As argued by scholar Gary Willis,

> Naomi is presented as a person lost in the nightmare created by her silence; only by expressing her feelings can she reach understanding and emotional health. The novel mimics the mental process by which the narrator, Naomi, achieves a deeper understanding of her life; also, the novel implies that it is the writing of the novel that constitutes the therapeutic process by which greater understanding is achieved. (...) If the novel is therapeutic for Naomi (and, presumably, for Naomi's creator, the author, Kogawa), it is also potentially therapeutic for the community of Japanese Canadians. By maintaining silence, the Japanese Canadians have allowed the lies about them to remain uncontradicted. (WILLIS, 1987, online).

Since the first scene of the novel, during Naomi's and Uncle's yearly visit to the valley near Uncle and Obasan's home (at the date we will later relate to the anniversary of the Nagasaki bombing), Naomi remarks that, in her family, silence plays a crucial role: "'Uncle', I whisper, 'why do we come here every year?' He does not respond. From both Obasan and Uncle I have learned that speech often hides like an animal in a storm." (KOGAWA, 1985, p.3). And this pattern will continue until the very end of the novel, since the recounting of what had occurred to Grandma Kato and Mother finishes in an abrupt way; we never know exactly what happens to them after the Nagasaki events. Coming to know the available truth concerning Mother's fate, however, is the concluding step taken by Naomi to be finally able to reconcile herself with her family's traumatic history. According to Heidi Tiedemann, in her thesis *After the Fact: Contemporary Feminist Fiction and Historical Trauma*, being aware of Mother's destiny enables Naomi to react to past oppressions not only to her family but also to Japanese Canadians as a whole: "the daughter [Naomi] only gradually becomes aware of the dimensions of the trauma experienced by her own mother, and of the political and ethical responsibilities that she herself bears to know, understand, and possibly publicize her mother's story" (TIEDEMANN, 2001, p. 111). It is relevant to bear in mind that such awareness is what makes Naomi, in *Itsuka*, a sequel to *Obasan*, to become actively involved with the Japanese-Canadian redress movement.

Kogawa's writing of Naomi's family's sufferings thus constitutes itself the process through which historical trauma may have been finally overcome by the

Japanese-Canadian community (and, by extension, by white Canadians, as well). This viewpoint is shared by Arnold Davidson who states that “the indictment of the book is, by extension, a call to action, a demand that something be done to oppose, to set right, as much as possible the wrongs exposed” (DAVIDSON, 1993, p. 14). It is particularly interesting to notice that the most acclaimed novel regarding the trauma issue for the Japanese-Canadian community during World War II had to come from a novel in which silence is one of the main elements. To the silences exposed by Kogawa in the epigraph to the novel (the one that “cannot speak’ and the one that “will not speak”) one might counterpoise the writing of the collective fictional self as the ultimate way to come to terms with a nation’s trauma.

3 *ALIAS GRACE*: A FICTION-HISTORY PATCHWORK

3.1 Margaret Atwood: Life, (Many) Works and Critical Acclaim

How do I relax? What is this "relax" of which you speak, Earthling?
Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood[11] is one of the most famous and celebrated contemporary Canadian authors. Her works have been widely read and critically acclaimed, not only in Canada, but throughout the world, having been translated into dozens of languages and read by millions of people. Her criticism, poetry and fiction deal with both local and universal themes and this might be one of the reasons for her widespread readership. Throughout her 50-year-old literary career, Atwood has approached varied issues, ranging from women's rights to environmental concerns. Paired to the thematic variety of her prolific production (61 works so far) is the quality of her writing. Literary scholar Coral Ann Howells, in her book chapter "Writing by Women", believes Atwood has been responsible for instituting a superior pattern for Canadian literature:

> Atwood has established a high profile for Canadian writing. […] She has always shown a genius for codifying and indeed for predicting popular trends, and she has worked in a dazzling range of fictional genres, continuously experimenting across genre boundaries, exploring the political and ideological significance of such revisions. (HOWELLS, 2004, p. 201).

As a matter of fact, before becoming a writing icon, Atwood started her literary journey the way most writers do: reading widely and voraciously. As many scholars who study Atwood's works have pointed out – among them HOWELLS (2005), REYNOLDS (2002), SULLIVAN (1998) and WISKER (2002) – her appetite for literature was greatly influenced by her family's lifestyle. Margaret Atwood was born on November 18, 1939, in Ottawa, Ontario. She was the second of three children of Carl Edmund Atwood, a forest entomologist, and Margaret Dorothy Killam, a former dietician and nutritionist. As Atwood comments, her parents were pretty unusual for the early forties: "my parents were unusual for their time. Both of them liked being as far away from civilization as possible, my mother

[11] Information regarding Margaret Atwood's biography, published works and awards, was mainly taken from *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, edited by Eva-Marie Kröller (2004), *The Routledge Concise History of Canadian Literature*, edited by Richard J. Lane (2011), *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (online) and Atwood's official website (online).

because she hated housework and tea parties, my father because he liked chopping wood. They also weren't much interested in what the sociologists would call rigid sex-role stereotyping." (ATWOOD, 1995, online). Due to her father's job, the family used to move, every spring, to North Quebec and then back to a different city. As Atwood remarks, "six months after [she] was born, [she] was taken by packsack to a remote cabin in north-western Quebec, where [her] father was doing research as a forest entomologist" (ATWOOD, 1995, online). The constant move between the great outdoors and town was a fundamental element for the development of Atwood's fertile imagination. As claimed by Gina Wisker, in her book review *Margaret Atwood's Alias Grace*, "[d]ividing time between the bush and the town helped develop a sense of dual identity and allegiance which has informed both imagery and ideas in her work" (WISKER, 2002, p. 7).

Margaret Atwood and her older brother Harold, who co-taught Atwood how to read, were educated exclusively by their mother until Atwood was eight, when the Atwood children eventually started to attend full-time school in Toronto. As the family kept moving, it would still take some time for Margaret Atwood to attend a complete school year, which, in her opinion was a benefit: "I did not attend a full year of school until I was in grade eight. This was a definite advantage." (OATES, 1978-9, p. 29). Atwood's remembrances of her early childhood seem to confirm the idea that uncensored reading would be a most natural activity: "No one ever told I couldn't read a book. My mother liked quietness in children, and a child who is reading is very quiet" (ATWOOD, 2002, p. 7). Reading skills then started to enrich Atwood's imagination. Since the family was frequently in the bush and it was the WWII period, Atwood and her brother did not have many toys available, so they used to play with their "few stuffed animals and then have the Battle of Waterloo". (ATWOOD, 2002, p. 12). Robert Potts, literary critic for *The Guardian*, argues that Atwood's imagination was prompted by the isolation provided by the Canadian bush:

> Atwood and her brother had few children to play with, no television or cinemas, and a radio that was unreliable and used mostly to find out about the war. Books naturally became a central focus, as did imaginative games. Their mother would school them in the mornings; the rest of the day they had to themselves. (POTTS, 2003, online).

At the age of 16, during her last high school year, Margaret Atwood had an epiphany that would have a great impact over both her life and Canadian literature. In a 1995 lecture, Atwood recalls the moment she learned she wanted to be a professional writer:

> The day I became a poet was a sunny day of no particular ominousness. I was walking home from school when […] a large invisible thumb descended from the sky and pressed down on the top of my head. A poem formed. […]. It was a gift, this poem – a gift from an anonymous donor, and, as such, both exciting and sinister at the same time. (ATWOOD, 1995, online).

As to the moment when she communicated her parents her intention to become a professional writer, Atwood states:

> [t]hey didn't encourage me to become a writer, exactly, but they gave me a more important kind of support; that is, they expected me to make use of my intelligence and abilities and they did not pressure me into getting married. My mother is rather exceptional in this respect, from what I can tell from the experiences of other women my own age. Remember that all this was taking place in the 1950's, when marriage was seen as the only desirable goal. (OATES, 1978, p.32).

