UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

THE MULTIFACED JANUS:

MULTICULTURALISM IN THE POETRY OF CYRIL DABYDEEN

EDEGAR FRANÇA JUNIOR

Dissertação submetida à Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina em cumprimento parcial dos requisitos para obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

FLORIANÓPOLIS

Maio 2008

Esta dissertação de Edegar França Junior, intitulada The Multifaced Janus: Multiculturalism in the Poetry of Cyril Dabydeen, foi julgada adequada e aprovada em sua forma final, pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente, da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, para os fins de obtenção do grau de

MESTRE EM LETRAS

Área de concentração: Inglês e Literatura Correspondente
Opção: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

_____
Dr. José Luiz Meurer
Coordenador

BANCA EXAMINADORA

_____
Dra. Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins
Orientadora e Presidente

_____
Dr. Gelson Peres da Silva
Examinador

_____
Dr. Gladir da Silva Cabral
Examinador

Florianópolis, 16 de Maio de 2008.

DEDICATÓRIA

Dedico este trabalho à minha esposa Evelize,
por sua compreensão e amor;
à minha família; pela paciência e suporte;
e à Maria Lúcia pelo empréstimo de sua
sabedoria.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere thanks to Almighty God for the gift of life and for the enlightenment to accomplish this step of my life; to my beautiful wife for her love and care in the good and bad times; to my family for the support and patience during my absence; to my advisor Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins for all the guidance and friendship that was beyond her duty; to all the professors from the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês e Literatura Correspondente of the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina for the wisdom that they brought to my academic life; to my employers for the understanding of the moments I had to relegate professional responsibilities to attend the classes and work at this thesis. Finally, I thank those unnamed people that one way or another contributed to the success of this academic journey. You all have a especial place in my heart. May the Lord bless you and keep you all.

ABSTRACT

THE MULTIFACED JANUS:

MULTICULTURALISM IN THE POETRY OF CYRIL DABYDEEN

EDEGAR FRANÇA JUNIOR

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA

2008

Supervising Professor: Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

As many countries, Canada has been built by the hands of immigrants. The great amount of people who have been looking for a better life in Canada made it a country of many cultures. On the one hand, the nation has been presented as land of opportunities. On the other hand, a reality of prejudice and discrimination overshadows an all-embracing nation. In order to regulate the immigrants' situation in the country, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was instituted to guarantee equal rights and freedom to all cultures, besides preserving and enhancing multiculturalism in Canada. Many immigrant writers have been writing about immigration and the implications of multiculturalism. Many critics, theorists and writers support these policies while others severely criticize them. Interestingly, the works of the Asian-Caribbean writer Cyril Dabydeen have been read both as a celebration and a criticism to themes related to immigrants' issues. Dabydeen depicts himself as a Janus-faced person, someone who

feels the need of looking in different directions. Janus represents the contemplation of past happenings while looking towards the future. In this work, I will analyze Dabydeen's poetry in dialogue with his prose works in order to demonstrate the development of his craft as writer. In his early works, he used to make a direct criticism the issues of immigration, as it can be observed in the poems "Lady Icarus" and "Señorita." Dabydeen's more recent works are full of historical references and use of language in a way that may allow both a celebration to multiculturalism and a criticism to the policies regulated by the dominant culture, as in "Multiculturalism."

Number of pages: 78

Number of words: 18,341

RESUMO

Como muitos países, o Canadá foi construído pelas mãos de imigrantes. O grande número de pessoas que procuraram e continuam a procurar uma vida melhor no Canadá fez desse um país de muitas culturas. Se, por um lado, o país tem-se apresentado como uma terra de oportunidades, por outro lado, uma realidade de preconceito e discriminação mancha essa nação que promete abraçar a diversidade. De forma a regulamentar a situação dos imigrantes no país, a Lei de Multiculturalismo do Canadá foi aprovada para garantir igualdade de direitos e de liberdade a todas as culturas, além de preservar e fomentar o multiculturalismo. Muitos escritores imigrantes têm escrito sobre imigração e sobre as implicações do multiculturalismo. Muitos críticos, teóricos e escritores apóiam essas políticas enquanto outros severamente criticam-nas. De forma intrigante, os trabalhos do escritor asiático-caribenho Cyril Dabydeen têm sido lidos tanto como celebração bem como crítica aos temas relacionados às políticas de imigração. Dabydeen descreve a si mesmo como uma pessoa com face de Janus, alguém que sente a necessidade de olhar em diferentes direções. Janus representa a contemplação de eventos passados ao mesmo tempo em que olha em direção ao futuro. Neste trabalho, eu analiso a poesia de Dabydeen, em diálogo com seus trabalhos em prosa, para demonstrar o desenvolvimento de sua arte enquanto escritor e poeta. Em seus primeiros trabalhos, ele fazia um ataque aberto às políticas de imigração e perseguição aos imigrantes, como se pode ler nos poemas “Lady Icarus” e em “Señorita.” Os trabalhos mais recentes de Dabydeen são repletos de referências histórias a eventos obscuros contra imigrantes no Canadá. Essas referências, e o uso de linguagem que permite mais de uma interpretação fazem com que alguns de seus

trabalhos sejam lidos tanto como celebração em relação ao fenômeno do multiculturalismo como crítica às leis implementadas pela cultura dominante, como pode ser lido no poema “Multiculturalismo.”

Número de páginas: 78

Número de palavras: 18,341

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

As most countries, Canada has laws that declare that every individual is equal before and under the law, protected from any discrimination, promising "freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association and [the Constitution of Canada] guarantees those rights and freedoms equally to male and female persons" (qtd. in Linda Hutcheon 369). The law that ensures these rights has been approved by the Canadian Senate and House of Commons as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which is a specific law for "the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada" (369).

The theme of multicultural policies has never been of consensus among writers, critics, and theorists in Canada. Some celebrate the act while others criticize it severely as a tool of oppression of immigrants, in special those belonging to what Himani Bannerji calls "'visible minorities', (the non-white people living in Canada)" (3). Interestingly, the works of the Asian-Caribbean writer Cyril Dabydeen have been read both as a celebration of multiculturalism and a criticism to the policies regulated by the dominant culture.

Cyril Dabydeen was born in 1945 in Guyana. He moved to Canada in 1970; he obtained a BA (First class Honours) at Lakehead University, an MA (his thesis was on Sylvia Plath) and an MPA (Master of Public Administration) at Queen's University, before settling in Ottawa. He has won many awards, including appointment as poet laureate of the city of Ottawa from 1984 to 1987. His collections of poetry include *Goatsong, This Planet Earth, Born in Amazonia,* and *Imaginary Origins* among others. Dabydeen's writing captures what he has defined in an interview to Frank Birbalsingh

as "the mixed feelings and ambivalent attitudes of displaced and marginalized people living in exile" ("Here and There" 106). Dabydeen calls himself Janus-faced, someone who feels the need of looking in different directions. About this self-definition he affirms: "[t]his sense of being Janus-faced will no doubt continue to dictate how I write" (*Imaginary Origins* 11).

The first of January was dedicated by the Romans to their God of Gates and Doors, Janus. A very old Italian god, Janus has a distinctive artistic appearance in that he is commonly depicted with two faces: one viewing what is behind and the other looking toward what lies ahead. Thus, Janus represents the contemplation of past happenings while looking towards the future. Some sources claim that Janus was characterized in such a peculiar fashion due to the notion that doors and gates look in two directions. Therefore, the god could look both backward and forward at the same time. Very early statues of Janus (around the Second Century B.C.) depict him with four faces.

Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins states that "More to a view of a four-faced Janus, the work of Dabydeen has a curious cardinality bringing a southern past to a northern present and articulating east / west axes—of old / new world, right / left wing—in their various conflicting lines" (author's translation)[1]. Dabydeen's multiple faces reflect his concerns about the problems of immigrants. Being himself an immigrant, Dabydeen observes about the immigrants' history and role in Canada:

> For these latter day newcomers, the frontier took a different meaning: (…) they too were drawers of water and hewers of wood, roughing it as domestic servants, factory and farm-workers, security guards, railway conductors, and more recently as teachers and doctors—all the while expressing a vitality of spirit stemming from the active imagination that is the birthright of all. (*A Shapely Fire* 9)

[1] Fronteiras Flutuantes: Poesia Canadense Contemporânea. Work in progress.

Dabydeen defends the immigrants that have been building the country since its colonization. He keeps bringing to his poetry and prose references to the cultures—especially to Caribbean and South Asian cultures—that have made Canada what it is today. The immigrants that have been coming to Canada differentiate from the early comers because they are not only domestic servants, factory workers, taxi drivers, but they have also conquered privileged spaces that have been long occupied only by the two solitudes, such as doctors and professors. Dabydeen expresses the importance that immigrants have had as the ones whose arms were used to domesticate the land and now sustain the country.

Dabydeen's poetry portrays the immigrant's situation in Canada in relation to the issue of multiculturalism and its policies. In his early poetry, Dabydeen's used to attack the policies of immigration more openly, as can be observed in the poem "Lady Icarus". In his more recent poems, as in "Multiculturalism," the poet brings certain elements that allow different readings that can take the poem as a celebration of multiculturalism and also a criticism to the policies that regulate it. In his critical prose, he has been discussing the importance of the contribution that immigrant writers have in Canadian literature.

The main objective of this master thesis is to analyse the trajectory of the poetry of Cyril Dabydeen in Canada, and verify how the expression of the poet's concern with the policies of immigration and multiculturalism develops through time. His earlier works were constructed from a poetry that presented an aggressive positioning in relation to the immigration policies to a subtle criticism of the multiculturalism policies. In Dabydeen's more recent works, he uses language in a way that allows readings that can recognize the poems as a celebration of the policies of multiculturalism and also as a criticism of these policies. My thesis is that the

development of the trajectory of Cyril Dabydeen as a poet reveals the maturing of an engaged poetry. I'll bring some of his prose writings in dialogue with his poetry in order to demonstrate how Cyril Dabydeen's concerns about the problematic of immigration and multiculturalism policies are expressed in his poetry.

The critical parameters that compose this analysis are studies on multiculturalism by Himani Bannerji, Neil Bissoondath, Linda Hutcheon, Smaro Kamboureli, Arun Prabha Mukherjee, as well as Cyril Dabydeen's prose works. In the chapter entitled "Voices on Multiculturalism in Canada," I discuss the writers that are part of this criticism on issues of immigration and multiculturalism policies, situating Dabydeen in this context. In the chapter, entitled "The Unquiet Immigrant," I analyse Dabydeen's early poems in which he expresses his concern and criticism about the policies of immigration in a more openly leftist approach. In the chapter entitled "The Multifaced Janus," I analyse Dabydeen's references to historical events as he puts them simultaneously with Canadian national symbols, giving the poem a tone of irony. I also discuss the way he assumes different selves in order to look in different directions—north / south, present / past—like Janus.

As Arun Prabha Mukherjee writes, "the past is not just the ethnic costume that one wears on ceremonial occasions but a visible badge that cannot be got rid of easily" (*Oppositional Aesthetics* 130). It is in this sense that Dabydeen's works expose facts of the past that have determined the present. His works have a certain tone of optimism, and at the same time keep remembering historical facts which show that Canada has been built with certain discriminatory actions that people should not be proud of. As Dabydeen's himself states, his work is an "engagement with memory (…), coupled with reflections on a changing self as it responds to Caribbean as well as Canadian temperaments and landscapes as they are internalized" (*Imaginary Origins*

11). The development of Dabydeen's poetry does not weaken his engagement with social struggle, but highlights his commitment to immigrants' cause, as well as the poet's concern about immigration and the discussion about multiculturalism.

