John Major Richardson is considered to be Canada’s first novelist, whose works have long been integrated in the official English-Canadian narrative of nation, marking the beginnings of Canadian literary tradition. I will focus in my paper on his two best-known fiction works – Wacousta and its sequel, the Canadian Brothers, as two examples of the way in which Richardson made use of history in his novels, as well as of his biased perspective on the war and on the parties involved, from the perspective of image studies (imagologie in German and French). Image studies explore the connection between the constitution of nationhood and its literary representations, in terms of national autoimages and the recurrence of these autoimages in the works accepted as part of the literary canon (Leerssen). Historical narratives, on the other hand, are verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found, and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in science. Northrop Frye has remarked that the comprehensiveness of a historical piece of text is related to its mythical shape. Historian R. G. Colingwood also insisted that historian is above all a storyteller and suggested that historical sensibility was manifested in the capacity to make a plausible story out of a series of acts that in their unprocessed form did not have a coherent sense (White 1992, 83). Hayden White goes on to deconstruct the process of history writing. In his essay “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” (1978), he insists on the existence of only isolated historical elements, which are made into a story – emplotted – by the historian through the suppression or subordination of some of them and the highlighting of others, in a process similar to that of literature writing. According to White, historical events do not posses an intrinsic value when considered potential elements of a story – they are neutral and their subsequent casting into one plot structure or another depends on the historian’s decision. Extending this and applying it to image theorist Joep Leerssen’s theories on the constitution of nationhood (Leerssen), we can argue that the creation of the very discourse of national identity is connected to a process of emplotment, whereby the members of
the group choose to ignore certain dissimilar features, including historical details. In doing so, they pit their common features against those of another group through a process of selection and subordination similar to the one White considers in the construction of historical fiction.

Although he was not, properly speaking, a historian, (despite his attempts to write a history of the 1812 War), Richardson did use historical elements in his construction of fiction, operating a similar process of selection and subordination; as a result, the image of a hostile American Other emerges from his writings, common enemy opposing the British rule in Canada. Without entering into the controversy regarding the writing of history or the impact of the historian’s subjectivity on constructing the plot, for the purposes of this paper, I will discuss a few instances of Richardson’s emplotment of history in his novels, that parallel the author’s assumptions on his own ethnic and national identity. In discussing the process whereby Richardson emploted history in his novels, we need to keep in mind the fact that the historical novels which flourished in the Romantic age of the early 19th century were marked by the national feeling that pervaded Europe (and North America, for that matter) in the wake of the French Revolution. This particular genre, which Richardson exploited, helped connect individuals with some remarkable event in the history of the nation they belonged to (typically one of the national founding myths), thus allowing for a deeper feeling of identification between the two (Sparling). Through his mix of history and fiction, Richardson manages to present his readers with a romanticized image of the Canadian past, as distinct from an American, but also from a British past. Writing history almost always involves a certain level of re-writing, and in Hayden White’s formalist reading, the historian makes history intelligible to the reader by encoding events in a pattern that will be recognizable to his audience. The main patterns along which this encoding process takes place in Richardson’s work are the symbolic construction of space, attitudes towards the natives, and the distinction he makes (especially in the Canadian Brothers) between Canadian/British/American.

What is particularly interesting in Richardson’s reworking of the past is that, in a way, he is anticipating what White calls elsewhere the “new genre of postmodernist parahistorical representation” (White 1999, 67), which is in fact a mixture of fact and fiction, allegedly triggered by the loss of authority of the event in modernist historiography, and which subsequently led to the loss of the taboo on the mixing of fact and
The 19th century historical novel is characterized by the interference between an imaginary set of events – usually the romance – and the real events – that constitute the historical backdrop of the story. But in the case of the traditional 19th century historical novel, the interplay between fiction and fact merely serves to give concreteness to the imaginary events, while rendering familiar the past, exotic because of the distance separating it from the reader. Richardson goes beyond this clear separation of fact and fiction in *The Canadian Brothers*, when he manipulates the events – tampering with time and thus blurring the border between fact and fiction for the sake of his story. It is from this perspective that we can say that his novels anticipate the “postmodernist historical metafiction” through “the placing in abeyance of the distinction between the real and the imaginary”. Fictional adventures of his heroes and true information about the Indian attacks are presented as if they “were of the same ontological order, both real and imaginary – realistically imaginary or imaginarily real, with the result that the referential function of the images of events is etiolated” (White 1999, 67-68).