Not having marriage as an obligation weighing upon her, Margaret Atwood pursued her dream of becoming a writer through her academic career. In 1957, at the age of 18, Atwood entered the English Language and Literature Honors Program at Victoria College, in Toronto. There, she first encountered Northrop Frye, a literary critic already famous for stressing the value of Canada's national literature. On Frye's possible influence upon her and her generation's works, Atwood comments that

> Frye was not a creative writer. He wasn't putting his influence on people. His main influence was that he took the process seriously. At a time in Canada when people did not generally recognize the importance of the arts, he did, and he was a very strong voice so that people doing it didn't think they were completely crazy. He had an international reputation. He was right here. And therefore he, as they say today, he was validating. (MOUNT, 2012, p. 64).

After concluding her undergraduate studies in 1961, encouraged by Frye and supported by a Woodrow Wilson fellowship, Atwood became a graduate student in English and American Literature at Harvard's Radcliff College, from which she received her M.A. in 1962. She continued her studies at Harvard, reading for Ph.D. in Victorian literature, but interrupted her research in 1967. In the same year, Atwood married James Polk, whom she would divorce in 1973. During the period she spent in the United States, Atwood would develop a new and broader perspective regarding Canadian identity and literary representation. While still an undergraduate student, back in Canada, Atwood had already realized her home country lacked self literary valorization, since the studied authors were "dead and English, or else extremely elderly and American" (ATWOOD, 1995, online). In a conversation with Earl Ingersoll, Atwood claims that, while in the USA, she could verify that the neighbor country would almost ignore Canada's existence: "It's not that the Americans I met had any odd or 'upsetting' attitudes towards Canada. They simply didn't have any

attitudes at all." (INGERSOLL, 1990, p. 78). The experience in the United States might have provided Atwood with the initial sparks for the writing of one of the most representative treaties on Canadian Literature (soon to be known as "Canlit"): *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972).

Coming to Atwood's literary production, it is relevant to mention that Atwood's debut as a writer took place while she was still an undergraduate student. In 1961, Atwood privately managed to print and publish *Double Persephone*, a collection of poems on the mythological figure of Persephone, which rendered Atwood an E.J. Pratt medal. Those were the first of many works and awards. From then on, Margaret Atwood would write not only poetry and novels, but also theoretical and critical works, short fiction and children's books, radio and television scripts, and a theater adaptation, thus becoming one of the most prolific writers of our times.

Atwood's poetry collections include *Double Persephone* (1961), *The Circle Game* (1964), *Kaleidoscopes Baroque: A Poem* (1965), *Talisman for Children* (1965), *Expeditions* (1966), *Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein* (1966), *The Animals in That Country* (1969), *The Journals of Susana Moodie* (1970), *Procedures for Underground* (1970), *Power Politics* (1970), *You Are Happy* (1974), *Selected Poems* (1976), *Marsh, Hawk* (1977), *Two-Headed Poems* (1978), *Notes towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written* (1981), *True Stories* (1981), *Snake Poems* (1983), *Interlunar* (1984), *Selected Poems II: Poems Selected and New 1976-1986* (1986), *Selected Poems 1966-1984* (1990), *Selected Poems 1976-1986* (1991), *Morning in the Burned House* (1995), *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (1998) and *The Door* (2007).

Atwood's short fiction works include *Dancing Girls* (1977), *Murder in the Dark* (1983), *Bluebeard's Egg* (1985), *Wilderness Tips* (1991), *Good Bones* (1992), *Good Bones and Simple Murders* (1994), *A Quiet Game* (1997) *The Tent* (2006), *Moral Disorder and Other Stories* (2006), *Selected Stories* (2012) and *I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth* (2012). The author also published two short stories exclusively for the e-book format: *I'm Starved for You* (2012) and *Choke Collar* (2012), both from the Positron Series. Besides these works, Atwood has also published two librettos, *The Trumpets of Summer* (1964) and *Frankenstein Monster Song* (with rock band One Ring Zero – 2004). She has also published a comic strip, *Kanadian Kultchur Komix* in *This Magazine is About Schools* (1975-1978), under the pseudonym of Bart Gerrard.

Atwood's non-fiction works include *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), *Days of the Rebels: 1815-1840* (1977), *Second Words: Selected Critical*

Prose (1982), *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995), *In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction* (1997), *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (2002), *Moving Targets: Writing with Intent: 1982-2004* (2004), *Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose* (2005), *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing* (2005), *Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose 1983-2005* (2005), *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (2008), *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (2011).

The author has also published some children's books, among them*, Up in The Tree* (1978), *Anna's Pet* (with Joyce Barkhouse – 1980), *For The Birds* (1990), *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut* (1995), *Rude Ramsay and the Roaring Radishes* (2003), *Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda* (2004), *Up in The Tree* (facsimile reprint – 2006), *Wandering Wenda and Widow Wallop's Wundergound Washery* (2011).

Margaret Atwood has written a radio script, "The Trumptes of Summer" (1964), and three television scripts, "The Servant Girl" (1974), "Snowbird" (1981) and "Heaven on Earth" (1986). Furthermore, she has recorded some readings of her poetry and novels, including "The Poetry and Voice of Margaret Atwood" (1977), "Margaret Atwood Reads from *The Handmaid's Tale*" (1985), "Margaret Atwood Reads *Unearthing Suite*" (1985) and "Margaret Atwood Reads from *The Door*" (2007).

Atwood has edited five anthologies of Canadian Literature: *The Best American Short Stories* (with Shannon Ravenel – 1989), *The Canlit Foodbook* (1987), *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* (1982), The *Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (with Robert Weaver – 1986) and *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (1995).

Although all the listed works are significant and, in general, have been well received by both the general public and the specialized criticism, Margaret Atwood is best known for her novels. So far, Atwood has written 13 novels: *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life Before Man* (1979), *Bodily Harm* (1981), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1989), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Penelopiad* (2005), *The Year of the Flood* (2009). Atwood is currently writing, with videogame author Naomi Alderman, a serial zombie novel, posted chapter by chapter at the website Wattpad. In August 2013, she is expected to release *MadAddam*, the final novel for the apocalyptic trilogy started by *Oryx and Crake* and followed by *The Year of the Flood*.

Because of the quality of her most fruitful and varied production, as well as of her politically engaged activism, Margaret Atwood has currently received 16 honorary degrees. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, has been presented with the Order of Ontario, the Norwegian Order of Literary Merit, and Government of France's Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Among her 50 literary awards, it is worth mentioning the Booker Prize and the International Association of Crime Writers' Dashiel Hammett Award (both for *The Blind Assassin* – 2000), two Governor General's Awards (*Circle Game* – 1966 and *The Handmaid's Tale* – 1986), and the Prince of Asturias Award for Letters (2008). In 2010, at Davos World Economic Forum, Atwood was presented the Crystal Award, traditionally granted to artists who contribute to the improvement of life on Earth.

Alias Grace, Atwood's book to be investigated in this study, was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award, the Orange Prize, the Booker Prize, and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award. The novel won, in 1996, the Giller Prize, the Salon Magazine Best Fiction of the Year and the Premio Mondello. In the same year, Atwood was granted the Canadian Booksellers Association Author of the Year Award.

Margaret Atwood has held positions as lecturer in English at the University of British Columbia (1964-65), instructor in English at Sir George Williams University (1966-1968) and assistant professor of English at the University of Alberta (1969-70) and York University (1971-72). She has also been writer-in-residence in many universities, both within Canada and abroad. Atwood has been the president of the Writers' Union of Canada (1981-82) and Pen International[12] – Canadian English Speaking Centre (1984-1986). Since 1973, Margaret Atwood has lived on a farm at the outskirts of Alliston, Ontario, with Graeme Gibson, also a writer. They have one daughter, Eleanor.

3.2 Historical Context: (Few) Known Facts and Their Respective Accounts in Susanna Moodie's *Life in the Clearings versus the Bush*

Truth is sometimes unknowable.
Margaret Atwood

[12] Pen International: a worldwide association of writers, founded in London in 1921 to promote friendship and intellectual co-operation among writers everywhere, with autonomous centers in over 100 countries. The initials stand for Poets, Essayists and Novelists (taken from Pen International official website - http://www.pen-international.org).