CHAPTER I: VOICES ON MULTICULTURALISM IN CANADA

The enormous immigration to Canada has made it a country of many cultures. The result of this is clearly seen in a literature full of writers whose names find their origins in different parts of the world, but who sustain the title of Canadian citizens, and write about immigration and the implications of multiculturalism. Multicultural literatures must not be taken as minority writing, for, as Smaro Kamboureli writes in the introduction to *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* anthology, "it does not raise issues that are of minor interest to Canadians" (3), once immigrants are more than half the population of Canada. Themes concerning immigrants' history and culture, as well as themes concerning the First Nations suppression and persecution, are controversial with the official English-French version of Canadian history, once the notion of Canada as a nation, Canadian unity, and Canadian identity are permeated with colonialism.

Canadian history has been told, the same way as Brazilian history has been, through the eyes of the colonizer. About the white-European first contact with the Aboriginal peoples, Kamboureli asserts that

> [t]he British and French colonizers saw themselves as settlers, as arriving in a land that was taken to be more or less empty. The presence, cultural differences, spirituality, and languages of the Aboriginal peoples (...) were not seen as having any inherent value. The land they inhabited, and which they continue to inhabit, was deemed to be ready for the taking. (7)

The negation of First Nations' culture and history as inhabitants and owners of the land by the classification of the 'invasion' of their lands by the European as a 'discovery' aims at hiding the fact that what it is now called Canada belonged to other people than the colonizers.

The total absence of Aboriginal founding nations in the text of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act walks along with the attempts to define Canada as a cohesive nation, and to define a Canadian identity, based on the view of the colonizers. More than a way to officially regulate immigrants' situation, the Act's policies seem only to aim at affirming an all-embracing Canadian identity but under the control of the dominant cultures (English and French). Along history, many attempts have been made in order to consolidate a Canadian identity, some at the cost of exclusion measures as the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, following earlier discriminatory legislation against immigrants from this ethnic group. The Act known as the Chinese Exclusion Act banned Chinese immigration to Canada. Prior to 1923, this kind of immigration was already heavily controlled by an Act of 1885, which imposed a hefty head tax on all immigrants from China or with Chinese background. Due both to a feeling of horror after Nazi culture-oriented death camps were discovered in Canada and the contribution of Chinese people as workers in Canada during World War II, the Canadian government repealed the Chinese Immigration Act on May 14, 1947. However, Chinese immigration to Canada was allowed only after the liberalization of Canadian immigration policy in 1967 (cf. Kamboureli 9).

The Meech Lake Accord was another example of the attempt to build the notion of cohesive nation. The Meech Lake Accord, named after the location were the conference was held, recognized Quebec as a 'distinct society' and restored its right of veto over most constitutional amendments. All other provinces shared with Quebec the other articles included in the Accord, such as holding control over immigration, the power to nominate Supreme Court judges, financial rights, etc. Many saw Meech Lake as a further dismantling or weakening of the power of the central government. Native groups, in particular, argued that their collective rights were being ignored. The Accord

was rectified and it died at the deadline for ratification on 23 June, 1990 (cf. Kamboureli 9-10).

These legislations exemplify how sustaining a dominant Canadian identity over other identities has been sought along Canadian history. There have always been attempts to redefine this construction of a cohesive identity. In this sense, Canada is a nation in a constant state of re-view. But the events that were discussed previously demonstrate that the aimed unity of Canadian identity can only be sustained by the suppression of the identity of the other peoples that form the nation (other than English and French). Kamboureli enters this discussion asserting that "[w]e are at a point now where the presumed uniqueness of Canadian identity is only that—a presumption" (10). The insistence on building a unique Canadian identity, in a country that has been multicultural and multilingual since before the arrival of the European, reinforces European domination and the maintenance of the supremacy of the English and the French cultures over the others.

A new period in the Canadian history started in 1971 with the introduction, by Pierre Elliot Trudeau, of the first discussions about cultural diversity which would result, in 1988, in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. Many legislations and discussions led to the creation of the policies of multiculturalism. In 1969, French and English were established the two official languages of the country, by the Canadian Official Languages Act. This Act reinforced even more the notion that the French and the British were the two founding nations of Canada. It raised voices of objection all over the country, such as Quebec's declaration of French as its single official language, in 1977. In 1971, the White Paper reiterated that there are two official languages, but there are no official cultures, sustaining the colonial ideology through language. The Multiculturalism Act (Bill C-93) followed the same fashion, declaring English and

French as the official languages, but recognizing "that multiculturalism [reflected] the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society", and promising "to preserve, enhance and share [this] cultural heritage" (Kamboureli 11).

The discussion about the Canadian Multiculturalism Act starts in the very meaning of the term 'multiculturalism'. Kamboureli states that "[m]ulticulturalism signifies different things to different people, and has not been embraced with the same enthusiasm by all Canadians" (11). The Department of Canadian Heritage web site defines Canadian multiculturalism as "fundamental to our belief that all citizens are equal. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging"[2]. Some Canadians have their understanding of Canadian history as threatened by the tolerance advocated by the Multiculturalism Act for it would augur against the development of a cohesive Canadian identity.

Multiculturalism has also been attacked for its policy of containment. As some Canadians argue, by legislating diversity, multiculturalism policies attempt to control the diverse cultures' representations and to maintain the racial and ethnic hierarchies in Canada. Other Canadians defend that the question of preservation advocates a kind of ethnocentrism that "might further prevent [these cultures'] integration into mainstream society" (Kamboureli 12). Multiculturalism, as well as Canadian identity, is understood, questioned and defended for different reasons. The discussion around these themes seems to be far from its end. The only certainty in cultural and multicultural discussions in Canada is that the notion of what it means to be Canadian is a concept under construction. The rereading of Canadian history, marked by cultural diversity, not only through the eyes of the white-European, but under the gaze

[2] http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/multi/what-multi_e.cfm

of all peoples who have taken part in the building of what we now call Canada, may contribute to shape the abstract concepts of what being Canadian mean.

Canada has been considered a multicultural country, and many writers, theorists, and critics have tried to define a Canadian identity, some celebrating the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, and others severely criticizing it. The ideal of a multicultural society proposes a reflection on what Linda Hutcheon calls "an innovative model for civic tolerance and the acceptance of diversity that is appropriate for [Canada's] democratic pluralist society" (15).

Hutcheon has an optimistic view of the multiculturalism policies, but she is aware of the problems. Hutcheon's optimism is expressed in her view of negotiation: "what we now call Canada has always been multicultural, (…) it has always negotiated the space between social tension and cultural richness" (3). In the introduction to *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fiction*, Hutcheon recognizes that there are many positive changes as a result of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. She points out the availability of multilingual media and services, the creation of the National Ethnic Archives in Ottawa, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario in Toronto, the increasing academic interest in Canada's diversity, the foundation of a Canadian Ethnic Studies Association, and the increasing of publications of journals, articles, and books on the topic (14-15).

Hutcheon explains that she has avoided the term "ethnic" in the title of *Other Solitudes* because 'ethnic,' from the Greek, meaning 'nation,' or 'people,' "would suggest that all Canadians are ethnic, including French and British" (2). According to her, "the fact that the word is not [author's stress] so used points to a hierarchy of social and cultural privilege that this collection wants to challenge" (2). The use of 'ethnic,' in this sense, would suggest an attempt to erase differences and the social hierarchy and

cultural privilege of English and French over the other cultures because it would take the white-European cultures out of their privileged situation and make them equal to the other cultures that form the nation. Other meaning for 'ethnic,' which comes from usage, associates the term with 'pagan,' 'foreign,' and it has to do with the social positioning of the other. By simply naming the authors of her collection by their ethnicity, Hutcheon already puts their ethno-cultural backgrounds in evidence, positioning them in a social hierarchy, contradicting what she intended to do by avoiding the use of 'ethnic.'

Hutcheon is aware, though, of the problems of multiculturalism. She points out the discordance among writers within the same ethnic group about the success or function of multiculturalism policies and social reality (4). She closes this point by stating that

> […] literature depends on the whole of culture, of history and social tradition, without reducing diversity to ethnocultural enclaves. […] [T]here are ways of seeing the world, and of writing in and about it, that may be different from our own ways–whatever they might be–and valuable because of that difference. (5)

A crucial point of social tension is racism. As in most of the countries formed and built by many people from different cultures, whose skin color is different, who have different religions and political histories, racism is undeniably a concept that has to be taken into consideration. About prejudice against minorities, Hutcheon recognizes that "few non-white […] writers will deny that it can exist, masked behind the rhetoric of tolerance that is an intrinsic part of multiculturalism" (8). She puts racism as a feeling that is natural to all cultures by quoting Neil Bissoondath when he states that "racism is as Canadian as maple syrup" (8).

Hutcheon puts Canadian history since the beginning of colonization as a history of social tension. Her following list of historical attacks to immigrants leaves no doubt about the difficulties that immigrants faced in the past, and how the scars of these attacks are still evident and constitute an unforgettable memory of intolerance:

> [w]hile the view of Canada as a tolerant, welcoming nation is to some extent valid, […] it must not be accepted without acknowledging an equally compelling history of intolerance: from the extermination of the Beothuk in Newfoundland to the restriction of the other native peoples to reserves; from the deportation of the Acadians to the cultural denigration of French Canada in Lord Durham's Report; from the head tax collected only on Chinese immigrants to the displacement and internment of all Japanese Canadians during the last war; from the deportation of the sick, poor, unemployed, or politically radical in the first decades of this century to the refusal to accept European Jews before the Holocaust. (11)

Cyril Dabydeen also addresses some of these events where immigrants were simply put apart from the other cultures, in a clear example of prejudice. Dabydeen's poem "Multiculturalism," and Hutcheon's lists have events in common, like the persecution of the First Nations and the head tax imposed to Chinese immigrants. In Dabydeen's case, these events are followed by a reference to the Canadian anthem—"OH, CANADA!"—which closes the poem. This reference suggests a celebration of the country through its anthem, but it also has a tone of irony due to the references to a history of prejudice against minor cultures. The poem analysis will further detail this issue.

Hutcheon recognizes the controversy of the policies of multiculturalism, but she is still optimistic in relation to them and believes that more than negative points, the policies bring positive possibilities. The earlier mentioned services' improvement in Canadian society such as availability of multilingual media services and foundation and support to institutions that focus on the discussions about multiculturalism seem not to be enough, and not what the ones who criticize the policies of multiculturalism consider as really important to the recognition and enhancement of different cultures other than

English and French. A history of intolerance, segregation, and persecution against immigrants cannot be erased by governmental financial compensation or support to festivals and celebrations which may stereotype and fossilize cultures, reducing them to singing and dancing and exotic food.

As a response for the suppression of immigrant cultures, the power of the dominant language has been subverted and used against the oppressors. Himani Bannerji ironically writes about the multicultural policy of Canada: “We demanded some genuine reforms, some changes—some among us even demanded the end of racist capitalism—and instead we got ‘multiculturalism’” (3). Bannerji strongly attacks multiculturalism policies in the article “On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of ‘Canada.’” She tells her history as an immigrant in Canada exposing it as one more history of racism, oppression and discrimination of immigrants. The history of the said ‘new Canadians’ runs at the same pace that the populations which are ‘visible’ for their skin color grow. The white state has to articulate forms to regulate and control the growing mass of non-white people.

It is said that the best form to control something is to keep it close to you. In that sense, as the minorities started to organize themselves, the only way for the state to stay in the control is establishing multiculturalism policies. Bannerji writes that “‘[c]ommunities’ and their leaders or representatives were created by and through the state, and they called for funding and promised ‘essential services’ for their ‘communities,’ such as the preservation of their identities” (3). In this sense, the state controls people’s lives with its laws and regulations, and the policies of multiculturalism are one more of the state’s tools to control and keep the minorities in their delimited spaces. Bannerji further observes:

> [a]s the state came deeper into our lives—extending its political, economic and moral regulation, its police violence and surveillance—we simultaneously officialized ourselves. It is as though we asked for bread and were given stones, and could not tell the difference between the two. (3)

In this relation of power and disempowerment, English and French cultural heritages dominate the political scenario. The struggle between the self-entitled settlers of the nation for the predominance of their language and culture shapes the nation's cultural struggle. It also puts the other cultures' struggles for recognition of their identity and space as minor issues–specially those cultures which Bannerji calls "'visible minorities' (the non-white people living in Canada)" (3). The evocation of a Canadian unity carries the sense of erasing the individuality and the identity that make each group unique, in order to assimilate an imposed cohesive national identity, which is remarkably white-European.