As Homi Bhabha noted in his “Introduction” to *Nation and Narration*, the origins of nations, just as the origins of narratives, are lost in the intertextual fog, vanishing in the myth of time (1990). The objective idea of a historical nation is triggered by an entire tradition of political thought and literary language, hence the ambivalence of the idea of nation, in terms of the tension between those who write it and those whose lives make up the very fabric of this nation. What historians may identify as a discrete entity, whose origins can be clearly traced, is in fact a much more transitional social reality. As far as the identity issue is concerned, it is clear that Richardson considered himself neither *Canadien* (this French-Canadian term used to designate the inhabitants of the former French colony), nor Canadian, as the latter term did not exist at the time in today’s acceptation, although it is used in the *Canadian Brothers*. He was neither British, nor American; defining his identity is further complicated by his cosmopolitan upbringing and, most importantly, by his Amerindian roots. Richardson’s

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1 Hayden White noted the connection between history writing and the influence exerted on it by the dominant mode of fiction writing. In his essay “The Modernist Event” (1999), he analyzes the connection between modernist strategies of fiction writing and history writing. The nineteenth century realist novel was based on the interplay between plot, event and character, and, as White showed in *Metahistory*, the same pattern could be found in the historiography of the time.
construction of Otherness is proof of his attempts at reconciling his conflicting identities; his representations of Indians and British officers are marked by ideology, in fashions reminding of Homi Bhabha’s comments on stereotypical representations of the Other, each hinting at one particular cultural space, with its own set of attributes and limitations, while landscape itself becomes the isomorphic correspondent of these two symbolic areas.

_Wacousta_ is a Gothic tale of a feud carried by Englishmen from the Old to the New World, similar to Fenimore Cooper’s writings of the frontier, and indirectly owing to Walter Scott’s fascination with the historical novel; the novel’s mental profile is undoubtedly marked by its author’s present realities, namely the post 1812 War years. In writing _Wacousta_, Richardson exploited the story of Pontiacs’ siege of Detroit, in 1763, with which he had been familiar since his boyhood, through his grandmother’s tales. Back in Europe, when subalterns in the same regiment, Colonel De Haldimar had stolen the bride of Wacousta, the Warrior of the Fleur de Lis, at the time known as Reginald Morton. In his rage against not only his rival, but against everything he stood for, army included, Morton abandons the British army and eventually enters a French corps at Quebec. Driven by his desire to get his revenge, he becomes a genuine Indian chief, excelling in cruelty, strength and cunning; _Wacousta_ will follow his passionate revenge against De Haldimar and his family. The plot combines these fictional elements with a clearly determined, historically documented background, so that the attacks of the Indians on Michilimackinac and Detroit are linked with the personal fates of the heroes. The (Canadian) past thus becomes romanticized, understandable and graspable, despite the exoticism that distance gives it in the eyes of Richardson’s 19th century readers.