On July 23rd, 1843, the corpses of Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery were found in the basement of Thomas's house in Richmond Hill, a village north of Toronto. It was then installed the investigation over one of the most explored and commented crimes of XIX century Canada. Such an interest was due to the elements that revolved around the crime. Thomas Kinnear, a wealthy bachelor farmer, was said to appreciate furtive relationships with his female servants. Nancy Montgomery, Kinnear's 24-year-old housekeeper, had abandoned her previous household when finding herself pregnant. Nancy's child, whose father's identity was never disclosed, would have been given for adoption. Moreover, Nancy was said to be Kinnear's mistress, and, during her autopsy, she was found to be pregnant.

Witnesses' testimonies and subsequent investigations implicated Kinnear's two Irish servants in the murders. They had fled the town and, according to the testimonies, taken some of Kinnear's silver plate with them. These servants were the stable-hand, James McDermott, and the housemaid, Grace Marks. They made their way up to Lewiston, in the United States, where they were arrested and brought back to Toronto, to await their trials. The murders, wrapped in sex, violence and passion, combined with the beauty and youth of Grace, who at time of the killings was merely 16, attracted media attention not only in Canada, but also in the United States and Europe. Influenced by the sensational treatment of the case, Toronto society believed Grace and McDermott were lovers, who would have robbed and killed Kinnear because they were to be fired by their master. Nancy's death would have been Grace's request to McDermott, since Grace would envy Nancy for being Kinnear's lover.

In November of that year, McDermott and Grace were tried and sentenced to be hanged for the murder of Thomas Kinnear. Since both had already been condemned to death, there was no need of trial for the murder of Nancy Montgomery. At the same month, a crowd, consisting of men, women and children of many social classes went to New Gaol, to attend the hanging of James McDermott. However, doubts about the effective participation of Grace Marks in the double murder, allied to her youth and the supposed "weakness of her sex" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 460) led a group of influential religious, political, and business men to appeal the commutation of Grace's death penalty to life imprisonment. The court abided by this request, and, still in November 1843, Grace was led to Kingston Penitentiary. She remained incarcerated for 29 years, including the one year and three months period at Toronto's Provincial Lunatic Asylum. On August 7th, 1872, Grace Marks received official pardon from John MacDonald, then the Canadian Minister of Justice, and was finally released from prison. She went to live in New York, and, from this moment on, no official records exist.

One of the first accounts of the described events was brought to the reading public by Susanna Moodie. Mrs. Moodie, as she used to sign her books, was an Englishwoman from Suffolk, who, in 1831, at the age of 28, went to Canada with her husband and daughter. Two of her siblings had already immigrated to that country, Samuel Strickland (who founded a museum in Peterborough on the English settling in Canada) and Catharine Parr Trail (who would write her experiences as a settler). In Canada, Moodie wrote two memoirs: *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), an account of her terrible experiences in Ontario backwoods, the "bush", and *Life in the Clearings versus the Bush* (1853), where Moodie tells her experiences in the city of Belleville, referred by the author as "the clearings".

In *Life in the Clearings versus the Bush*, Susanna Moodie dedicates an entire chapter to narrate Grace's story, and a significant extract of another chapter to tell her visit to Grace at the Lunatic Asylum. Moodie's account contains crass mistakes concerning the murders. For instance, we may observe Moodie mistakes the names of Nancy Montgomery (whom she calls "Hannah") and Thomas Kinnear (whom Moodie names "Kinnaird"). Also, Moodie's account was to be directly influenced by the impressions of Kenneth Mackenzie – Grace's and McDermott's lawyer – and by the sensationalistic coverage the case had gained at the media of the time. We may understand Moodie had an established impression of Grace even before getting to know her. While recollecting her visit to the Women's Department, at Kingston Penitentiary, Moodie affirms:

> My chief objective in visiting their department was to look at the celebrated murderess, Grace Marks, of whom I had heard a great deal, not only from the public papers, but from the gentleman who defended her upon the trial, and whose able pleading saved her from the gallows, on which her wretched accomplice closed his guilty career. (MOODIE, 1853, p. 215).

Moodie offers a logical explanation for the reasons which, in her opinion, would have led Grace Marks and James McDermott to commit the crimes. According to Moodie, Grace and McDermott would have killed Nancy and Kinnear due to a combination of jealousy and damaged honor. Although claiming objectivity, Moodie's words do not contain specific information, but reflect her intention of constraining Grace and McDermott to the proper roles of perpetrators of a crime against life. Through Moodie's characterization, Nancy (Hannah) would be a nice servant, who lived in "intimate terms" with Kinnear (Kinnaird), a gentleman and fine master. The following passage greatly reflects Moodie's own opinions, and biased arguments:

> About eight or nine years ago – I write from memory and am not very certain as to dates – a young Irish emigrant girl was hired into the service of Captain Kinnaird [sic], an officer on half-pay, who had purchased a farm about thirty miles in the rear of Toronto; but the name of the township, and the county in which it was situated, I have forgotten; but this is of little consequence to my narrative. Both circumstances could be easily ascertained by the curious. The captain had been living for some time on very intimate terms with his housekeeper, a handsome young woman of the name Hannah [sic] Montgomery, who had been his servant of all work. Her familiarity with the master, who, it appears, was a very fine-looking, gentlemanly person, had rendered her very impatient of her former menial employments, and she soon became virtually the mistress of the house. Grace Marks was hired to wait upon her, and perform all the coarse drudgery that Hannah considered herself too fine a lady to do.
> While Hannah occupied the parlour with her master, and sat at his table, her insolent airs of superiority aroused the jealousy and envy of Grace Marks, and the man-servant, MacDermot [sic], who considered themselves quite superior to their self-elected mistress. (MOODIE, 1853, p. 216).

It is relevant to observe that, although Susanna Moodie does not recall important information concerning the case – such as names, dates and locations – she readily prompts a logical and most detailed reason for the effectuation of the murders. Moodie's imagination is so fruitful that she manages even to alter official information. In Moodie's version of McDermott's confession, McDermott "admits" to having "cut the body [Nancy's] in four pieces" (MOODIE, 1853, p. 228). Actually, McDermott never stated that in his official confession, even because Nancy's body was found in a single piece.

More than one century later, the Montgomery-Kinnear double murder and the life of Grace Marks remained fascinating enough to attract the attention and dedication of a young author who would become one of Canada's most celebrated writers, Margaret Atwood. Her involvement with the murders and the story of Grace Marks starts as early as the 1960's, when, for, on the author's words, "reasons that can't be rationally explained" (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1512), Atwood started to write the poems which would compose her poetry collection *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, which was to be published in 1970. Atwood's poems constitute a new reading of the two memoirs Susanna Moodie had written.

It was in *Life in the Clearings* (as Atwood constantly refers to Moodie's second memoir) that Margaret Atwood first came across Grace Marks. Moodie's portrayal of the murders impressed Atwood, who did not question the English settler's description of the events. In her lecture, "In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction", Atwood affirms: "That [Moodie's] was the first version of the story I came across, and, being young, and still believing that 'non-fiction' meant 'true', I did not question it." (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1513). In 1974, still based on Moodie's accounts, Atwood wrote *The Servant Girl*, a television script focused on Grace Marks. Atwood received and accepted an invitation to turn the television script into a theater play, but, eventually, she gave up. In the early 1990s, nevertheless, Atwood returned to Grace Marks, under a different perspective. As Atwood puts

it: "This time, however, I did what neither Susanna Moodie nor I had done before: I went back to the past." (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1513). Atwood's new approach to the whole case, as we shall see, is very different from the one taken by Moodie. The result is her novel *Alias Grace*, a superb blending of historical elements and creative imagination.

3.3 *Alias Grace:* A Short Summary and Initial Impressions

Grace has left no marks.
Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* is divided in 15 chapters, each of them named after patchwork quilt patterns, whose names are associated to the events to be narrated. In each of the chapters, following a graphic representation of the respective quilt pattern, are epigraphs taken from literary prose and poetry (including some extracts from Susanna Moodie's *Life in the Clearings*) and from varied documentation concerning the murders (newspaper articles, Grace Marks's confession, Kingston Penitentiary Punishment Book, etc.). The chapters are then subdivided in sections. Throughout the novel, the reader is presented to narrative shifts, which transport the reader to varied times and places. This brief summary intends to display the most important events of the narrative, concerning the primary focus of this analysis: the review of Grace Mark's identity through the fictional rewriting of her history.