According to Northrop Frye, "real unity tolerates dissent and rejoices in a variety of outlook and tradition, recognizes that it is man's destiny to unite and not divide […]. Unity […] is the extra dimension that raises the sense of belonging into genuine human life" (vi). Frye opposes the concept of unity to the one of "uniformity," "where everyone 'belongs,' uses the same clichés, thinks alike and behaves alike, produces a society which seems comfortable at first but is totally lacking in human dignity" (vi). The sense of uniformity thus implies the myth of a unity that can only exist by the suppression of other identities. Although Frye has been severely criticised for his 'practice' of 'uniformity' in his representations of Canadian literature, his concept of "unity" has contemporary validity.

Bannerji states that "to imagine 'com-unity' means to imagine a common-project of valuing difference that would hold good for both Canadians and other, while also claiming that the sources of these otherizing differences are merely cultural" (7).

According to her, the creation of an ideology that averts divisive social relations rises a multicultural ideology that both needs and creates 'others' while subverting demands for anti-racism and political equality. Multiculturalism, in this sense, becomes "a mandate of moral regulation as an antidote to any, and especially Quebec's, separatism" (11). Instead of a policy for the 'preservation and enhancement' of the many cultures that form the nation, multiculturalism ends up as political device to promote and sustain the white supremacy over the 'visible minorities.' Thus, "[t]he particularized and partisan nature of this nation-state becomes visible through the same ideological and working apparatus that simultaneously produces its national 'Canadian' essence and the 'other' – its non-white population" (Bannerji 11).

The evocation of a historical political memory is the link between Bannerji and Dabydeen. They share immigrant roots, marked by racism, prejudice and persecution. The consciousness of the writer's role as a people's memory keeper seems to be what motivates them to write. Their works are permeated with the immigrants' anxiety and fear. If the white-European power insists in ruling immigrants' lives, even the language they should speak, the dominated find means to subvert their persecutors' language and use it against the dominant. As Bannerji writes, "[w]e must then bite the hand that feeds us, because what it feeds us is neither enough nor for our good" (20). Both writers stand for those who have built Canada, even under oppression and suffering all kinds of prejudice and discrimination. Dabydeen's earlier works speak in consonance to Bannerji's strong criticism on multiculturalism policies. His recent works about multiculturalism, however, allow different readings. The use of positive and negative historical references and subtleties of language offer the reader varied possibilities of interpretation. Some poems were written in such a way that may be read

as both celebratory and critical of the policies of multiculturalism, confirming Dabydeen's self definition as Janus faced.

Bissoondath asserts that the point in studying cultures and multicultural societies comes from the sense that "people are central", when he claims that academic training has been robbing from the academics their sense of the blood and the guts of history (29). In other words, Bissoondath is aware that people and cultures are agents of events that shape society, and people and cultures are also shaped by events. Severely criticizing the policies of multiculturalism, Bissoondath gives an account of the history of immigrants in Canada. He goes through Canadian history, in order to show how Canadian society has changed in the last century. He starts with the example of the Ignatieff family, which left Petersburg in the beginning of the 20th century as a noble family, and entered Canada as agricultural labourers. Bissoondath tells the story of how Paul and Natasha were determined to leave the past in the past, and taught their five sons—Nicholas, Vladimir, Alec, Lionel and George—that Canada was their land and that they would succeed. The five joined important universities and built a successful life history. Times were clearly others, once the country was in a state of transition. No longer glad to be considered a mere adjunct to the British Empire, Canada had left the First World War with a great sense of itself, anxious to be the ruler of its own.

Acquiring full control over its foreign and domestic policy, Canada was, as Bissoondath claims,

> on the whole, protective of its racial and cultural exclusivity. The native population was contained on reserves, the small black communities effectively isolated from mainstream life and entry to Canada by people deemed undesirable of racial and ethnic grounds severely restricted. (30)

The only immigrants to whom would be given opportunities and respect were the said 'traditional' immigrants, who were the white and Christian ones. Dabydeen's poem "Sir

James Douglas: Father of British Columbia" criticizes this privilege of the white people. The poem refers to the fact that Sir Douglas was born in a colony, son of a creole mother, and therefore he was also an immigrant in Canada. Thus, "immigration was defined by a sense of superiority based on race, ethnicity and class-consciousness" (Bissoondath 32). Such perspective took a long time after World War II to start being questioned.

Towards the end of the 60s, emerged the vitality and presumed activism of Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Bissoondath defines him as "the man who would remake Canada, a country prepared to follow him out of its traditional staidness into a more exciting version of itself" (35). In 1971, with his government sliding steadily into unpopularity, in a clear attempt to save his mandate from drowning, Trudeau initiated the discussion on a federal policy that would change the face of the nation forever, the official policy of multiculturalism.

Bissoondath writes that "multiculturalism boosted into the limelight not as a progressive social policy but as an opportunistic political one, not so much an answer to necessary social accommodation as a response to pressing political concern" (36). He believes that Trudeau was doing what was advantageous politically by launching a program that worked as a policy of funding to buy ethnic votes. Bissoondath criticizes the multiculturalism policies by writing that they are merely "'sweet talk', a document […] that seeks to seduce" (38). The strategic use of words that have the sense of valuing the minorities such as recognition, appreciation, understanding, respectful, promote, foster, preserve, in the Multiculturalism Act is seen as a mask for the political intention of the policy. The power of the words is so strong that leaves the one who is suspicious of its activist tone with a feeling of ingratitude to question such care to immigrants.

Suspicion, however, cannot be avoided. According to Bissoondath, the Act leaves some assumptions that must be taken into consideration:

> that people, coming from elsewhere, whish to remain what they have been; that personalities and ways of doing things, ways of looking at the world, can be frozen in time; that Canadian cultural influence pales before the exoticism of the foreign. It views newcomers as exotics and pretends that this is both proper and sufficient. (39)

The document lacks of mention of unity. Instead, the funding it ensures to ethnic festivals seems to encourage division, as if the cultures that the Act supports intended to remain distinct. The interpretation of to which point promoting difference is positive and to which point it is discriminatory, leaves a sense of division, as if the applied policies of the Act were an attempt to keep groups apart. In this case, according to Bissoondath, the Act seems to be a policy which aim is to "keep divided and therefore conquered", based in the notion that a divided populace is easier to be politically manipulated (Bissoondath 40).

Cyril Dabydeen defends the immigrant peoples who have been building the country since its colonization. He keeps bringing to his poetry and prose references to the cultures—especially to Caribbean and South Asian cultures—that have made Canada what it is today. He defends that the immigrants who have been coming to Canada these days differentiate from the early comers because they are not only domestic servants, factory workers, taxi drivers, but they have also conquered privileged spaces that have been long occupied only by the two solitudes—English and French—such as doctors and professors.

Dabydeen expresses his concern about the policies of multiculturalism and immigration in poems full of references to discrimination of immigrants. He presents the importance that immigrants have as the ones whose arms were used to domesticate the land, who were and still are persecuted and victims of prejudice, and now play a

main role in sustaining the country. According to Arun Prabha Mukherjee, “Dabydeen’s poetry can be called a poetry of subversion. It continually attacks the romantic, tourist-guide version of the tropics and uncovers the relationships of production” (128). Dabydeen works show the contradictions between the colonizer’s version of history and the immigrants’ everyday life, and confirm his commitment to the immigrants’ cause for recognition and acceptance. Although some of his more recent works have been read as celebratory of multiculturalism, a close reading of the historical references reveals his criticism to the policies regulated by the dominant culture.

CHAPTER II: THE UNQUIET IMMIGRANT

Cyril Dabydeen's first published works in Canada have a sense of "engagement with memory," as he describes his early poetry in the introduction to *Imaginary Origins* (11). The poems speak about loss, dislocation, persecution and discrimination against immigrants and are pervaded with anxiety, fear and erasure of identity. These poems explore the problems that immigrants who helped to build the country and the native peoples who are supposed to be the owners of the land face due to discrimination and prejudice against them by the dominant cultures (English and French). In some of Dabydeen's poems that will be discussed here, immigrants are depicted as people who die in their attempt to enter the country; who want to stay in Canada, even illegally, looking for better days; immigrants who lose their identities to the appeal of cultural assimilation. The poems express Dabydeen's critical views on persecution and discrimination against immigrants, immigration policies, manifesting engagement to immigrants' cause, combined with his diasporic and immigrant selves.

"Grosse Ile[3]" remembers the Irish immigrants who were "trying to start / a new life" in Canada, running from the Great Irish Famine, 1845-1849. Grosse Isle is an island in the St. Lawrence River east of Quebec, situated in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The Canadian Government set up this depot to contain the Cholera epidemic of the time that was believed to be caused by the large influx of European immigrants. Thousands of Irish were quarantined on Grosse Isle from 1832 to 1847.

[3] Poem from the book *Goatson*, published in *Imaginary Origins*, 26.

They perished
forty thousand
from across
the sea –
all immigrants
trying to start
a new life. Typhus raged.
They died.
Forty thousand
skeletons were
found here
where a quarantine
station now stands.
Someone's
searching for a documentary
to stir up
the ghost of
the living.

The poem mentions "forty thousand / skeletons," which is a different account of the official history record of deaths. It is registered that over 3000 Irish died on the island and over 5000 are currently buried in the cemetery there, many having died en-route. Most of those who died on the island were affected by Typhus which sprang up from the conditions there in 1847. Grosse Isle is the largest Irish Famine burial ground located outside of Ireland. A memorial was erected in 1997 and the island is now a National Historic Site of Canada[4]. The memorial may be seen as Dabydeen's "documentary / to stir up / the ghost of / the living," predicting the construction of a monument the living would made to honor the ones who died under sub-human

[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grosse_Ile%2C_Quebec

conditions, as well as to diminish the sense of guilt for leaving the Irish immigrants to die, isolated from the mainland.

"Lady Icarus"[5] tells the story of Maria, who came from Ecuador "wanting / desperately, to stay / in Canada." She is probably an illegal immigrant, a situation that forces her to run from the officers who come to order her deported. Her geographical movement from Ecuador to the north, to Canada, evokes Icarus' trip in his attempt to capture the Sun. Both stories depict similar searches for a forbidden treasure, and end in a tragic way.

"ordered deported – for the fifth time."

You fell, you
fell from seven
stories high
tempting gravity
from the Stratchona
Hotel

not skyward
only landward

like a recalcitrant
angel, Maria,
all the way
        from Ecuador

you came, wanting
desperately to stay
in Canada

[5] Poem from the book *Goatson*, published in *Imaginary Origins*, 27.

so glorious
and free – defying
another deportation
order when suddenly
your rope

of sheets and blankets
broke
no sun now melting wax
your hold snaps

as you plunge
to sudden death
we stand on guard for thee
oh so glorious and free

O Canada O Canada

Maria tries to escape her persecutors using an improvised “rope / of sheets and blankets” to descend from the apartment where she is hiding. But the rope breaks and she “plunge[s] / to sudden death.” The story of the poem is not an exception among the immigrants who try a new life in Canada. They tell stories of fear, misery, desperation, anxiety and prejudice. Sometimes these stories have happy endings, most of times they do not. Maria does not reach the Sun she was looking for. She tries hard, “tempting gravity,” in desperate effort to stay where she is, defying the power that insists in pushing her down from her dreams. She resists, and her reward is death.