In his dealing with the new British North American space, Richarson, using the colonial cultural code of the metropolitan public he was trying to attract, withholds from his readers the historically determined context, delivering instead romantic stereotypes of the natives and inhabitants of frontier – forest demons, whites turned native in a Kurtzian fashion, and noble British officers. Similarly, the imagotype of the North American frontier he chose to remember and present, continues the European tradition of exoticism – rich and mysterious wilderness, awaiting the civilizing hand of the white

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2 The Canadas the author speaks of did not even exist at the time when the plot is set (1763).
man, a space inhabited by violent Indians performing bloody rituals on their war prisoners. Stereotypes of an exoticism whose roots are in Europe, at least at a superficial level, Richardson’s forest and his Indians are Others resistant to analysis, picturesque margins that only reconfirm the superiority of the metropolitan centre. No historical explanation seems possible for either of them, but they share the basic ingredients of the Romantic sublime – awe and terror. Even the presentation of the Canadas Richardson makes in the opening of *Wacous*ta clearly alludes to such a direction:

> All who have ever taken the trouble to inform themselves of the features of a country so little interesting to the majority of Englishmen in their individual character must be aware, – and for the information of those who are not, we state – that that portion of the northern continent of America which is known as the United States is divided from the Canadas by a continuous chain of lakes and rivers, commencing at the ocean into which they empty themselves, and extending in a north-western direction to the remotest parts of these wild regions, which have never yet been pressed by other footsteps than those of the native hunters of the soil (Richardson 1832, 2).

As a result of this simplistic division of characters and of space, the main opposition structuring the narrative in *Wacous*ta is New World/Old World, Europeans/non-Europeans, white/Natives, civilization/savagery, the whole embodied in the constant interplay and opposition of the foreground (garrison) and backdrop (forest, Indian-inhabited wilderness), divisions which structure his construction of space along clearly cut lines. As part of this opposition, the presence of the French Canadians is somewhat blurred. In fact, the fate of the Canadians, as Richardson calls them, is dealt with only cursorily in the *Introduction*. Their cultural legacy is of no consequence to Richardson’s orderly world. The French *coureurs de bois* are regarded from the perspective of the dichotomy civilisation/barbarism that structures the novel; consequently they are quickly assimilated to one side or the other. Furthermore, Richardson’s oversimplified description of the gradual changes undergone by the administration of the Canadian provinces and the subsequent sets of alliances testifies for an edulcorated image of history. The history that comes out of his novels matches his idea of a happy British North American nation, with decorative French Canadians, mainly relegated to the position of semi-native, highly picturesque *coureurs des bois*, throughout the two novels under discussion here, and with equally picturesque, albeit a little more dangerous Indians; interestingly enough,
despite his own Métis background, or perhaps because of this, in *Wacousta*, Richardson distances himself from the wild, forest-dweller Amerindians, repressing his own racial allegiance in favour of a more European/colonial stance. And equally interesting, in *Wacousta*, the term Canadian refers strictly to the French Canadian inhabitants of the land.

In the *Canadian Brothers* the negative characters are no longer the Indians, converted spectacularly from foes into friends. Designed as a sequel to *Wacousta*, the novel exploits to the maximum the historical experiences Richardson had witnessed; the love story between Gerald Grantham, an heir of De Haldimar, and mysterious Matilda de Montogmery, a daughter of Desborough and descendent of Wacousta, unfolds on the background of the War of 1812-13. The place occupied by the Indians in the economy of the novel is taken by the Yankees who are ascribed all the negative features necessary for the organisation of stereotypical heteroimages along the axes of ideology and utopia (Ricoeur). This organisation of images is particularly treacherous in Richardson’s prose, due to his mixed racial and national allegiance, as his perspective tends to change and the patterns of identification tend to vary. Thus, the image of the British Other is *utopian*, in the reading that Paul Ricoeur gives to this term (386), allocentrical, Other-oriented – the British being seen as belonging to an alternative order, rich in potentialities denied to the Canadian born. However, the image of the Yankee Other, equally seen from a Canadian perspective, is *ideological*, ethnocentrical and self-oriented. In *Wacousta*’s sequel, the American individualist exists as a metaphor of destruction. Since the paternalistic values Richardson upholds throughout his novel are based on the ideas of community, hierarchy, loyalty and parental relations, the Yankee individualist inhabiting the *Canadian Brothers* is fighting the very ideas of tradition and history and is dealt with as the enemy of civil community in Canada.