The first chapter, Jagged Edges, starts with Grace's observations regarding the peonies growing out of the gravel at the prison yard. Grace associates the peonies to the ones at the Kinnear's household, and her thoughts lead the reader to the day of the murders. Grace remembers – or imagines she does, one can never be sure – Nancy Montgomery "holding out her hands […] for mercy" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 6). In this vision/memory Grace believes she can make everything different and "none of it will have happened" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 6). In the very first chapter, Atwood breaks the reader's expectation towards a novel, since this chapter presents Grace within prison (but does not present any explanation to why she was incarcerated) and Nancy's request for mercy (though we do not know why she would be claiming for help). As observed by Luiz Manoel Oliveira, in his Ph.D. thesis, *Subvertendo o Legado de Caliban: Perspectivas Pós-Coloniais de Superação da Subalternidade em um Estudo Comparativo de Jasmine, de Bharati Mukherjee e Alias Grace, de Margaret Atwood*:

> The story of Grace Marks will not start from ground zero, so to speak, that is, from some distant and remote point in Grace Marks's childhood, which is already an indication of the breakdown of narrative linearity (besides the break with the structural form of presenting a novel). (OLIVEIRA, 2007, p. 120 – my translation)[13].

The reader's first contact with Grace Marks's current situation is framed by the protagonist's contextualization: "It's 1851. I'll be twenty-four years old next birthday. I've been shut up in here since the age of sixteen." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 5). Grace also lets us indirectly know that she works for the prison Governor's wife. The most important extract of this first chapter, however, takes place in its very end. Graphically separated from Grace's vision/delusion comes the most revealing sentence: "This is what I told Dr. Jordan, when we came to that part of the story." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 6). Although the reader is still not aware of who Dr. Jordan might be, from the very beginning of the novel we may infer Grace is a narrator who selects what to tell, as well as to what extent it should be told.

In Chapter 2, Rocky Road, we are presented to the crimes which led to Grace's imprisonment, as well as to her and McDermott's trials. This presentation takes place through the use of extracts from the Toronto Mirror newspaper, and a contemporary ballad on the murders. In the same chapter there is also an extract from The Punishment Book of Kingston Penitentiary, where Grace remained incarcerated for 29 years. It is relevant to add that, still in this chapter, just before the transcription of the above-mentioned ballad, there are the portraits of James McDermott and Grace Marks, "as they appeared at the Court House." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 10). Under Grace's representation, there is a line where it reads "Grace Marks *alias* Mary Whitney." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 10). Mary Whitney enters the novel in a paradoxically abrupt and subtle manner. The character is going to have a great importance to the development of the plot.

In Chapter 3, Puss in the Corner, the narrative leaps to 1859, when we are presented to Grace's routine as a maid at the prison Governor's house, during daytime. Both at her way to the Governor's house and at her return to prison, Grace is constantly bullied by the wardens who escort her. It is also in this chapter that we come to know Reverend Verringer, Kingston Methodist leader of The Committee to Pardon Grace Marks. As to achieve his purposes, Verringer and his companions, mostly members of local traditional families, hire the services of Dr. Simon Jordan (a character invented by Margaret Atwood). Dr. Jordan's chief objective

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[13] Original Text: "A história de Grace Marks não vai começar do marco zero, por assim dizer, ou seja, a partir de algum ponto distante e remoto da infância de Grace Marks, o que já é um indício da quebra de linearidade da narrativa (além do rompimento com a forma estrutural de se apresentar um romance)".

is to get Grace to remember the moments related to the murders of Mr. Kinnear and Nancy, which she claims not being able to recollect.

From this moment on, we are presented to the main issue of the novel: through a series of interviews, Simon tries to "psychoanalyze" Grace Marks (the treatment takes place before the term and concept were properly developed and established by the theories of Jung and Freud). In order to accomplish his task, Simons tries the analysis of Grace's dreams and memories, besides attempting varied associations, making use of objects, fruit and vegetables. Throughout the novel, Simon seeks to establish the proper chain of thought which would unravel Grace's blocked memories. Through these interviews, the narrative keeps moving back and forth in time and space. In addition to the mentioned interviews, the narrative also presents some letters, exchanged between Simon and the doctors who had previously watched over Grace.

Through the referred interviews we come to know Grace's origins. Actually, we get to know her past as far as we are allowed to. Grace withholds some details regarding her trajectory when talking about her early childhood to Dr. Jordan. Some of these details she claims not to know, such as the reasons why her English father would have fled from his home country; certain information Grace claims not to tell for protective reasons, such as the name of the town they lived in, as she argues not to wish to "bring disgrace upon" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 103-4) an aunt who may still be alive. What Simon, and us, readers, indeed find out is that Grace was born in Ireland and her family was very poor. Grace's grandfather on her mother's side was a Methodist clergyman, "and it was said [he] had done something unexpected with the church money." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 104). Due to this "unexpected" action, Grace's grandfather would never again get a position, and, after his death, both Grace's mother and her aunt, Pauline, were without any economic resources.

As remarked by Grace, in spite of being educated, since "they both could embroider and play the piano" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 104), her mother and aunt got married beneath their standards. While her aunt married the owner of a small grocery shop, Grace's mother married an Englishman who had no reputation or fixed job. As time passed, the couple had eight children, besides three babies who died as stillborn. Due to Grace's father's inability to maintain a job and support his own family, they lived on the little money her mother would make from sewing. Pauline's husband, Roy, would also support the family with some groceries from his shop. After Aunt Pauline gets pregnant, however, Roy claims he can not afford his in-laws anymore, and thus makes the necessary arrangements for the Marks to

embark to Canada, where there was "free land to be had [...] and an industrious man could do well for himself". (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 104).

Grace's family then comes to Canada in a ship that "brought logs of wood eastward from the Canadas, and emigrants westward the other way, and both were viewed in much the same light, as cargo to be ferried." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 112). Before stepping on the ship, Grace's mother foresees her own death: "My foot will never see land again." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 112). Due to the inhumane conditions of the trip, Grace's mother's foreshadowing is confirmed. Grace makes all the improvised "wake" arrangements, and provides a second-hand sheet for her mother's corpse to be thrown at the sea. It is interesting to observe that Grace's mother falls sick while the ship was coming around some icebergs, which Grace, a most mysterious and misleading character, had learned "had the biggest part of them under the water, and invisible." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 118). After this perilous journey, the remaining family finally gets to Toronto. If things were bad back in Ireland, now they were much worse, since Grace did not have her mother, and her father, as usual, would not help at all. Seeing the raising risk of starvation for her and her siblings, Grace, at the age of 13, starts to work as a maid at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's house.

At this house, Grace is acquainted with a 16-year-old servant, Mary Whitney, a character that shall have a great importance not only to the development of the novel's plot, but also to Grace's personality. Mary and Grace soon become best friends, and the former even defends Grace from her father, when he comes to ask Grace for money. Mary Whitney, thus, is directly responsible for developing in Grace a sense of independence and for introducing some happiness into Grace's hard and wretched life. Grace's happiness, however, starts to fade when her suspicions over Mary's pregnancy are confirmed. After all of Grace's insisting and reasoning, Mary confirms the pregnancy but does not reveal the child's father's identity. By this moment, however, both Grace and the reader may fully understand that Mary had been seduced by Mr. George, one of the Parkinson boys that had come home for Christmas holiday. As Mr. George would not support Mary, and the girl knew his mother would fire her as soon as she discovered the girl's pregnancy, Mary decides to take an abortion. Even though Grace lends the money for Mary to pay for the clandestine surgery, and accompanies her friend to the doctor's place, she is not fully aware of the procedures that are to be carried out. Only after they are back to Mrs. Parkinson's house does Grace realize "that what the doctor had cut out of her [Mary] was the baby." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 176). As a result of this abortion, Mary dies. This event will have utmost importance to the development of Grace's dubious personality, as it will be further discussed later.