The political tone of the poem comes with the irony that is suggested in the last lines of “Lady Icarus”: “we stand on guard for thee / oh so glorious and free / O Canada O Canada.” Maria stands in a heroic position like Icarus, and the expression

"glorious and free" may refer to both her and Canada, once it is a fragment of the Canadian anthem. The reference to the Canadian anthem, as Arun Prabha Mukherjee states, "makes the poem highly ambiguous in its accordance of a heroic status to Maria while being ironical about the anthem at the same time" ("The Poetry of Michael Ondaatje and Cyril Dabydeen" 126-127). The choice of words emphasizes Dabydeen's ironic tone in associating a self-defined Canadian glorious history to the immigrant's effort to reach the sun, the north, which shines with its promises of freedom, equality and better life. The "recalcitrant angel," who was, as well as Icarus, supposed to go "skyward," is ordered "landward," back to Ecuador. But "no sun now melting wax" will stop or soften her fall.

Dabydeen explores another form of death in "Señorita,"[6] which is a poem that tells the story of a woman from the Dominican Republic who "had attended school / in Canada, [and] is interested in Lope de Vega / and extols the Golden Age of Spain."

> This Señorita from the Dominican
> Republic flashes a smile;
> she tells me she had attended school
> in Canada, is interested in Lope de Vega
> and extols the Golden Age of Spain.
>
> I remind her of Pablo Neruda
> and Nicolas Guillen,
> both closer to her home.
> She still smiles, professes
> a dim acquaintance with the poetry
>
> of both, talks about water imagery

[6] Poem from the book *Goatson*, published in *Imaginary Origins* 28.

in Neruda. I remind her about the latter's
fire of love, the Cuban's revolutionary
zeal. She's not impressed;
she still smiles, however.

How about the poets
of the Dominican Republic?
She smiles once more, "Ah, do you
not see I have been educated
in Canada?" she protests innocently.

"Five million people there –
surely there must be poets!"
I exclaim in silent rage.
Once more the Señorita smiles –
bewitching as a metaphor.

In the conversation between the poet and the woman, he questions the woman about literary figures from the Caribbean and Latin America such as "Pablo Neruda and Nicolas Guillen." She seems to recognize the names, but is not interested in Third World culture, the very same culture from where she comes from. As the poet insists on talking about poets of the Dominican Republic, she limits to answer: "Ah, do you / not see I have been educated / in Canada?" and smiles. The poem shows what Mukherjee calls "the apolitical and amoral stance of our English departments [in Canadian educational system]," and "the political repercussions of this apolitical stance in the colonial situation" (124). In this case, a more tragic kind of death is presented: the death of culture, of identity, which is lost forever, replaced by the dominant's ideologies.

"Señorita" brings not the physical persecution and death of immigrants, but the immigrants' identity being swallowed by the dominant culture, and digested by ideologies that completely erase their identity of origin. The oppression of 'minor cultures' is not less tragic and brutal in the real world than it is in the poem. The poet's indignation before this silent violence against immigrants' culture is so intense that he can barely refrain himself from screaming. He expresses his anger in a contained cry: "Five million people there – / surely there must be poets!"

"Goatsong"[7] may be taken as an attempt to wake up the immigrants from the state of unawareness imposed to them. It is a poem that leaves the reader with the sensation of hearing a very unpleasant song:

> Only goatsong, mind you,
> I sing, sing of brother
> tramping the lanes
> where the dogs are snarling
> while with goatsong
> we howl, bleat with the sheep,
> neigh with the horse
> and cackle in the fowl's
> barnyard commotion.
>
> I'm no owner of a gun
> to scatter the danger
> of the squawking night
> when goatsong is about,
> an aunt drunk as daylight
> downing the bootleg rum
> upon the throat of the yard.

[7] Poem from the book *Goatsong*, published in *Imaginary Origins* 29.

I sing, I sing now
of the howl and the screech
and the lice in the hair
of niece crying
with her broom
in the swelling tide
of the dark.

These natural, farming sounds, in the context of “the danger / of the squawking night,” become the sounds of a furious riot that is snarling like dogs, howling like wolves, complaining with the sheep’s bleat, the horse’s neigh, and the fowl’s cackle. But this raging crowd is contained in a barnyard, controlled, watched and kept in the place that the imaginary farmer made for it, and where the farmer wants it to stay.

The figures of the different animals may allude to the different people who immigrated to Canada and cry their suffering and discrimination for being visibly different from the farmer. And their cry seems to be in vain, not heard, ignored. The drunk aunt, who guards the throat of the yard and does not let the animals out, does not care about the cries of the animals and stays “downing the bootleg rum.” The poet seems to resign facing the strength of the drunk aunt. He seems to give up its purpose of awaking, once he complains for having no gun “to scatter the danger / of the squawking night,” and to defeat the drunk aunt. However, the poet has a gun, a very powerful gun. His gun is his song. So, he continues to sing of “the howl and the screech,” crying for the “lice in the hair” of a servant niece, “in the swelling tide of the dark.”

Cyril Dabydeen's immigrant self is also expressed through his imaginary crossing of boundaries. In "Fruit,"[8] the sense of dislocation, of being here, wishing to be there, "straddling past and present" (*Imaginary Origins* 12), is present when he stares at this "fruit, / of the earth" that evokes his memories of his Caribbean origins.

> of the earth
>
> I imagine myself
> a mouth
>
> you an apple
> me a mother-mouth
> brother-mouth
> sister-mouth
> munching, munching
>
> remembering how
> once upon a time
> the season was
> palpable escape
> with the slice
> white slice/red slice
>
> eagerly munching
> aunt-mouth
> grandmother-mouth
> before balance of
> payments became crucial
> in a tropical state

[8] Poem from the book *Distances*, published in *Imaginary Origins* 41.

when suddenly
star-apple, mango
papaw, sapodilla
take their place
oozing a nation's
sweet distaste.

The sense of dislocation may be suggested with the use of the fruits and where they appear in the poem. The fruit that brings familiar memories to the poet's mind is an apple, a fruit that grows in cold regions like Canada, suggesting the poet's location. The memory of his ancestors then leads him to tropical fruits evoking his place of origin. The poet's sense of dislocation can also be suggested by the position of the fruits in the poem, the apple in the beginning, and the tropical fruits at the end of the poem, suggesting a north-south geographical reference.

The political tone comes with the lines "balance of / payments became crucial / in a tropical state." The family seems to enjoy life until this point. They were all munching together, as in a celebration, or in a peaceful moment of a family meeting. The reference to "balance of payments" suggests the interference of capitalism, which comes and disturbs the harmony of the place where the family lives, "oozing a nation's / sweet distaste."

In "This is it,"[9] Dabydeen brings his memories of his early times in northern Canada. The strength of the poem seems to be the subversive tone in the reference to a "tame life" disturbed by "a leviathan."

The tame life:
the animals here

[9] Poem from the book *Distances*, published in *Imaginary Origins* 44.

do not look at you –
they converge,
converge.

Thousands
of miles away
it's the same
nightmare: a leviathan
in a water-laced

dream. Entering
once more, huddling
against the cold
in northwestern
Ontario

we notice that footprints
are here too,
our mild reckoning
from country
to country.

The "tame life" mentioned in the beginning of the poem may be a reference to Dabydeen's early days in the Lake Superior region, where he lived his "own pioneering days" (*Imaginary Origins* 13). But tame life could also allude to a domesticated life under a political system that suppresses people and rules their lives. The poet is "in northwestern / Ontario," "huddling / against the cold," where the domesticated animals which "do not look at you," stand in a silent contrast to the wild animals in the tropical forests back in his Caribbean origins.

Like the harmony in his place of origin threatened by the "balance of / payments" in "Fruit," in Canada, "thousands of miles away," there is the danger of a nightmare. A "leviathan" brings sensation of danger "in a water-laced / dream," a probable allusion to the Lake Superior region. Leviathan is a monster of chaos in the Phoenician mythology. In the Bible, it is referred as a beast that corrupts the human spirit, profaning everything that is sacred[10]. In his "mild reckoning / from country / to country," Dabydeen recognizes that the tame life of both his place of origin and "northwestern / Ontario" is in danger when he mentions that "footprints / are here too." The word "mild" at the end of the poem relates to the "tame life" of the beginning, and contrasts with the leviathan's threat. The poem shows a Janus-faced poet who keeps critically pondering on correspondences between his place of origin and the one where he lives in.

In "When They Came,"[11] Dabydeen assumes the voice of the native people of a country that is invaded. The poem tells a story of horror and anguish felt by the invaded with the brutality of the invasion. Dabydeen expresses the native people's fear and anxiety before the armour and the army that is there to control the population. He writes:

> When they came
> they rode trucks
> along the main
> road of my youth
>
> they held bayonets
> stiffly against
> their faces

[10] A Bíblia de Jerusalém: Job, 3, 8; 40, 25; Psalms 74, 14; Isaiah, 27, 1; Amos 9, 3; Revelations 12, 3.
[11] Poem from the book *This Planet Earth*, published in *Imaginary Origins* 52.

tongues sticking out
like barbed wire

we dared not look
for long
we lived on
in the nightmare
thinking we couldn't
govern a country

we couldn't hold
our own
until the troops came –
men laughing hyena-like
blocking the roads
with eyes of steel
lips ribbed in metal

I watch from
this distance
nurturing fables
one after another

all fragments
of a life

The trucks that come along the way of the poet's youth represent the violent intervention of this huge power that dominates the country and takes the govern of the land from the hand of its people. No resistance is shown to the soldiers that hold their guns like in a horror parade. The image of the tongues may symbolize the personification of evil, once pointed tongues remember a snake, or a dragon, both

symbolic figures of leviathan, mentioned earlier. The hyena laughs reinforce the reference to evil. In both views of the invaders, they are depicted as inhuman. There is no way out of this nightmare, for the men are "blocking the roads" like impassable metal statues, with their cold "eyes of steel." This is a strong and frightening view that people "dared not to look" at, leaving the hopeless feeling of a populace that cannot govern its own country. At the end of the poem, the poet is no longer at the invaded country. He "watch[es] from / this distance," in Canada, remembering past events, "all fragments / of a life." These lines may be read as a revelation of the poet's role as an eyewitness and voice, speaking for those peoples who have suffered with these violent events.

In "As An Immigrant,"[12] Dabydeen speaks as an immigrant who helped to build Canada.

> I have made out of Canada
> bones, sawdust, fire engines,
>
> fuel, the ground reshaped into tunnels,
> as I am here with a vengeance.
>
> This too is flesh, making arrangements
> as I dramatize with the spirit, my way,
>
> watching railway tracks, sleepers
> in my midst, chug-chugging along.
>
> How steel leaps I will never know.
> I am at the edge of mighty lake

[12] Poem from the book *Coastland,* published in *Imaginary Origins* 143.

Superior, bound by waters, trees,
sand, other lakes, the ground swirling.

Let the beaver bring me closer
as I quarry silence and talk

in riddles that the maple leaf
itself will finally understand.

Dabydeen assumes the voice of the people who have built Canada. The beginning of the poem refers to the occupation of the land, settlement of immigrants and the course of progress, like the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The poet identifies himself as an immigrant. He seems to be in a train on a trip through the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the view of the tracks, the sleepers, and the sounds of the train “chug-chugging along” fill his mind with memories of the beginning of his life as an immigrant.

At the end of the poem, the poet refers to the work of the poet, using the beaver as a symbol of his craft. The importance of the American Beaver in the development of Canada through the fur trade led to its designation as the national animal. Interestingly, the beaver’s dam building can bring both benefit and damage. Dam building is extremely beneficial in restoring wetlands. Such wetland benefits include flood control downstream, biodiversity, and water cleansing. Over the eons, this collection of silt produces the rich bottom land so sought after by farmers. While beavers can create damage, part of the problem is one of perception and time scale. Such damage as the undermining of a roadway or the drowning of some trees is very visible shortly after the beginning of beavers’ activity in an area. The benefits, mentioned below, are long-term and not easily seen except by someone who is

monitoring the process and realizes the beneficial effects of beaver dams.[13] Like the work of the beaver, the work of the poet is a silent, long-term work. It is a work that can both mirror and transform reality. But effects of this work can only be felt by those who dare to try to solve the riddles in which the poet talks. Riddles are made to be decoded. The more difficult they are to be understood, the more pleasure the one who decodes the riddle will have. By talking in riddles, the poet makes people think about what he is suggesting. And by talking in riddles about immigrants' life in Canada, Dabydeen seems to make people think about the theme, increasing and enriching the discussions around the implications of multiculturalism.