*The Canadian Brothers* replaces the racial civilization/savagery opposition structuring *Wacousta* with the opposition between the Americans and the Canadians, this time from a cultural and national perspective, the natives being relegated to the role of exotic and decorative elements in a picturesque North American frontier. If *Wacousta* presents the clash between the Old World and the New World, whereby the imagotype of the British is opposed to that of the inhabitant of the new world, the Indian and the French *coureurs de bois*, represents an intermediary phase in *The Canadian Brothers*; here the “Other” moves on to the continental level. We are no longer dealing with a racial Other, but with a national Other, the differences between the
two warring nations in *The Canadian Brothers* being far subtler than the racial or linguistic one that dominated Wacousta, a fact that accounts for the emergence of an abstract “imagined community” (Anderson).

The reinforcement just arriving was composed principally of warriors who had never yet pressed a soil wherein civilization had extended her influence – men who had never hitherto beheld the face of a white, unless it were that of the Canadian trader […]. Firm of step – proud of mien – haughty yet penetrating of look, each leader offered in his own person a model to the sculptor, which he might vainly seek elsewhere. Free and unfettered in every limb, they moved in the majesty of nature, and with an air of dark reserve, passed, on landing, through the admiring crowd (Richardson 1976, 11).

The symbolic reunification of the Old and the New Worlds in Richardson’s work is manifest in his organization of space and time, as well as in the construction of his characters. The space the latter inhabit is hauntingly dual, split, while the resulting topography complements the contrasting character types. *Wacousta* and *The Canadian Brothers* stand for an entire cosmology of early Canadiannes, whose characters are the epitomes of the Apollinian-Dyonisian dual world they delineate. In fact they are translating for the metropolitan audience a world of alien experience, focusing on the collision between the old and the new, Europe and North America: the British officers in *Wacousta* and in the *Canadian Brothers* inhabit an ordered, balanced space that reproduces the rigid, cold rules that had structured their metropolitan world. On the other hand, the Indians, as well as Wacousta and his American descendants, symbolically oppose the values upheld by the garrison. The dichotomy savagery/civilisation, at work in *Wacousta*, is distilled into the clash instinct/reason in *The Canadian Brothers* and it is interesting to note the translation of the attributes of instinctuality, savagery and violence from the imagotype of the Indian to that of the American. Thus, the direct descendants of Wacousta – Desborough and Matilda – are opposed to the descendants of Colonel de Haldimar – Major Grantham, stern judge and fervent supporter of the British allegiance, and his sons Gerald and Henry; on the other hand, passion is the key word for the American frontiersman isolated in the bush – Desborough, and for his daughter, Matilda – who pursue their own form of vengeance in the same intense way as their ancestor, disrupting the harmony of the reason-ruled world of the Granthams, first by murder, then by love.
Richardson’s prose is constantly imbued with the filiative relationship with British culture; at the same time, a need for “indigeneity”, of the Canadian specific, is perceivable. This longing for authenticity can be traced in Richardson’s particular approach to the Canadian-born whites, (such as the Grantham brothers); or to the French Canadian coureurs de bois and the Indians in Wacousta. They all belong to a space that is “non-British”, hence different from the motherland and its European inheritance; in order to underscore their indigeneity, Richardson emphasizes the particular relationship that the inhabitants of the new colony had with the universe. This original relation is not described as a return to origins – especially since these origins would be unavoidably European – but rather as a Romantic return to the origins of humankind: the savage man, communion with nature, closeness to the land (Duffy). Thus, the Indians and the coureurs de bois have unparalleled knowledge of the land; the Granthams are also able to scout in the woods and to emerge safe and sound from storms and natural disasters due to their natural, apparently innate abilities to connect with the new land. Consequently, the imagotypes used to describe the other inhabitants of the colonies will resort to the exotic imagery of the Romantics – closeness to nature, simplicity of feeling and of manner, frugality and stoicism; the communion with the land/nature seems to be an unavoidable step in the shaping of a colonial selfhood. Such an approach, especially in the case of the Canadian-born Granthams, permits the coexistence of the old colonial allegiance with loyalty to the new land to whom they are mysteriously connected.