After Mary Whitney's death, Grace leaves Mrs. Parkinson's place with her friend's few belongings, which Mary had wished would go to her, in a written "will". Grace goes to work at varied households. In one of them she is harassed by Mr. Haraghy, one of the masters who, in Grace's words, "think you owe them service twenty-four hours a day, and should do the main work flat on your back." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 200). To escape Mr. Haraghy's constant harassment, Grace goes to work at Mr. Watson's, where she finally meets Nancy Montgomery, Thomas Kinnear's housekeeper. She invites Grace to join her as a servant at Kinnear's farm in Richmond Hill. As the wages were to be better, and Grace had sympathized with Nancy, who "resembled Mary Whitney" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 202), she takes up Nancy's offer. Arriving at Mr. Kinnear's farm, Grace comes to know not only her master, but also the Irish stable-hand, James McDermott. Nancy is also present, but makes no move to come over to Grace, suggesting, from the beginning, that she was no regular servant. While recollecting her first moments at Richmond Hill, Grace remarks to Dr. Jordan: "It is strange to realize that of all the people in that house, I was the only one of them left alive in six months' time". (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 209).

Through Grace's interviews to Dr. Jordan we find out that the relationship among the inhabitants of the house grows more difficult each day. McDermott constantly harasses and bullies Grace. Nancy is each time ruder and ruder towards Grace, who observes she is eating more than usual (a possible indication of her pregnancy). Nancy then gives, under Mr. Kinnear knowledge, both Grace and McDermott notices of leaving. McDermott then tells Grace he is going to kill both Nancy and Kinnear. Although Grace tells Dr. Jordan she did not believe McDermott meant doing it, she claims to have warned Nancy of the danger, but Nancy is also dismissive of McDermott's menaces. Then Grace's memory starts to fail. She can remember in full details what happened right before and after the murders, including her escape to the United States with McDermott, but not the moments of the murders themselves. Simon then reluctantly agrees to submit Grace to a hypnosis session, in order to take Grace's memory back to the day of the murders.

The session is conducted by Dr. Jerome DuPont, who, we, readers, and Grace, know to be Jeremiah, a peddler who Grace has known since her time at Mrs. Parkinson's. As the other attendants of the session are not aware of this, they all take the session in full credit. Although we know Dr. DuPont is a charlatan; after the session begins, it takes our complete attention. At the beginning of the session, a different voice in Grace's body claims to have been responsible for "putting Nancy out of her misery" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 401). To the governor's wife exasperation – "Oh Grace…I thought better of you…All these years you have

deceived us" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 401) – the voice replies not to be Grace's: "Stop talking rubbish…You've deceived yourselves! I'm not Grace! Grace knew nothing about it!" (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 401). Dr. Jordan insists that the voice reveals who it belongs to, and comes to know its owner is no other than Grace's former friend, Mary Whitney: "'Come, Doctor', says the voice, cajoling now. 'You know the answer. I told you it was *my* kerchief, the one I left Grace, when I, when I…' […] 'Not Mary', says Simon. "Not Mary Whitney." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 402 – author's italics). After the hypnosis session comes to an end, Grace claims not to recall anything from what has just happened. The reader is as amazed as the people present to the session, including rational Dr. Jordan, religious Verringer and charlatan DuPont. They all gather and try to propose logical explanations for the incomprehensible event they have just witnessed. Their efforts, however, are fruitless, since, as observed by the narrative voice in Simon's thoughts: "The fact is that he can't state anything with certainty and still tell the truth." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 407).

After this most disturbing hypnotism session, the narrative presents a series of letters exchanged among varied characters. Through these letters we come to know that Dr. Jordan, right after the mentioned session, abruptly goes back to his hometown, Massachusetts. He does not produce the medical report Verringer intended to use as an alibi to relieve Grace from prison, and say no goodbyes to anyone, not even Grace or Verringer. Also through the letters, we find out Dr. Jordan becomes engaged to a fine lady, but, before their wedding, he joins the medical staff at the Civil War. During his service at the war, Simon is badly injured at the head. After returning home from the conflict, Simon believes his fiancée to be Grace Marks. Ironically enough, the doctor responsible for recovering Grace's memories loses parts of his own.

The last chapter of the novel, "Tree of Paradise", narrates Grace's merriment when receiving the news of her pardon. She comments on the difficulties to adapt to freedom and the voyage to New York, where she is met by Jamie Walsh. By the time of the murders, Jamie used to be the boy who played the flute at the parties at Mr. Kinnear's farm. He had testified against Grace at her trial. Now, he is Grace's link to freedom and asks Grace to marry him. Grace accepts and they live quietly in a small country house. The final chapter shows us a happy and possibly pregnant (we can not be sure) Grace, embroidering the "Tree of Paradise" quilt, the one that would join her with both Nancy Montgomery and Mary Whitney:

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

> floral, cut from the dress of Nancy's that she had on the first day I was at Mr. Kinnear's, and that I wore on the ferry to Lewiston, when I was running away.
> I will embroider around each one of them with red feather-stitching, to blend them in as a part of the pattern.
> And so we will all be together. (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 460).

3.4 A New Perspective over a Much Discussed Story

For it's the very things that aren't mentioned that inspire the most curiosity in us.
Margaret Atwood

The summary above should demonstrate that Atwood's novel, as previously argued, constitutes a rather innovative perspective over a much discussed factual event. Throughout her novel, Margaret Atwood accomplishes her proposed task of rewriting a historical moment without either accusing or defending Grace Marks. Therefore, Atwood's narrative succeeds in representing varied points of view, an objective Atwood had in mind before starting the writing of the book. As a result, *Alias Grace* introduces the reader, acquainted or not with the story of the murders (which, in Canada, has become popular legend), to new facts regarding a largely explored historical event. To better illustrate the proposal of the previous sentence, it is worth noticing the distinction between the concepts of facts and events, as proposed by Canadian literary critic and postmodern expert, Linda Hutcheon, in *The Politics of Postmodernism*:

> Among the consequences of the postmodern desire to denaturalize history is a new self-consciousness about the distinction between the brute *events* of the past and the historical *facts* we construct out of them. Facts are events to which we have given meaning. Different historical perspectives therefore derive different facts from the same events. (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 57).

Before Atwood's novel, the murders of Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery (as well as the possible participation of James McDermott and, more relevantly to this analysis, of Grace Marks) were discussed under the influence of religious, political and social conveniences of XIX century Canada. While researching for the production of the novel, Atwood came to the conclusion that there were several versions and stories concerning the case, all of them "influenced by received climates of opinion, about politics, and also about criminality and its proper treatment, about the nature of women – their weakness and seductive qualities, for instance – and about insanity, in fact, about everything that had a

bearing on the case." (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1515). While writing *Alias Grace*, Atwood "felt that, to be fair, [she] had to represent all points of view". (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1515).

In order to succeed at her fictionally investigative task, Atwood adopted certain procedures, and she states:

> I devised the following set of guidelines for myself: when there was a solid fact, I could not alter it; […] Also, every major element in the book had to be suggested by something in the writing about Grace and her times, however dubious such writing might be; but in the parts left unexplained – the gaps unfilled – I was free to invent. Since there were a lot of gaps, there is a lot of invention. *Alias Grace* is very much a novel rather than a documentary. (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1515)

Atwood's recognition that her account is a fictional one is what most distinguishes it from the previous narratives concerning the murders. The court trials, newspapers of the time, and Susanna Moodie's depiction of the issue, for instance, all claimed they intended to be accurate factual representations of the events. Atwood's assumption that hers is one of many possible versions to deal with a specific historical moment is one of the features which characterize her novel as a postmodern one. By reviewing a historical moment through the use of narrative strategies and the blending of fictional and factual elements, Atwood inscribes *Alias Grace* into the concept of historiographic metafiction, according to Linda Hutcheon's already mentioned definition.