"For Columbus"[14] is about European domination over the Americas. The poet assumes the voice of the eyewitness. In the first part of the poem, Dabydeen expresses his wish to be hybrid.

I.
When grapes are her breasts
and apples her skin, I am at home.
I long for Italian brothers, Greek sisters,
an African father
        an Indian mother.

I long with the same longing
as the clouds coming down, the sky
about to tilt over
like a ship in a hefty sea.

I long too for a French aunt
who will elegantly raise her a handkerchief

[13] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaver
[14] Poem from the book *Coastland,* published in *Imaginary Origins* 148-149.

in the wind, signalling an archipelago
as I cry out, “Islands, islands!”

The poet’s longing to be hybrid evokes selves of peoples who immigrated to America to colonize the new world—the European, the African and the Asian. The immigrant’s hybridity may also suggest a contrast to the myth of the white conqueror’s purity. The poet registers the difficulties of the trip on the ocean: “the sky / about to tilt over / like a ship in a hefty sea.” These lines also may allude to the turbulent process of the conquest of the Americas.

In the second part, the poet remembers the dominated cultures and violence used to accomplish the explorers’ task.

Now it is you who I remember,
your neck bruised, the shadow
of an axe coming down
in the Tower.

You too, Cortez, as Montezuma burns
inside, his cry resounding in the night;
you with your Quetzalcoatl face,
a helmet still glinting.

Pizarro next,
as I watch the Incas in silver mines
living out a life, buried in sand, their heads
above the ground while the ocean once more
threatens disaster.

This part of the poem tells the story of domination, slavery and termination of the Native American peoples. The poet remembers the natives with their “necks bruised, the

shadow / of an axe coming down." Two conquerors are mentioned in the poem: Cortez and Pizarro. Hernán(do) Cortés Pizarro was a Spanish conqueror who initiated the conquest of the Aztec Empire in the early 16th century. Arriving on the continent, Cortez executed a successful strategy of allying with some indigenous peoples against others.

Cortez had relations with Montezuma, whose "cry resound[s] in the night." Dabydeen describes Cortez as the one with "Quetzalcoatl face." Quetzalcoatl is an Aztec creator god. As the personification of a god, Cortez dominated the superstitious Montezuma. Montezuma was an Aztec ruler and leader of the Aztec Triple Alliance from circa 1502–1520. He is known for being the ruler of the Aztec empire at the beginning of the Spanish conquest of Mexico. During his reign the Aztec Empire reached its maximal size.

The domination of the Incas by Pizarro is the other theme of the second part of the poem. Francisco Pizarro González was the Spanish conqueror of the Inca Empire and founder of Lima, La Ciudad de los Reyes, capital of Peru. He conquered Peru after three attempts. In the third attempt, Pizarro executed Inca chief Atahualpa's 12-man honor guard and took the Inca captive at the so-called ransom room. Despite fulfilling his promise of filling the room he was imprisoned with gold and twice that amount of silver, Atahualpa was convicted of killing his own brother and plotting against Pizarro and his forces, and was executed by garrote on August 29, 1533. In 1572 the last Inca stronghold was discovered, and the last ruler, Túpac Amaru, was captured and executed, bringing the Inca Empire to an end. Túpac Amaru execution is described as it follows: "the shadow / of an axe coming down / in the Tower."

In the third part of the poem, Dabydeen assumes his role as a person whose duty is to register these events. He wears his Crusoe's mask, commanding Friday, and

watching the fall of the Spanish Empire in the Americas after they have taken all they wanted.

III.
With a Crusoe mask, I listen in the distance;
our Friday commands,
the Spanish Empire sinking in the background.
This treasure is all I am left with,
Bible in hand, the sun whipping by,
a lopsided moon sinking lower
    into the bottomless sea.

As I try to jump over it, my *paradiso,*
El Dorado, the heathen sky
falls prostrate
    at my feet.

Dabydeen makes use of references of the English novel *Robinson Crusoe,* written by Daniel Defoe, to criticize the European invasion and conquest of Americas, imposing culture and religion. *Robinson Crusoe,* first published in 1719, is sometimes regarded as the first novel in English. The book is a fictional autobiography of the title character, an English castaway who spends 28 years on a remote tropical island near Venezuela, encountering natives, captives, and mutineers before being rescued. Crusoe may be seen as a symbol of the conquest of Americas. In a sense Crusoe attempts to replicate his own society on the island. This is achieved through the application of European technology, agriculture and even a rudimentary political hierarchy. Several times in the novel Crusoe refers to himself as the king of the island. At the very end of the novel the island is explicitly referred to as a colony. The idealized master-servant relationship Defoe depicts between Crusoe and Friday can also be seen in terms of

cultural imperialism. Crusoe represents the enlightened European while Friday is the savage who can only be redeemed from his supposedly barbarous way of life through the assimilation into Crusoe's culture.

The legacy the European leave to be documented is ironically described as the "treasure" the poet is left with. The Native American were dominated, all the richness were taken to Europe, and the native who were not killed were left in misery and sickness. The hopeless felling that prevails is symbolized by the sun that whips with its heat during the day, and the moon that sinks in the bottomless sea, leaving the land in deep darkness. The imposed European culture over the native's one is represented by the Bible. Dabydeen finishes his records mentioning that all the land of richness is lost forever. The land once named "*paradiso*" and "*El Dorado*" is now only a "heathen sky," as the word 'heathen' suggests, an irreligious, uncivilized, and unenlightened land that falls prostrated at his feet after the conquerors left.

Cyril Dabydeen's critical view of the Canadian policies of immigration, persecution and prejudice against immigrants and Native peoples can be observed throughout his work, as demonstrated here. As his writing matures, he gives less direct indication of his political position concerning the discussion on the issue of immigration but makes references to events in Canadian history, and uses language in a way that allows different readings of his works, as it will be demonstrated in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III: THE MULTIFACED JANUS

The development of Cyril Dabydeen's craft as a writer reflects in the way he writes about multiculturalism policies and immigration, "coupled with reflections of a changing self" (*Imaginary Origins* 11). He continues to express his criticism about the policies and discrimination against immigrants, but he does it in an indirect way, through references to events and figures of Canadian history in order to demonstrate his anxiety about these themes.

In "Sir James Douglas: Father of British Columbia"[15], Dabydeen's ability to write in a way that leaves many openings that allow different readings of his work starts to be revealed. The poem tells the story of Sir James Douglas from the point of view of an immigrant who shares the country of origin and creole stock with the main character of the poem. Interestingly, the references to Sir Douglas' life and actions point both to a criticism of his predominant whiteness over his mixed origin, and to a praise for his accomplishments in founding and sustaining Western Canada.

Sir Douglas is best remembered as the founder of settlement, trade and industry of British Columbia. He was born in Demerara, British Guiana (presently known as Guyana) in 1803. Son of a Scottish Merchant and a free colored woman, he married Amelia Connelly, daughter of New Caledonia's Chief Factor William Connolly and a Cree mother. Sir Douglas' origin is described in the first part of the poem:

[15] Poem from the book *This Planet Earth*, published in *Imaginary Origins* 65.

("What a good a little molasses can do")

1
You were born
where I was born
Demerara's sun in your blood,
Guiana's rain on your skin.
You came from creole stock
taking a native wife
who hardly shadowed
your British pride
with the *dougla* taint.

You're part of my heritage too
despite colonialism
and bending to the rule
for a while.

The sense of inferiority of the native facing the dominant, even when they share the same origin, starts to be felt in the choice of the words used in the poem. The depreciative sense of "creole stock," and expression that is associated with a person of mixed European and African race, not pure, and "the *dougla* taint," this bastard, bad and unpleasant person who spoils the quality of the European settlers' race, expresses discrimination and prejudice. The fact that Sir Douglas married "a native wife / who hardly shadowed" his British pride reinforces the domination of the white-European over the native.

Some of Sir Douglas' accomplishments are listed in the second part of the poem, such as his success in keeping the Americans out of Canada during the period when gold was found on the Fraser River. The region around the Fraser River has

strategic importance. It was the essential route between the Interior and the Lower Coast after the loss on the lands south of the 49th Parallel with the Oregon Treaty of 1846. It was the site of the first recorded settlements of Aboriginal people, the route of multitudes of prospectors during the gold rush and the main vehicle of the province's early commerce and industry. That is the reason why it was important to "let the rabble [Americans] / stay far and wide."

2
Fever on the Fraser River now:
Victoria's ribbed veins
pulsating with the gold-lust.

Settle dispute after dispute
with the Haidas;
sweet smell of molasses
in their veins,
rum dizzying
their minds
while each jewel
formed the dung-
heap of another
claim.

They come from
everywhere now.
Ah, keep the Americans
out, let the rabble
stay far and wide
(de Cosmos, loudest of all).

The references to Sir Douglas relationship with the Haidas may be read as a criticism to his relation with the natives. During the period when he was the chief employer and person in charge of Hudson's Bay Company finances and land, Sir Douglas had a policy to deal with the natives for their land. Costs for each parcel of land were usually in form of blankets, often three for each man. Official historiographers claim that this policy stemmed from a desire to have interactions with natives while avoiding violence. Any similarity with relation between the Portuguese settlers with the Brazilian native is mere coincidence.

The natives mentioned in the poem are the Haidas who were traditionally known as the naked fierce warriors and slave-traders. Their oral narratives record journeys as far north as the Bering Sea and one account implies that even Asia was visited by the Haidas before the Europeans entered the Pacific. The Haidas' ability to travel was dependent upon a supply of ancient Western Red-cedar trees that they carved into their famous Pacific Northwest Canoes.

In the poem, Dabydeen refers to the Haidas' as victims of colonization. At the time of colonial contact, Haidas' population decreased roughly due to European diseases, such as smallpox, typhoid, measles, and syphilis, and violence for the use of alcohol. The jewels of the land, as the poem suggests the natives to be, were wasted for the colonial anxiety to expand the empire. The corpses of the Haidas formed this "dung-/ heap," this nasty pile of animals' excrement. By the choice of words, Dabydeen suggests how the invaders saw the Native peoples.

3
El Dorado of a different kind now.
Note the natives coming
out of their dark days

after the era
of the Hudson Bay Co.
and colonial administration

The third part of the poem is about a more recent period. It starts referring to an “El Dorado of a different kind now.” El Dorado is a legend that began with the story of a South American tribal chief of the Muiscas who covered himself with gold dust and would dive into a lake of pure mountain water. Imagined as a place, El Dorado became a kingdom, an empire, the city of this legendary golden king. The legendary El Dorado filled European explorers’ imagination for two centuries, and the city and people which had given origin to the legend was eventually discovered in Colombia. The Muiscas’ towns and their treasures quickly fell to the conquerors. Taking stock of their newly won territory, the Spanish realized that there were no golden cities, nor even rich mines, since the Muiscas obtained all their gold in trade.

The reference to the natives may be read as an ironic allusion to the present discussions on multiculturalism, in what concerns to them. “Notice the natives coming / out of their dark days / after the era / of the Hudson Bay Co. / and colonial administration.” The establishment of the Hydaburg Reservation for the protection and civilization of the Haidas in 1912 started the process of containment of this native people in these official areas. The delimitation of reservations may be seen as positive, once the native peoples are protected. But one may ask: protected from what? Contemporary science already offers treatment for the diseases that exterminated most of the natives. The creation of reserves seems to be a form of compensation for the natives’ persecution and extermination during colonization. It seems to be the same case of the earlier mentioned poem “Grosse Isle,” in which the creation of a monument in honor of the dead would “stir up / the ghost / of the living” and give them some peace of

mind. In the case of the reservation areas, the settler would be giving back to the natives a few portions of land that was already theirs. To be "out of their dark days," in this sense, seems to be only not being persecuted inside your delimited area.