History is re-read and re-written in order to match the colonial version of things, and a deconstruction of this re-reading of history through colonial lenses, as perceivable in Richardson’s prose, allows for a further exploration of the settler identity. The stereotypes he uses are intertextual constructs, stemming from the conventions and commonplaces inherited from the pre-existing British textual tradition and at times purposely overshadowing Richardson’s memories and experience of reality. Ever since Socrates and Plato, discussions on memory can not avoid the use of metaphor, either spatial or temporal. Nonetheless, the construction of cultural (collective) memory does not necessarily entail some form of ‘metaphysical spiritualization’. The social frames (schemes) will determine the patterns of memory that the individual creates for him/herself, and more or less will dictate what is valuable and even necessary to remember, or what can or must be forgotten. Cultural memory, therefore, is a key element in the construction of his/her identity, as part of the discourse of a certain
community, because our memory recalls personal experience interpreting it through social frames (Halbwachs).

Richardson’s reconstruction of the recent past is similarly marked by the patterns of memory he shared with his contemporaries, just as much as it is influenced by his own memories of the war. The clash between the above mentioned subjectivised reading of history and the resulting construction of the characters that inhabit Richardson’s prose can be analysed at a temporal level. If the political history that constitutes the background of the story evolves in a linear, progressive time, the image of the characters is characterised by a cyclical, reversible time frame, represented by the alternations between the cyclical time of images – stereotypes about the natives, British, etc. – and the linear time of the narrative. Thus, when Wacousta turns native, he exits the linear time of the chronologically oriented western world, entering a realm where he remains virtually unchanged throughout the novel. The stereotypical constructions of the characters that are construed so as to mirror the underlying assumptions which shaped Richardson’s world view and “re-written memories” belong to an almost mythical past – hence this cyclical time they inhabit. The historical time, on the other hand, is linear; it constitutes the background against which these archetypal figures evolve, embodying the stereotypical figures of deeply engrained categories: the bad Yankees, the wild Indians, the noble British, the confused yet equally noble Canadians. History itself, as chronological datum, is occasionally manipulated by the author, either for the sake of narrative, or for the sake of “translating” Canadian realities into a more palatable form to a British, but also American audience. The textual history of Wacousta and The Canadian Brothers reveals that the texts were dramatically bowdlerized by American publishers in order to suit the tastes of the American public³, the best known example being that of the “adapted” edition of Wacousta, but also of the Americanized version of the Canadian

³ Adam Waldie of Philadelphia pirated Richardson’s novel within four months since its publication in London, operating transformations (about 15 000 words were eliminated) that turned Wacousta from a pro-British, pro-Canadian historical novel into a non-British, non-Canadian novel (cf. Cronk). Also, when Richardson moved to New York, in order to lure the American audience, he reissued the Canadian Brothers into an edition named Matilda Montgomerie, “americanised” not by a dramatic alteration of the plot, but by a reduction of Canadian characteristics.
Brothers, published under the title Matilda Montgomery. Thus, in order to construct a spectacular climax of a British-Canadian triumph in The Canadian Brothers, the author slightly alters the historical facts: the battle of Queenston Heights is placed in 1813, rather than in 1812, as it happened. Interestingly enough, his preface to the novel shows that he took such understanding for granted on the part of the reader, who is equally expected to condone the introduction of Tecumseh into the narrative “somewhat earlier than the strict facts would justify”. Of particular interest are the historical facts that could not be adapted, and which Richardson, in his concern for his metropolitan audience, tried to render more palatable – namely the alliance with the Indians against the Americans in the 1812 War. Thus, The Canadian Brothers, like his War of 1812, opens with fictional and nonfictional apologies that are trying to explain the cooperation of the British with the Indians in the 1812 War, finding justifications for an alliance that might have seemed unusual to the British reading public (Duffy, 78).