The writing of postmodern historical novels such as *Alias Grace* could only have been possible at our contemporary postmodern times, when authors and readers alike may recognize that the access to abstract concepts such as absolute truth may not be feasible. As argued by Margaret Atwood, the truth concerning the murders and their perpetrator(s) must lie somewhere, even because we know for a fact that Nancy Montgomery and Thomas Kinnear were indeed killed. The fact that we do not know exactly how the murders took place does not change the fact that they happened. Such assumption is definitely different from the argument that there is no truth. In Atwood's opinion, there is a truth; it just happens that it can not be accessed by us: "I am not one of those who believes there is no truth to be known; but I have to conclude that, although there undoubtedly was a truth – somebody did kill Nancy Montgomery – truth is sometimes unknowable, at least to us". (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1515). Atwood's proposal may be related not only to her novel, but could also be applied to many representations of past events, be they fictional or real.

As briefly observed in the previous summary of the novel, in order to tell her assumedly fictionalized version of the life of Grace Marks and the murders in which she was involved, Margaret Atwood makes uses of many paratextual elements. Among these, we

might highlight the use of extracts from XIX-century poetry and prose; newspaper clippings; official documents, for instance, excerpts from court, lunatic asylum and prison registers, as well as from Grace's and McDermott's Confessions; letters exchanged between real and fictional characters; popular ballads; portraits; patchwork quilt patterns, etc. These elements work to introduce the plot of the novel, which, as argued by Peonia Guedes, in her article "A Multiplicity of Truths: Margaret Atwood's Fictionalized Story of Grace Marks", revolves around varied themes:

> In the narrative we are made aware of the push for social reform that divided Canadian citizens in relation to the treatment of immigrants, of servants, of women, as well as of the spreading of Spiritualism, Mesmerism, and the new theories about mental diseases and the various forms of treating phenomena such as amnesia, somnambulism, hysteria, dissociation of personality and all other sorts of nervous diseases. […] Though the story of Grace Marks and her treatment constitutes the core of [the novel], several others stories/texts are developed concomitantly: Dr. Jordan's flirt with Lydia, an eligible young girl from town; his sexual affair with Mrs. Humphrey, his landlady; his emotional involvement with Grace Marks; the demands of his ailing and manipulative mother, conveyed by emotional letters; the struggle between the conservative and liberal members of local society; the different views concerning the treatment of the insane, represented by local groups and also expressed by scholars and professionals in letters exchanged between them and Dr. Jordan. […] [W]e are offered a fascinating view of the historical and social context the novel offers of small-town life, with its prejudices, hypocrisy, sexism, fear and ignorance embedded in the Canadian version of Victorian culture. (GUEDES, 2002, p. 72).

All of these elements contribute to make Atwood's narrative a plural one. In "Historical Figures and Paradoxical Patterns: The Quilting Metaphor in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace*", Jennifer Murray studies the mentioned plurality of historical and fictional elements and the way found by Atwood to sew them up into a novel:

> Faced with a large number of details related to the story of Grace Marks, details which are often in contradiction with each other, Atwood had to select, eliminate, order, assemble, and fill in absences. In so doing, her story (and here the analogy with the patchwork quilt is quite visible) becomes the meeting place and site of transformation for various historical fragments: some only partially legible, others more or less reliable; some highly subjective, some written for dramatic effect. It becomes something new made from something already in existence, and declares this in its form, rather than attempting to conceal the process of stitching together. (MURRAY, 2001, p. 70-1).

Parallel to the variety of sources and fragments used to the building, or, rather, stitching of the novel, are the multiple voices of *Alias Grace.* Instead of the traditional single narrator and straight forward plot, *Alias Grace* presents varied narrative voices, both at first and third person, and its narrative is developed through multiple perspectives. The mentioned paratextual elements, allied to time and space shifts makes the reading of the novel a complex experience. Leila Harris and Lilian Pinho, in their article "(In)Sanidade em *Alias Grace*", analyze the function of Bakhtin's polyphony in the novel:

> Among the postmodern strategies used by Atwood in her novel to deconstruct the notion of sanity/insanity we highlight the use of polyphony as described and illustrated by Bakhtin and which is characterized by several conflicting voices representing a variety of ideological positions and involved in a dialogue on an equal footing, free from judgment of the author or any pressure. In *Alias Grace*, polyphony is present through different narrative viewpoints (both first and third person, with changes from one type to the other even during a scene) and through the wide variety of voices expressing diverse opinions about the same subject. (HARRIS & PINHO, 2003, p. 15 – my translation).[14]

Moreover, as argued by Linda Hutcheon, multi faceted plots, as the one presented in the novel, "challenge narrative singularity and unity in the name of multiplicity and disparity. Through narrative, they offer fictive corporality instead of abstractions, but at the same time, they tend to fragment, to render unstable, the traditional unified identity or subjectivity of character." (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 368).

All of these multiple elements play important roles in the development of the novel. As argued by Peonia Guedes, the most representative passages of *Alias Grace* might be said to occur during the interviews between Grace and Dr. Simon Jordan. During these conversations, Simon seeks to unravel Grace's mind and thus manage her to recollect exactly what happened at the day of the murders. Through this invented character, Atwood allows us, readers, to get in touch with both the institutionalized history of the murders and Grace's version(s) concerning them. Therefore, Dr. Jordan is a most relevant character, since it is through him that we are presented to the plot in two distinct manners. Initially, Simon is presented to the records of the murders. Reverend Verringer tells him the official and recognizable "facts" related to the murders, according to which Grace would have helped to strangle Nancy Montgomery, besides being an accomplice to the murder of Mr. Thomas Kinnear. Then, Simon Jordan guides the reader through his interviews with Grace, where he tries to obtain information related not only to the murders, but also to Grace's life and trajectory.

As briefly mentioned in the summary of the novel, during the interviews Grace selects what to tell Simon. For this reason, one can never be sure if what she says is what happened or whether she is subtracting facts from or adding facts to her narrative. Grace is definitely very much aware that her conversations with Simon Jordan may result in her eventual pardon

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[14] Original Text: "Entre as estratégias pós-modernas utilizadas por Atwood no romance para desconstruir a noção de sanidade/insanidade, destaca-se o uso da polifonia como descrita e ilustrada por Bakhtin e que se caracteriza por várias vozes contraditórias representando uma variedade de posições ideológicas e envolvidas num diálogo em posição de igualdade, livres do julgamento do autor ou de qualquer pressão. Em *Alias Grace* a polifonia se faz presente através dos diferentes pontos de vista narrativos (tanto primeira como terceira pessoa, havendo mudanças de um tipo para o outro até mesmo no decorrer de uma cena) e através da grande variedade de vozes que expressam opiniões diversas sobre o mesmo assunto".

and consequent release from prison; this is the reason why her selection of what to reveal and what to conceal is so important. Margaret Atwood comments on Grace's narrative:

> In my fiction, Grace, too – whatever else she is – is a storyteller, with strong motives to narrate but also strong motives to withhold; the only power left to her as a convicted and imprisoned criminal comes from a blend of these two motives. What is told by her to her audience of one, Dr. Simon Jordan – who is not only a more educated person than she is but a man, which gave him an automatic edge in the nineteenth century – is selective of course. It is dependent on what she remembers; or is it what she says she remembers, which can be quite a different thing? (ATWOOD, 1998, p.1515).

The ways Grace and Simon Jordan relate to each other through different uses of language is also analyzed by Peonia Guedes. According to Guedes, Grace often decides deliberately whether or not to voice their thoughts to Simon:

> Dr. Jordan's unitary language, however, breaks down when confronted with Grace Marks's musings and answers to his questions. In a slow and intense movement, the two characters circle warily around each other and around language in their relation/investigation of Grace's story. Dr. Jordan tries earnestly to decipher what Grace "truly" is or is not saying. Meanwhile, Grace tries cunningly to understand what he wants to hear and to decide what she does and does not want to reveal. Very often Grace has either a vague or a very precise idea of what Dr. Jordan wants her to inform him, and slips out of the question-and-answer game refusing to play the game through her denial of the verbal. (GUEDES, 2002, p. 74).

Although, as previously argued by Atwood, Simon is supposed to be in a superior position in relation to Grace – since he is not only a doctor, but also a man – it is Grace who dictates the ways their conversations shall take. While Simon permanently tries to access Grace's memories through the use of what he thinks would be logical associations (such as the use of earth vegetables to make Grace tell the traumatic experience in the cellar), Grace consistently selects what to tell, at the moments when she is disposed to tell anything related to the murders. In this psychological hide-and-seek game, Grace relevantly portrays an innocent image, even though she does not explicitly claims to be innocent. In fact, this refusal to say herself innocent might be considered the way found by Grace to convince not only Simon and the religious activists, but also the readers, of her innocence regarding the double homicide. As a matter of fact, it would be fairly more difficult to convince all of us of her innocence would Grace continuously whine about being a victim.