The poem ends with the following lines, in which the poet ironically talks to Sir Douglas:

> and I remember pouring
> sugar in my tea
> in St. Mungo's city
> where you were educated,
> thinking if you were
> more Scottish
> I'd be less of the tropics.

St. Mungo is a patron saint and founder of the city of Glasgow. Interestingly, Sir Douglas was not sent to Glasgow to be educated, but to Lanark, which was the county town of the former county of Lanarkshire. The poet argues that Sir Douglas had forgotten his Caribbean ancestry, giving value only to his European heritage and education.

In "Weaving Fables[16]" and "Legends[17]," Dabydeen unfolds his many selves. In the introduction to *Imaginary Origins*, he states that he found his truest poetic self "in the crossing of boundaries, and the necessity of looking in different directions," through different points of view (11). The act of assuming different selves allows Dabydeen to demonstrate different positions about the theme he is discussing in his works. *Elephants Make Good Stepladders* is a book in which Dabydeen writes mostly about themes

[16] Poem from the book *Elephants Make Good Stepladders*, published in *Imaginary Origins* 93-95.
[17] Poem from the book *Islands Lovelier than a Vision*, published in *Imaginary Origins* 107-108.

related to his Asian ancestry, and, in some poems, such as “Weaving Fables,” he assumes different selves and brings elements that may be read as a criticism to Canadian multiculturalism policies. “Weaving Fables” tells the story of the Indian people who were taken abroad to the West Indies to work in cotton farms. The poet melancholically remembers his ancestors’ past back in India, the suffering that was imposed to them, and wonders at the possibility of a better future in the new land.

I.
I am Mowgli, Kipling’s
native boy,
the howl of centuries
yet to come.

I am the Bengal tiger, too,
eyes emblazoning
with the outlines
of you face –
solid light in the cave.

Etchings of memory,
body’s heat;
the cotton sea heaves
far from Bombay.

In the first part of the poem, Dabydeen assumes the self of Rudyard Kipling’s character Mowgli, from *The Jungle Book*, first published in 1907. Mowgli is the personification of the natural man in a harmonious relation between nature and society. Mowgli is raised by wild animals in the jungle. Lost by his parents in the Indian jungle during a tiger attack, baby Mowgli is adopted by wolves. Bagheera, the black

panther, befriends Mowgli. Baloo, the bear, has the task of educating Mowgli in the law of the jungle. Due to his adoptive family and friends' education, Mowgli has extraordinary skill at hunting and tracking. *The Jungle Book* tells Mowgli's adventures while living among the animals until the moment when he goes into the village where he finds his adoptive mother, which forces him to come to terms with his humanity and decide to rejoin his fellow humans.

The mention of Mowgli brings a sense of simplicity, natural life, harmony, but the reference to "the howl of centuries / yet to come" gives the reader expectation of a dark future where the howls, these long cries of pain, echo. When Dabydeen assumes to be "the Bengal tiger / eyes emblazoning / with the outlines / of your face," it is unavoidable not to think of Shere Khan, the tiger that tries to kill Mowgli in most of his adventures. In this sense, the tiger seems to be staring at its prey, waiting for the right time to attack and dominate. The reference to the tiger leaves the sense of a great threat that is about to disturb the harmony that Mowgli evokes. The following lines: "the cotton sea heaves / far from Bombay" give the point of view of someone who sees the land from a ship that goes up and down due to the movement of the waves. The Cotton Sea became a commercial slave plantation crop in the West Indies.

In the second and third parts of the poem, the poet makes its imaginary trip back to India. The memory of images that describe India fills the poet's mind.

II.
On squelchy ground
the monsoon rain
slaps hard, as the cattle
keep winding home,
dogs ululating

as a baboon
loudly coughs.

From a spotted window
I persist.
looking for a change of pace –
being near the Arabian
Sea once again.

The way the poet's place of origin is described suggests a difficult life in the country side and his dissatisfaction with his situation. These images bring the idea of life in the new country was hoped to be better than life in India.

In the beginning of the third part of the poem, the poet is still wondering about his adventure and success in his new life.

III.

Astride a dolphin, I am
my own muse,
contemplating a humpbacked whale,
images carrying me further
in time:

the Middle Passage
as I taste sugar,
my molasses tongue
being all
with the shangrila
of a new sun;

The poet sees himself as the mythical figures of his culture that represent adventure and free spirit. His self image as an adventurer excites his expectations to a life in a new land where his dreams can be reached. The new place would be a kind of Shangri-La.[18]

The reference to the Middle Passage fulfills the poem with hopeless feelings. The Middle Passage was the brutal and horrific transportation of Africans across the Atlantic to the plantations of the Caribbean and Americas. Africans were captured and imprisoned in forts on the coast before enduring the inhumane conditions of the Middle Passage, or the way of death. Heaped below deck, in filthy conditions, at least one million Africans lost their lives on the crossing. This reference suggests how reality would reveal itself to the adventurer in the new land, as it can be read in the sequence of the poem, where the poet expresses his disappointment with the reality and what his dreams of a better life turned to be only dreams:

a plantation life,
living in the hovel
I conspire with –
all in a country's
despair.

Crows keep flying low,
circling a tenement
far from Calcutta.
The lotus-eater's dream
is a salve
as I sit close to you

[18] Shangri-La is a mythical, mystical, harmonious valley. It has become synonymous with any earthly paradise, a permanently happy land, isolated from the outside world. The word also evokes the imagery of exoticism of the Orient.

etching vermilion rays,
ringing out a sun's revolution,
my kama sutra body
being all I am left with

as I reach out for a tourist
romance –
palm trees yet swaying,
while I swallow rum and press
my ears to the ground,
genuflecting,
my bones walking out,
with blood gushing –
seeds ready to germinate
a new orchard.

Life in the new land ended up not different to life in India. The poet continues to have an agrarian poor life. Poverty is read in where he lives once a hovel is a house or room that is not fit to live because it is dirty or in very bad condition.

The poet's dream of a better life revealed to be a lotus-eater dream. "The Lotus Eater" is a short story written by Somerset Maugham in 1945. It is the story of Thomas Wilson, and English man who is tired of his life of work in an office in London and sells everything he has to live a life of simplicity and enjoyment in a small cottage in Capri. The difference between the poet and Wilson is what happens after they realize that their dreams are not going to become true. Wilson decides to commit suicide when he runs out of money and becomes insane after failing his attempt. He lives his last six years like a wild animal. When the poet realizes that his body is all that is left with of its Indian origin, a revolution starts to ring out. He begins to prepare himself for a fight like warriors do, praying with their "ears to the ground, / genuflecting," before he bursts in

action. The act of putting the head down and genuflecting may also mean the poet's humility when he recognizes that he failed to reach his goals. Both interpretations suggest the poet's desire to retake his adventure for his dreams. It is not written in the poem how the poet succeeds in his fight for his dreams. But his attitude towards the non-accomplishment of his dreams is going to influence other people to fight for their dreams.

In "Legends," Dabydeen tells his own story as an immigrant. In the first part of the poem, he tells a story of dissatisfaction with his life in the Caribbean and the anxiety for a better life in Canada:

I.

I begin my book of legends
to be other than I am.
I walk across the high bridge,
barefooted in the blistering sun.
I swelter, seeking for shelter
from overhanging trees.

Dismay follows with a young
bull bellowing; my father's lasso
converges. He looks back
as I imagine an outside life –
fishing in Ontario, skiing down
Vancouver mountains –
from glossy magazines.

I am still on the winding path
looking for retreat once in a while.
I continue to be livid

I take further note of the sun.

Dabydeen begins his book of legends in his country of origin, in the Caribbean. He is unsatisfied with his poor farming life and wishes to change his situation, to be other than the poor barefooted farmer. He imagines a better life in Canada, with all the commodities and enjoyment he has seen in glossy magazines. As he comes down from his Canadian dream and realizes that he still is in the Caribbean, he does not give on looking for a quiet place to go in order to get away from its usual life as he feels the sun even hotter than before.

In the second part, already in Canada, Dabydeen's writes about his first years in Canada in the Lake Superior region, as it follows:

II.

Later in Canada, amidst deciduous
tree, I test myself: I am in a
muskeg, hounded by blackflies
and mosquitoes. I plant tree after tree.
I brace against the cold in northern
Ontario – freezing one more time.

In the introduction to *Imaginary Origins*, Dabydeen states that his first three seminal years in the region "contributed to my initial grounding in Canadian literature, with a concomitant sense of the immediacy of the Great White North, always inspiring beauty and awe" (12-13). These were his "own pioneering days, if only as a tree planter" (13). Being in a muskeg, hounded by black flies and mosquitoes and bracing against the cold is clearly the opposite situation to the one he imagined when he was in the Caribbean.

In the third part, the voice of the poem assumes settler self dominating the land and the Native people.

III.

In Kingston I am a founding father
living up to treaties; I bolster
with the old fort: I nurture defence
with brittle skin and flesh;
I grimace as guns keep
firing in my head.

Kingston was originally settled by the French upon a traditional Mississaugas First Nation site called *Katerokwi* – Cataraqui, in the common transliteration. The lines: “I grimace as guns keep / firing in my head” may be read both as the persecution to the Mississaugas or as the capture and destruction of the French Fort Frontenac by the British in the Battle of Fort Frontenac, during the Seven Years' War in 1758.

In the forth part of the poem, the poet assumes the Canadian government’s self.

IV.

In Ottawa I am Governor General
and Prime Minister, too,
Parliament Hill my domain. I look
around: cannons firing from the past,
relived in my dreams. A burning next.
I continue to listen to entreaties.

War Measures Act. My mind festering
solitudes.

The place where the decisions about the country are taken is set. But the place is marked with a history of violence that still haunts the poet's dreams. Dabydeen makes it clear his criticism opinion about the Canadian government positioning on First Nations and immigrants. Their demands for equality and recognition are called entreaties, as a form to express how seriously these issues should be discussed. And his mind, its ruling principle festers because it cannot deal with the relation between the two solitudes—British and French—that dominate the country and the many cultures that form the nation.

In the fifth part, the poet's mother reminds him of himself, of his origin. Dabydeen's long trip and the many places where he lived transformed his own self as he had contact with different cultures and environments.

V.

Finally, my mother, to remind me
of myself, sends a postcard from
Tobago – she on her first holiday
after fifty years or more.
I continue to make humming noises
in my sleep.

The changing self is seen as a positive mark of his character and adventure, once even his mother, after fifty years or more, is having a holiday. Dabydeen closes the poem stating that his self is still under construction. To make "humming noises" in the sleep is a characteristic of someone who is dreaming. Dreams are often used to refer to

one's desire of something different. In this sense, the poem is a suggestion that Dabydeen's self as a poet is in never ending hone process.

In "Discussing Columbus,[19]" Dabydeen uses Christopher Columbus' as an example of someone who seeks for new routs and lands to demonstrate the building of his self as a writer of poetry. He demonstrates his inner revolution and transformation as he observes reality.

> "All the peoples of the world are human"
> *(Bartholomé de las Casas)*
>
> I talk in tongues of newness,
> I fulfil a rage without disdain;
> I am the voice within, I cringe,
> coming to an understanding
> of who I am, where I am going next;
> this Columbus in me, smashing the waves
> into smithereens with bare hands.

The process of self discovery and understanding is not an easy one. As the poet observes reality, he cringes, but his Columbus' spirit does not let it go back and pushes him forward. Through the critical observation of reality, exploring its secrets and facets, the poet discovers himself and his duty as a writer, using a new form of language to describe the world where he lives.

[19] Poem from the book *Discussing Columbus*, published in *Imaginary Origins* 206-207.