Clearly, two discrete items – Indians and Empire – are at work in the shaping of Richardson’s identity; this is why his coping with the co-operation of the British with the Indians in his novels, through the above-mentioned explanations, is significant as a mediating strategy between the two cultural and racial spaces he inhabited equally. We have seen so far how the imaginary Canada that was taking shape in Richardson’s prose was constructed, from the interplay between the Old World elements with the New World realities, from the interplay of two distinct identities – the British subject and the settler. Even the name that the resulting hybrid identity of the New world settler colonist is to be given – Canadian – can be the topic of a ‘terminological’ confusion. The term “Canadian” is used for the first time in 1568 as an adjective, referring to the inhabitants of the North American territories, probably native or French Canadian. The first use of the term with reference to the Canadian nation goes back to 1862, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. Susanna Moodie uses the term with reference to the Native inhabitants of the colonies in Roughing it in the Bush, published in 1852, (though recounting her experiences of settling in Upper Canada in the 1830s). As for Richardson, his use of the word “Canadian” is inconsistent. Thus, in the introduction to Wacousta, the full title of which is Wacousta or the Profecy – a Tale of the Canadas (1832) the adjective “Canadian” refers to the French Canadian inhabitants of the colonies (Richardson 1832, 13-15), while in the Canadian Brothers (1840) it already hints at a certain British North American identity as distinct from either British or American. In the latter novel, however, the implicit hierarchical relations assumed in
claiming a British versus a “Canadian” identity are more clearly expressed than in *Wacousta*. *The Canadian Brothers* can be said to be an early attempt, maybe the earliest, at giving expression to a spirit of Canadian nationality, and this is visible from the opening chapters, when Canadian not only designates a native of the colony, but is also perceived as an insult – the insult of not being British. Richardson’s treatment of Canadianness is proof of a strategy of identity construction: on the one hand it is the constant support of the paternalistic ties with the metropolis, expressed in a rich family imagery, gravitating around the mother-daughter relationship of the colonies to Britain. On the other hand, this mechanism of self-identification is constructed from a double perspective and hierarchical assumption: that the superiority of the British stock over the colonists is paralleled by the cultural superiority of the British North American settlers over their Yankee counterpart, mainly due to those features that stood in fact for their British legacy.

To conclude, in his (more or less innocent) manipulations of historical events for the sake of literary suspense, in his ambiguous treatment of the Indians and their relationship to the representatives of the Empire, and in his construction of the Yankee imagotype as metaphor of destruction, Richardson’s narrating of the British North American nation (to use Homi Bhabha’s expression) owes a lot to his mixed racial background, to his imperial allegiance, as well as to the ambiguous feelings aroused by the division of North America between Britain and the United States. After all, Richardson’s British North America of the mid-19th century was merely a construct that resulted in the wake of the American Revolution, in a time when every boundary line on the maps of British America marked a new, more fragile identity that had followed the loss of another, encompassing one – that of the British colonist/settler. Consequently, time and space intersect in Richardson’s symbolically constructed British Canada, inhabited by savage Indians, converted by need from foes to friends; equally savagely passionate Americans, converted from friends into foes; British officers and Canadian-born soldiers, trapped between the old sets of allegiances and the new patterns taking shape under their eyes. The resulting narrative Richardson is ultimately trying to create is that of a new social space; corresponding to this new social space there is an equally new racial and territorial identity that would ensure the transition from Empire to the New World, assimilating the native element – either Indian legacy or natural spirit of the land – into the more encompassing, though not yet clearly defined identity of the British North American colonist.
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