As to the role of victim, Margaret Atwood is assertive when affirming that we should not consider Grace as such: "Grace is no victim, the victims are Nancy Montgomery and Thomas Kinnear." (ATWOOD, 2002, p. 10). A difficult task that might be, since Grace is so cunning and convincing that it is difficult for readers to believe she would have been able to having committed such hideous crimes when she was merely sixteen. Grace's studied

evasiveness and her varied versions of the events concerning the murders, allied to her alleged lack of memory contribute for a natural, however involuntary, belief in her innocence. However, Grace herself indicates that she is not a trustworthy character, much less a reliable narrator. Throughout the narrative, Grace Marks never promises to tell the truth. And although she does not explicitly affirm she is going to lie, she hints she may do it: "Perhaps I will tell you lies." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 41). Therefore, none of Grace's words might be assertively considered true or false. And this applies not only to what Grace says during the interviews with Simon Jordan, but also to her recorded statements, including her official confession. As Grace tells Simon, "That is not really my Confession, […] it was only what the lawyer told me to say, and things made up by the men from the newspapers, you might as well believe the rubbishy broadsheet they were peddling about, as that." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 101).

Grace's Confession also exposes the Canadian prejudice towards immigrants, more specifically towards the Irish immigrants. As Grace argues:

> What it says in the beginning of my Confession is true enough. I did indeed come from the North of Ireland; though I thought it very unjust when they wrote down that both of the accused were from Ireland by their own admission. That made it sound like a crime, and I don't know that being from Ireland is a crime; although I have often seen it treated as such. (ATWOOD, 1997, p.103).

Later on in the narrative, Grace recollects the first time she set foot in Toronto, and compares the city to Babel: "The people appeared to be very mixed as to the kinds of them, […] and you could never tell what sort of speech you were going to hear […] and altogether it was just like the Tower of Babel." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 124). As Grace was soon to discover, the treatment poor immigrants to Canada used to receive was unfair and based on prejudice. Earlier in the novel, when commenting on Grace's trial and conviction with Dr. Jordan, Reverend Verringer seems to arrive at a similar conclusion: "The Tories[15] appear to have confused Grace with the Irish Question, although she is a protestant; and to consider the murder of a single Tory gentleman (…) to be the same thing as the insurrection of an entire race." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 80). Margaret Atwood comments on the influence the political

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[15] "Tory [Irish tóraidhe, "pursuer"]: the name applied to members of the British Conservative Party and its antecedents. The name originated as an epithet for dispossessed Irish "papists" who plundered English settlers and soldiers in Ireland. It was applied from 1679-80 to supporters of the succession of the duke of York (later James II, a Roman Catholic) to the English throne. From 1689 it was the name of the political party associated with conservative beliefs and later closely identified with the Church of England. The term survived as a nickname for the British Conservative Party and was applied by analogy to the Conservative Party that emerged in Canada in the 19th century. "Tory" is still the American term for supporters of Britain during the American Revolution; those who are called Loyalists in Canadian parlance". (The Canadian Encyclopedia – online).

concepts of the time might have had over the opinions related to Grace Marks's participation in the crimes:

> I discovered as I read that the newspapers of the time had their own political agendas. Canada West was still reeling from the effects of the 1837 Rebellion, and this influenced both Grace's life before the murders and her treatment at the hands of the press. […] In 1843 – the year of the murders – editorials were still being written about the badness or worthiness of William Lyon Mackenzie; and, as a rule, the Tory newspapers that vilified him also vilified Grace – she had, after all, been involved in the murder of her Tory employer, an act of grave insubordination – but the Reform newspapers that praised Mackenzie were also inclined to clemency toward Grace. (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1514).

The previously commented Moodie's description of the crimes and her proposed reasons seem to agree to the notion of "grave insubordination", proposed by Atwood. In "Can We Believe What the Newspapers Tell Us? Missing Links in *Alias Grace*", Judith Knelman argues that the killing of one's master was traditionally considered not only a regular murder, but also "petty treason":

> The press […] labels offenders according to the belief system that obtains. There is a stock of images to draw on, a mythology in which to place the offender. For four hundred years, until the end of the eighteenth century, the English justice system had operated in the context of a mythology that decreed some kinds of murder to be worse than others. Just as landowners owed allegiance to the crown and wives to their husbands, servants owed allegiance to their employers. Murder of the master (or mistress) by a servant was considered petty treason. (KNELMAN, 1999, p. 678)

All of the discussed elements related to the novel contribute to the narrative's multiple perspectives concerning Grace's identity. Although the representation of Grace may be approached through a great number of perspectives, there are at least two dominant portraits. One is the public Grace Marks. This is the young girl who is accused of murder and elopement, two elements that have always attracted audiences' attention, and thus are central features for the newspapers. This version of Grace is intriguing, since no one can really understand why such an apparently innocent young servant would commit such a terrible crime. The other Grace Marks is not public, but rather concentrated on the private sphere. This is the Grace with whom we, as readers, identify. This version represents a sympathetic Grace, an intelligent and even refined woman – one must remember how well she succeeds in maintaining her dignity –, who is conformed to what has happened to her. This docile Grace is the one who makes Reverend Verringer believe in her innocence and also the one who draws the tenderness and maybe love of Dr. Jordan.

The varied representations of Grace Marks in Atwood's novel encounter correspondents in the historical representation of Grace. As argued by Atwood: "some viewed

Grace as a cunning female demon, others considered her a simple-minded and terrorized victim, who had only run away with James McDermott out of fear for her own life." (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1514). Atwood's proposed multiplicity regarding Grace's identity might also be related to the multiple representations of her physical appearances, as described by Susanna Moodie, in *Life in the Clearings*. When recollecting her first encounter with Grace, at Kingston Penitentiary, Moodie description portrays a melancholic, yet calm and peaceful woman:

> She is a middle-sized woman, with a slight graceful figure. There is an air of hopeless melancholy in her face which is very painful to contemplate. Her complexion is fair, and must, before the touch of hopeless sorrow paled it, have been very brilliant. Her eyes are a bright blue, her hair auburn (MOODIE, 1853, p. 232).

Later, when retelling her visit to Grace at the Provincial Lunatic Asylum, Moodie's description displays an endangered and insane woman: "Among these raving maniacs I recognised the singular face of Grace Marks – no longer sad and despairing, but lighted up with the fire of insanity, and glowing with a hideous and fiend-like merriment". (MOODIE, 1853, p. 308).

The multiple representations of Grace Marks are also directly related to Grace's best friend, Mary Whitney, a character relevant to the development of Grace's personality. It is important to bear in mind that, although Mary Whitney is the alias used by Grace when registering in the Lewiston's small tavern to which she had fled with McDermott, historical records do not bring any reference to a real woman of this name. Moreover, within Atwood's novel, the only way the existence of Mary Whitney may be asserted is through Grace's speech, which, as we have seen, is not fully reliable. Therefore, Mary Whitney might have not ever existed, and she could be a conscious invention of Grace Marks to justify the performing of the murders. According to a different perspective, within the novel, Mary could really have been Grace's factual friend, whose spirit, after her death, in a kind of possession, would have taken control over Grace's body. This last argument is indicated by some moments in the narrative, such as when, right after Mary's death, Grace can listen to Mary's voice begging to "enter":

> And then I heard the voice, as clear as anything, right in my ear, saying *Let me in.* I was quite startled, and looked hard at Mary, who by that time was lying on the floor, as we were making up the bed. But she gave no sign of having said anything. And her eyes were still open, and staring up at ceiling. (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 178-9).