Dabydeen sets the poem in the Northwestern region of Canada and Alaska, a region in continuous transformation and discovery process for its rigorous climate and strategic geographic position. The first reference is the Behring Straits[20].

> Next, making much a do about Behring Straits,
> talking myself hoarse at the zenith
> of a totem pole, or grimacing at the bear
> in the sky, I am a shaman at ease
> discussing treaties with the RCMP,
> a constitutional accord, this bleeding self's disdain,
> or all of spruce and jackpine.

During the Cold War, the Bering Straits marked the border between the United States and the Soviet Union. Traditionally, the indigenous peoples in the area had frequently crossed the border back and forth for routine visits, seasonal festivals and subsistence trade, but were prevented from doing so during the Cold War. The border became known as the "Ice Curtain." The political reference to the Behring Straits may also allude to the poet's concern about politics and its consequences in people's lives, specially the policies of multiculturalism in regard to the Native Peoples' lives.

Dabydeen contrasts the European knowledge, culture and religiosity with the Native Peoples' ones. He ironically refers to European individualistic knowledge, culture and religiosity. According to the poem, the European is confused in its attempt to be orientated by the stars, "grimacing at the bear / in the sky," and faces difficulty in

[20] The Bering Straits is a sea strait between Cape Dezhnev, Russia, the easternmost point of the Asian continent and Cape Prince of Wales, Alaska, the westernmost point of the North American continent, slightly south of the polar circle.

the exploration of the land, in opposition to the Native shaman[21], who sees and understands the world as a single huge organism in which all creatures are connected. The poet assumes the self of a native shaman "at ease" while he discusses political treaties with the RCMP, lingering and laughing at boundaries which he does not understand. As the shaman sees himself as part of the world where all the creatures are part of each other and part of the earth, the boundaries imposed to him make no sense. The shaman understands that the land is only one and belongs to all the creatures, which are connected by the endless cycle of life. In this sense, the Native Peoples see themselves as part of every creature, be it an animal like the partridge and the beaver, or vegetal like the spruce and the jack pine, all Canadian national symbols.

The RCMP is a symbol of the European control over the land. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police is the federal, national and paramilitary police force of Canada and one of the most recognized forces in the world[22]. The RCMP is responsible for an unusually large breadth of duties, from policing in isolated rural towns, the far North and urban areas; protection service for the Prime Minister and the Canadian government, visiting dignitaries, and diplomatic missions; enforcement of federal laws, including wire fraud, counterfeiting, and other related matters; counterterrorism and domestic security; and various international policing efforts.

Dabydeen demonstrates the European disrespect to the land and native culture in the following passage:

> Still making memory out of nothing,
> collecting cambium and spitting it out
> at the face of the Great Spirit,

[21] Some anthropologists and religious scholars define a shaman as an intermediary between the natural and spiritual world, who travels between worlds in a state of trance. Once in the spiritual world, the shaman would commune with the spirits for assistance in healing, hunting or weather management.
[22] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rcmp.

the sky golden, a rainbow's own crossing,
the sunset falling under,
this cave, again a sudden divide,
I linger and laugh at other boundaries
which I do not understand…

He points out that the European settlers make "memory out of nothing / collecting cambium and spitting it out / at the face of the Great Spirit," in opposition to the shaman's table of values, where The Great Spirit is a conception of a supreme being prevalent among Native American and First Nations cultures. It is a syncretistic conception of God. By spitting at the face of the Great Spirit, the settlers are spitting at the whole world's face and at the Native people's face consequently. The Natives view of nature as a huge organism where every part is linked, contrasting to the European individualistic culture, is demonstrated in the following lines:

I live with the centuries' folds of skin,
other emblems like shale, rock, an entire shield –
my canoe's surfacing at the heart of a lake
and the partridge yet hops about in the dark,
the sun's pitch-blackness
across this Turtle Island[23].

In the last part of the poem, Dabydeen goes back to his duty as a poetry writer, observer of reality, and calls people to drink from his views on the world.

Drink in me, I entangle and enmesh
all the regions as one, bracing myself
with a tightrope as more waves come in,

23 Turtle Island is a small island located 1.54 km from the Manitoba/Ontario border in Ontario, Canada. The island is named after the snapping turtles that inhabited the area.

the ships' own somersault,
the ground breaking at the horizon,
the sails' language, which I repeat or memorize
on a deserted but peopled land!

He makes more references to his inner revolution and transformation as he observes the world through images of instability, like to walk on a tightrope on a ship in a turbulent sea. Criticism on the European view on the land may be read in the last line of the poem. The occupation of some land is justified when it is empty, which is not Canada's case at the time of colonization. In this sense, the simple imposition of the white-European culture confirms an act of violence against real owners of the land, as well as against the immigrants who built the nation, despite persecution and discrimination.

Dabydeen's poem "Multiculturalism[24]" is maybe the most read in Canada, including the National Library of Canada, in Ottawa, in events that celebrate multiculturalism, despite its negative references to Canadian history and policies of multiculturalism. The poem actually makes a strong criticism to the policies of multiculturalism by mentioning events in Canadian history in which Native Peoples and immigrants were discriminated and persecuted. It starts an imaginary conversation between the poet and Canada.

I continue to sing of other loves,
Places...moments when I am furious,
When you are pale and I am strong
As we come one to another.

[24] http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/Jouvert/v5i1/daby2.htm.

The poet refers to loves more than his own, but all immigrants' love and passion for what they had and still have to go through due to prejudice against them. These other loves he sings about make him furious, so furious that makes his interlocutor pale. During the conversation, Dabydeen remembers places and events that marked Canadian history with discriminatory events.

> The ethnics at our door
> Malingering with heritage,
> My solid breath—like stones breaking.
> At a railway station making much ado about much,
> This boulder and Rocky Mountain,
> CPR... heaving with a head tax
> As I am Chinese in a crowd,
> Japanese at the camps;
> It is also World War 11:
> Panting, I am out of breath.

Rocky Mountain refers to the very beginning of Canadian history as a colony. It is a reference to the explorers who marched into the region from the south in 1540. The introduction of horses, metal tools, rifles, new diseases, and different cultures profoundly changed the Native Peoples cultures. Native Peoples populations were extirpated from most of their historical ranges by disease, warfare, habitat loss, and continued assaults on their culture.

Another memory makes reference to the persecution of Chinese immigrants during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway: "CPR… heaving with a head tax." It is an allusion to the immigration of Chinese people to work in the Canadian Pacific Railway in a regime very close to slavery, and to a tax that was imposed to them when the railway was finished. The workers received between $1 and $2.50 per day, but

had to pay for their own food, clothing, transportation to the job site, mail, and medical care. After two and a half months of hard work, they could earn as little as $16. They did the most dangerous construction jobs, such as working with explosives. The families of the Chinese who were killed received no compensation, or even notification of loss of life. Many of the men who survived did not have enough money to return to their families in China. The head tax stipulated that all Chinese entering Canada would be subjected to a head tax of $50. The tax was mostly to discourage the lower class Chinese from entering, since Canada still welcomed the rich Chinese merchants who could afford the head tax. After the Government of Canada realized that the $50 fee did not effectively eliminate Chinese from entering Canada, the government passed the Chinese Immigration Act of 1900 and 1903, increasing the tax to $100 and $500, respectively (Kamboureli 9).

By referring to the “Japanese at the camps”, Dabydeen remembers the Japanese Canadian internment, which was the forced removal and internment of more than 22,000 Japanese Canadians during World War II by the government of Canada. Following the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, prominent British Columbians, including members of municipal government offices, local newspapers and businesses called for the internment of the Japanese. In British Columbia, there were fears that some Japanese who worked in the fishing industry were charting the coastline for the Japanese navy, acting as spies on Canada's military. Military and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) authorities felt the public's fears were unwarranted, but the public opinion quickly pushed the government to act. Canadian Pacific Railway fired all the Japanese workers, and most other Canadian companies did the same. Japanese fish boats were first confined to port, and eventually, the Canadian navy seized 1,200 of these vessels. Many boats were damaged, and over one hundred sank (Kamboureli, 9).

The memory of many events marked by prejudice makes the poet pant, out of his breath. But he does not stop. He is so furious that he cannot stop. He makes reference to social struggles for equal rights and violent repression of these social movements, as it follows:

So I keep on talking
With blood coursing through my veins:
The heart's call for employment equity,
The rhapsody of police shootings in Toronto;
This gathering of the stars one by one,
Codifying them and calling them planets –
One country really...

Or galaxies of province after province,
A distinct society too –
Quebec or Newfoundland; the Territories...
How far we make a map out of our solitudes,
As we are still Europe, Asia,
Africa; and the Aborigine in me
Suggests love above all else –
The bear's configuration in the sky.
Other places, events; a turbanned RCMP,
These miracles –

The poem also makes reference to images of unity. The lines “This gathering of the stars one by one, / Codifying them and calling them planets” may be read as labeling the many cultures that form the nation. By naming, delimitating the cultures and putting them together, there is an attempt to create an idea of a unified country, “One country really.” The same sense of unity and of an ideal society can be read in: “As we are still Europe, Asia, / Africa; and the Aborigine in me / suggests love

above all else," referring to the native peoples, as well as to the nations where immigrants and colonizers came from, and to the possibility of harmonious relations among these cultures. But there are cultures that insist in sustain their individuality, and even independence of the main root of the nation, like Quebec and Newfoundland. These are both basically white-European parts that claim their separations and sovereignty, while the inclusion of "a turbanned" man in a traditionally white institution like the RCMP is ironically referred as a miracle.

At the end of the poem, there are expressions that can be interpreted in more than one way.

> My heritage and quest, heart throbbing,
> Voices telling me how much I love you,
> YOU LOVE ME; and we're always springing surprises,
> Like vandalism at a Jewish cemetery,
> Or Nelson Mandela's visit to Ottawa
> As I raise a banner high on Parliament Hill –
> Crying "Welcome!" – we are, you are...
> OH CANADA!

The expression "YOU LOVE ME" (in upper case letters) brings the sense of a country that accepts and love immigrants, but can also express irony in regard to the oppression that the immigrants face. The expression "Welcome," written on a banner the poet raises "high on Parliament Hill" for the visit of the worldwide known pacifist Nelson Mandela to Ottawa, reinforces the idea of acceptance of diverse cultures, as the welcoming to a man that fought against prejudice and acceptance of diversity suggest. Therefore, the juxtaposition of this banner with the dark history of immigrants in Canada gives the word a suspicious and ironic tone. The final reference to the Canadian anthem closes the poem with further irony, allowing different readings. The last line of

the poem suggests a celebration of the country through its anthem, but it also has a tone of irony due to the references about discrimination and prejudice against Native Peoples and immigrants.

CONCLUSION

The increasing number of writers from cultural background other than the English and the French has brought a breeze of newness to the subjects and approaches that have been traditionally dominated Canadian literature. According to Mukherjee Arun Prabha, by raising issues such as prejudice and persecution against immigrants and the Native Peoples, these writers challenge the dominant social hierarchy and keep vivid the discussions on multiculturalism and the application of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (*Oppositional Aesthetics* 112). In this sense, Cyril Dabydeen's engagement with memory has contributed to the renewal of Canadian literature as he brings up his memories coupled with reflections about multiculturalism and its effects in immigrants' and native People's lives in his works.

In his first published works in Canada, Dabydeen has presented a poetry and prose permeated with severe criticism to the immigration policies and the imposition of the two dominant cultures over the minor ones. He continued to approach racism, discrimination, prejudice against immigrants and Native People, as well as themes related to the discussion on multiculturalism in his works. Although some of Dabydeen's more recent works have been read as celebratory of the policies of multiculturalism, the close reading and analysis of the poems demonstrated that the maturing of his craft as a writer and permitted him to use language in a way that allows different and sometimes opposite readings. His concern and criticism on the political and social spheres of the country is expressed in references to historical events in which the said minorities were oppressed and persecuted. References to his past back in the Caribbean, coupled with a critical view over Canada's reality reinforces his sense of

being Janus faced, fulfilling his need to look in different directions. For the recognition and acceptance of the minorities that have built and continue to build the country, Dabydeen assumes the voice of the immigrants in the quest for dignity and identity.

Born in South-America, he also expresses his anxiety about Brazil. His poetry crosses boundaries and makes references to the problematic of immigration and the issue of multiculturalism, which are not only a Canadian concern.

BRAZIL

I have watched Brazil
on the screen like a wound
that needs dressing

I dislike Copacabana for its
waves that do not lash

I watch the boy with one eye gone
hoping that he will appear
like Orpheus

with his guitar to take
the sun
by surprise

In the meantime, I understand
the shame of the outhouse
without doors

the bathroom
without cover

and I am confused in Canada
because I can hardly shake a fist
at the wind. I am too tame.

Sun, do not rob me of this anger.

Dabydeen describes Brazil as “a wound / that needs dressing.” He is critical firstly to his impression of the Brazilian apathy facing the country political and social problems. The stereotype of the easygoing and unworried people is sustained in Copacabana, one of the most famous landmarks of Rio de Janeiro for its beauty, but also marked by violence, prostitution and drug dealing. In spite of all these dark traces, the Brazilians continue to live concerned only with *Carnaval* and football, according to the same stereotype. The worldwide image of a people that wish to take advantage of the others with the said *jeitinho brasileiro* is present in the reference to Orpheus.

Orpheus was believed to be one of the chief poets and musicians of antiquity, and the inventor of the lyre. It was said, that with his music and singing, he could charm wild beasts, coax the trees and rocks into dance, and even divert the course of rivers. It may be an allusion to the way the Brazilian people would defeat poverty and violence with their music as Orpheus tried to bring his wife Eurydice with him from the underworld after her death by touching the nymphs and gods heart with sad mournfully played songs.

Dabydeen feels touched by the misery he describes, but he is also confused. He sees the Brazil’s problems as well as he sees Canada’s ones. And the same way as he sees the Brazilian people, he feels that he is tamed too. He begs the sun not to rob him of this anger, of this need to shake his fist in protest against inequality and prejudice. Seeing and describing reality in riddles is his duty as a writer. Therefore, he

continues to write, subverting the language of the dominant and using it to express his concern about the immigrants' social struggle.

In the recent *Born in Amazonia*, Dabydeen depicts the Amazon forest and its myths mixing, as Miguel Nenevé asserts in his study entitled "Linking Canada to South-America and the Caribbean," "legends of South-American and Guyanese beliefs and experiences with the Canadian imagination" (2). Nenevé further comments that "it is possible to say that the book is a stimulus for the reader to reflect on the ecological issues and on the ongoing social and historical forces that are present in the Amazon region and which are hinted by the author" (6). By writing about the nature, myths of anthropomorphized animals, and Native Amazon People, the poet seems to use these images the same way he used the image of the shaman in the poem "Discussing Columbus." He evokes traditionally known symbols of the link between the real and the spiritual world to remind the reader that all creatures, including the humans, are part of a greater world where every being plays a role in order to sustain harmony.

The study of Cyril Dabydeen's works is relatively new. This thesis will contribute to future studies on Dabydeen or other writers who deal with diaspora, literature of the minorities and studies related to the issue of multiculturalism. The discussion about such themes also takes place in Brazil, as we live in a multicultural society too. Thus, the reflections suggested here may also contribute to the discussions about ethnicity, racial struggle, and marginalization of the 'visible' minorities in our country, in the light of Dabydeen's portraits of Brazil in his poetry.

REFERENCES

Bannerji, Himani. “On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of ‘Canada’”. *Journal of Canadian Studies*. Fall 1996.

Birbalsingh, Frank. “Here and There.” Interview with Cyril Dabydeen. Frank Birbalsingh. 16 March 1991. Transcript. *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996.

Bissoondath, Neil. *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada.* Toronto: Penguin, 1994.

Dabydeen, Cyril. *Born in Amazonia*. Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1995.

---. *Imaginary Origins: Selected Poems 1970-2002*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2004.

---. Introduction. *A Shapely fire: Changing the Literary Landscape*. Ed. Dabydeen, Cyril. Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1987. 9-12.

Frye, Northrop. Introduction. *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: Anansi, 1971.

Hutcheon, Linda. Introduction. *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*. Ed. Hutcheon, Linda, Richmond, Marion. Ontario: Oxford UP, 1990. 1-16.

Kamboureli, Smaro. Introduction. *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature*. Ed. Kamboureli, Smaro. Ontario: Oxford UP, 1996. 1-16.

Mukherjee, Arun Prabha. *Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space*. Toronto: TSAR Publications, 1994.

APPENDIX

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

R.S.C 1985, Chap. 24 (4th Supp.);

[1988, c. 31, assented to 21st July, 1988]

An Act for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada

[*1988, c. 31, assented to 21st July, 1988*]

WHEREAS the Constitution of Canada provides that every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination and that everyone has the freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association and guarantees those rights and freedoms equally to male and female persons;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution of Canada recognizes the importance of preserving and enhancing the multicultural heritage of Canadians;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution of Canada recognizes rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution of Canada and the *Official Languages Act* provide that English and French are the official languages of Canada and neither abrogates nor derogates from any rights or privileges acquired or enjoyed with respect to any other language;

AND WHEREAS the *Citizenship Act* provides that all Canadians, whether by birth or by choice, enjoy equal status, are entitled to the same rights, powers and privileges and are subject to the same obligations, duties and liabilities;

AND WHEREAS the *Canadian Human Rights Act* provides that every individual should have an equal opportunity with other individuals to make the life that the individual is able and wishes to have, consistent with the duties and obligations of that individual as a member of society, and, in order to secure that opportunity, establishes the Canadian Human Rights Commission to redress any proscribed discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin or colour;

AND WHEREAS Canada is a party to the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, which Convention recognizes that all human beings are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law against any discrimination and against any incitement to discrimination, and to the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, which Covenant provides that persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion or to use their own language;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada;

NOW, THEREFORE, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:

SHORT TITLE

1. This Act may be cited as the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*.

INTERPRETATION

2. In this Act,

"federal institution" means any of the following institutions of the Government of Canada:

(*a*) a department, board, commission or council, or other body or office, established to perform a governmental function by or pursuant to an Act of Parliament or by or under the authority of the Governor in Council, and

(*b*) a departmental corporation or Crown corporation as defined in section 2 of the *Financial Administration Act*,

but does not include

(*c*) any institution of the Council or government of the Northwest Territories or the Yukon Territory, or

(*d*) any Indian band, band council or other body established to perform a governmental function in relation to an Indian band or other group of aboriginal people;

"Minister" means such member of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada as is designated by the Governor in Council as the Minister for the purposes of this Act.

MULTICULTURALISM POLICY OF CANADA

3. (1) It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to

(*a*) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage;

(*b*) recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian heritage and identity and that it provides an invaluable resource in the shaping of Canada's future;

(*c*) promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in the elimination of any barrier to that participation;

(*d*) recognize the existence of communities whose members share a common origin and their historic contribution to Canadian society, and enhance their development;

(*e*) ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity;

(*f*) encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada's multicultural character;

(*g*) promote the understanding and creativity that arise from the interaction between individuals and communities of different origins;

(*h*) foster the recognition and appreciation of the diverse cultures of Canadian society and promote the reflection and the evolving expressions of those cultures;

(*i*) preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada; and

(*j*) advance multiculturalism throughout Canada in harmony with the national commitment to the official languages of Canada.

(2) It is further declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada that all federal institutions shall

(*a*) ensure that Canadians of all origins have an equal opportunity to obtain employment and advancement in those institutions;

(*b*) promote policies, programs and practices that enhance the ability of individuals and communities of all origins to contribute to the continuing evolution of Canada;

(*c*) promote policies, programs and practices that enhance the understanding of and respect for the diversity of the members of Canadian society;

(*d*) collect statistical data in order to enable the development of policies, programs and practices that are sensitive and responsive to the multicultural reality of Canada;

(*e*) make use, as appropriate, of the language skills and cultural understanding of individuals of all origins; and

(*f*) generally, carry on their activities in a manner that is sensitive and responsive to the multicultural reality of Canada.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MULTICULTURALISM POLICY OF CANADA

4. The Minister, in consultation with other ministers of the Crown, shall encourage and promote a coordinated approach to the implementation of the multiculturalism policy of Canada and may provide advice and assistance in the development and implementation of programs and practices in support of the policy.

5. (1) The Minister shall take such measures as the Minister considers appropriate to implement the multiculturalism policy of Canada and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, may

(*a*) encourage and assist individuals, organizations and institutions to project the multicultural reality of Canada in their activities in Canada and abroad;

(*b*) undertake and assist research relating to Canadian multiculturalism and foster scholarship in the field;

(*c*) encourage and promote exchanges and cooperation among the diverse communities of Canada;

(*d*) encourage and assist the business community, labour organizations, voluntary and other private organizations, as well as public institutions, in ensuring full participation in Canadian society, including the social and economic aspects, of individuals of all origins and their communities, and in promoting respect and appreciation for the multicultural reality of Canada;

(*e*) encourage the preservation, enhancement, sharing and evolving expression of the multicultural heritage of Canada;

(*f*) facilitate the acquisition, retention and use of all languages that contribute to the multicultural heritage of Canada;

(*g*) assist ethno-cultural minority communities to conduct activities with a view to overcoming any discriminatory barrier and, in particular, discrimination based on race or national or ethnic origin;

(*h*) provide support to individuals, groups or organizations for the purpose of preserving, enhancing and promoting multiculturalism in Canada; and

(*i*) undertake such other projects or programs in respect of multiculturalism, not by law assigned to any other federal institution, as are designed to promote the multiculturalism policy of Canada.

(2) The Minister may enter into an agreement or arrangement with any province respecting the implementation of the multiculturalism policy of Canada.

(3) The Minister may, with the approval of the Governor in Council, enter into an agreement or arrangement with the government of any foreign state in order to foster the multicultural character of Canada.

6. (1) The ministers of the Crown, other than the Minister, shall, in the execution of their respective mandates, take such measures as they consider appropriate to implement the multiculturalism policy of Canada.

(2) A minister of the Crown, other than the Minister, may enter into an agreement or arrangement with any province respecting the implementation of the multiculturalism policy of Canada.

7. (1) The Minister may establish an advisory committee to advise and assist the Minister on the implementation of this Act and any other matter relating to multiculturalism and, in consultation with such organizations representing multicultural interests as the Minister deems appropriate, may appoint the members and designate the chairman and other officers of the committee.

(2) Each member of the advisory committee shall be paid such remuneration for the member's services as may be fixed by the Minister and is entitled to be paid the reasonable travel and living expenses incurred by the member while absent from the member's ordinary place of residence in connection with the work of the committee.

(3) The chairman of the advisory committee shall, within four months after the end of each fiscal year, submit to the Minister a report on the activities of the committee for that year and on any other matter relating to the implementation of the multiculturalism policy of Canada that the chairman considers appropriate.

GENERAL

8. The Minister shall cause to be laid before each House of Parliament, not later than the fifth sitting day of that House after January 31 next following the end of each fiscal year, a report on the operation of this Act for that fiscal year.

9. The operation of this Act and any report made pursuant to section 8 shall be reviewed on a permanent basis by such committee of the House, of the Senate or of both Houses of Parliament as may be designated or established for the purpose.

AMENDMENT

— 1993, c. 28, s. 78 (Sch. III, s. 16):

16. Paragraph (*c*) of the definition "federal institution" in section 2 is repealed and the following substituted therefor:

(*c*) any institution of the Council or government of the Northwest Territories or the Yukon Territory or of the Legislative Assembly for, or the government of, Nunavut, or