It is also in this scene that Grace passes out and, when waking, first speaks as Mary. When finally coming back to herself, Grace claims not being able to remember what just happened:

> I fell to the floor in a dead faint. They said I lay like that for ten hours, and no one could wake me. […] [W]hen I did wake up, I did not seem to know where I was, or what had happened; and I kept asking where Grace had gone. And when they told me that I myself was Grace, I would not believe them, but cried and tried to run out of the house, because I said that Grace was lost, and had gone into the lake, and I needed to search for her. They told me later they'd feared for my reason, which must have been unsettled by the shock of it all; and it was no wonder, considering. (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 179-80).

As we may notice, this is very similar to what will later take place in the narrative, when, through Grace's body, a voice claiming to belong to Mary reveals to have participated in the killing of Nancy Montgomery. From a scientific and medical approach, Mary Whitney might be said to be Grace's double, a representation of the protagonist's dissociation of personality. Though many options are offered, one can never assure who Mary Whitney really is. As observed by Dr. Jordan, when looking for Mary Whitney's grave: "the Mary Whitney buried beneath it may not have any connection with Grace Marks at all. She could be just a name, a name on a stone, seen here by Grace and used by her in the spinning of her story." (ATWOOD, 1997, p. 387-8).

Finally, it may be argued that the multiplicity of the narrative and the various representations of Grace's identity constitute key elements to the development of the plot in *Alias Grace*. They are directly responsible for keeping the suspense of the novel and so retain the reader's attention and, at some moments, his or her breath. However anxious we feel to finally discover whether Grace Marks is innocent or guilty, this has never been Margaret Atwood's concern. As the author states, *Alias Grace* "is not a murder mystery, it's a mystery about murder. In a murder mystery you can't just end it by saying 'Well, I don't know'" (ATWOOD, 1998, p. 1514). After the revealing "climax" in which we find out Mary Whitney's agency over Grace's body, Atwood's refusal to portray a definite revelation concerning Grace's culpability subverts traditional narrative pattern, in a most postmodern way. It might be argued that the lack of traditional narrative closure is a contributive element to make the novel such an intriguing and fine masterpiece. As Dr. Jordan observes, "Nothing has been proved. But nothing has been disproved, either" (ATWOOD, 1997, p.388).

CONCLUSION

"Hey what are you doing?" she said, and he said "i'm just standing here being a Canadian." and she said, "Wow, is that really feasible?" and he said, "Yes, but it requires plenty of imagination."

Lionel Kearns

After having read this dissertation, one might feel tempted to affirm that *Obasan* and *Alias Grace* are completely different novels. I would then feel forced to agree with this opinion, at least in part. The two novels' plots, characters, and settings are indeed completely different. And yet, one might argue this difference is *the* Canadian feature concerning this investigation. In a country where the implementation of an official act was necessary to deal with the issue of multiculturalism, it is not surprising to notice the disparities between the novels. However, I deem it relevant to point out the similarities my research demonstrated to exist between them. In the first pages of this investigation, I argued the common feature to both novels concerns the search for the establishment of a distinct Canadian identity. Both Joy Kogawa and Margaret Atwood perform the mentioned search through the use of characters who feel alien to the society they live in. Both Kogawa's and Atwood's novels, although set in different historical moments, portray individuals who might be considered subaltern subjects in Canadian society. While one may say Naomi Nakane and Grace Marks are completely different characters, both protagonists feel they do not belong. This dislocation of characters, who are situated in complicated and, most often, dangerous circumstances, contributes to their necessity to (re)build their identities. As representatives, respectively of Irish and Japanese traditions, Grace and Naomi must search their own places, identities and roles, the same manner Canadian people have done throughout the centuries. The mentioned search for a specific Canadian identity demonstrates that "national identities are not things we are born with; actually, they are formed and transformed." (HALL, 2007, p. 602).

Silence also plays a central role to the development of both novels. As we have seen in this investigation, concerning speech, Naomi Nakane and Grace Marks are paradoxically different, yet similar. To this matter, the difference between the two characters concentrates mainly in their willingness or unwillingness to speak. In *Obasan*, Naomi refuses to voice her feelings throughout her childhood and is able to voice out her sufferings and trauma after she is a grown-up woman. But, and this is also significant, she does so to us readers, not to other characters in the novel. In *Alias Grace*, Grace Marks talks, often and at a length, to us and to

other characters. However, there is a striking and most relevant similarity between the two characters: many times what is left unsaid is more important and relevant to the plots and characterizations than what is outright spoken. Grace's and Naomi's silence simultaneously conceal and reveal the protagonists' life trajectories, as well as their most intimate feelings.

As a consequence of the importance of silence to both novels, we might observe the narrated events are presented to the reader not through dialogues or *action* events, but through silent discontinuous discourses, which depict the narration of events through the protagonists' memories. The lack of definition and the confusion regarding one's memory and identity might be related to the issue of the Canadian identity and its representation in contemporary Canadian literature. As Margaret Atwood argues, Canadian literature should work as a tool to establish both to Canadian people and to the international community the defining characteristics of Canada. In *Survival – A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Atwood emphasizes the importance of literature and art in the Canadian identity creation. She says:

> A piece of art, as well as being a creation to be enjoyed, can also be a mirror. The reader looks at the mirror and sees not the writer but himself; and behind his own image in the foreground, a reflection of the world he lives in. If a country or a culture lacks such mirrors it has no way of knowing what it looks like; it must travel blind (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 16).

Another relevant feature concerning both novels is related to the use of postmodern narrative strategies. I do believe the postmodern feature that most often catches the readers' attention in both novels is the appropriation and consequent rewriting of historical events under new perspectives. These perspectives concern subaltern subjects' viewpoint over factual events, which had so far been reported by members of traditional dominant classes. As we have observed during the analysis of the novels, although Kogawa's and Atwood's works refer to different historical moments, both novels demonstrate the ways varied issues – among them identity, memory, trauma and history – may interact in order to produce new representations of certain individuals – such as the legendary Grace Marks – or groups of people – such as Japanese Canadians – through the fictional reinterpretation of historical events.

During the course of this investigation, I could also notice that *Alias Grace* is much more commonly associated to the postmodern impulse than *Obasan*. I believe the reasons for that are not so difficult to understand. As I have pointed out in the investigation of this novel, Margaret Atwood makes use of varied and multiple postmodern strategies. Most of these strategies are used in relation to the way the author narrates Grace Marks's story and the protagonist's relation to the notorious murders in which she was involved. In the novel,

Atwood blends factual and fictional characters, besides adding vast factual documentation to her fictional narrative. Furthermore, the narrative of *Alias Grace* is definitely postmodern, as, among other highlighted elements, it does not follow a logical sequence of events, but goes back and forth in time and space. Also, the novel does not display a traditional ending, a closure, since the reader can never be sure whether Grace is guilty or not. For these reasons, as well as other ones studied at the chapter dedicated to the novel, *Alias Grace* is easily recognized by many critics as one of the most prominent representatives of postmodern literature in English.

The same can not be said of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan.* As a matter of fact, while performing my research and during the writing of this investigation, I could not find theoretical studies referring to Kogawa's novel as a postmodern work. This might be due to the apparently traditional narrative presented by the novel. Although *Obasan* also displays official documentation amid a fictional retelling of historical events, and some of the characters in the novel are indeed actual people, many would claim the narrative is a traditional one, since it does not present more obvious postmodern ways of narrating. However, I believe – and I hope this was made clear during my analysis of the novel – Obasan may be inscribed in the postmodern context by reasons other than that presented by *Alias Grace*. These reasons are mainly related to the most relevant historical representativeness *Obasan* achieved. Since the novel is a fictional account of historical events, real political representativeness comes from a fictional work. Also, I trust the simultaneously personal and collective, fictional and autobiographical modes present in the novel may also be regarded as a postmodern feature.

Finally, one might highlight that both Margaret Atwood and Joy Kogawa employ official documentation, historical accounts and metafictional strategies in their narratives. One of the key features of both novels concerns the ways through which memories and personal impressions of two representatives of traditionally subaltern and silenced groups acquire relevant representation in the depiction of historical events. In both novels, the search for a distinctive representation of Canadian identity must go through the reinterpretation, rewriting and consequent reconstruction of historical events through a perspective so far inexistent. The result of this elaborate search marks the existence of two of Canada's most important contemporary literary works, *Obasan* and *Alias Grace*.

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