

## **HYPHENATED IDENTITY AND MYTHS OF WORLD CREATION LEAD TO A HAPPY ENDING, IN HIROMI GOTO'S *CHORUS OF MUSHROOMS***

Luciano Cabral  
*Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*

**RESUMO:** *Chorus of Mushrooms*, de Hiromi Goto, traz à tona os efeitos da diáspora sobre três mulheres de três diferentes gerações. Naoe, japonesa forçada a migrar para o Canadá devido à Segunda Guerra Mundial, recusa-se a usar o idioma de seu novo país e passa os dias calada, sentada numa poltrona. Keiko, ao contrário, adota um nome ocidental e abraça completamente os costumes canadenses. Seu repúdio à cultura oriental leva-a a esquecer sua língua nativa. O antagonismo materializado nestas duas personagens é, no entanto, apaziguado pela protagonista Murasaki, a jovem narradora que assume o papel de amálgama das culturas canadense e japonesa. Conforme cresce, ela passa a interessar-se por sua identidade hifenizada. Símbolo de uma certa aceitação diaspórica, Murasaki renomeia a si mesma e assim aproxima-se deliberadamente de suas raízes orientais. Com isso, ao recontar os mitos de criação do Japão, ela os reforma e os reorganiza, dando abertura para novas combinações e interpretações. Tal atitude diminui a inquietação e o temor causado pela diáspora, reconcilia os membros de sua família e proporciona um final feliz para o romance.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Diáspora, Identidade Hifenizada, Mitos de Criação.

**ABSTRACT:** Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* brings to life the consequences of diapora as it portrays three women from three different generations. The grandmother Naoe, forced to move away to Canada due to the Second World War, refuses to speak the language of her host country. She thus spends her days silently, not uttering words, sitting in the living room. Conversely Naoe's daughter Keiko gives herself a Western name and struggles to assimilate the Canadian culture. She consequently forgets her native language, for she has decided to stop speaking Japanese altogether. The dichotomy which those characters embody is settled down by the young protagonist Murasaki, Naoe's granddaughter. She serves as an amalgam to fuse Canadian sets of habits with her family's Japanese background. She becomes interested in her hyphenated identity, renames herself, and comes to soothe certain diasporic effects. Therefore, the moment she retells the Japanese myths of world creation, she changes them, as she rearranges them and inserts new information. A possibility of new standpoints is offered as a result. Such attitude makes the effects of diaspora less severe, reconcile her family members, and provides the novel with a happy ending.

**KEYWORDS:** Hiromi Goto, *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Diaspora, Hyphenated Identity, Myths of World Creation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the opening lines of James Joyce's fictional recollection of his early life and environment, there is a phrase which calls back those fairy tales usually told to children: "Once upon a time and a very long time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road [...]" (JOYCE, 1994, p. 1). The moment "once upon a time" is brought into play, the narrator

becomes able to move readers to a period back in time, that is, Stephen Dedalus's childhood, when his father used to tell him stories.

Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* makes use of the very same strategy. In its prologue, the protagonist Muriel lies in bed with her boyfriend (identified hitherto merely as "you") and is asked to tell a story: "Will you tell me a story?" you ask. Eyes on the strand of dust" (GOTO, 1997, p. 1). She agrees to do so, and right before she starts, she evokes the fairytale phrase: "Mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi..." (GOTO, 1997, p. 2). A rough translation of "once upon a time", this Japanese expression also moves readers to a period in time. Unlike what takes place in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, nonetheless, it does not lead the way to childhood, but far back to mythological accounts which helps Muriel cope with her hyphenated identity.

Goto's novel revolves around three generations of Japanese-Canadians embodied in three women from the same family: Muriel Tonkatsu, the young woman narrator; Keiko Tonkatsu, Muriel's mother; and Naoe Kiyokawa, the old woman narrator and Muriel's grandmother. Moving to Canada due to the Second World War, Naoe and Keiko react differently to their host country. As Keiko believes "You can't be everything at once. It is too confusing for a child to juggle two cultures. Two sets of ideals" (GOTO, 1997, p. 189), she tries to efface her Japanese background by taking up a Western name and embracing the Canadian lifestyle willingly. Naoe, on the other hand, refuses to do the same and, though she can speak English fluently, she has decided to answer her family in Japanese all along:

I might be stupid as well as deaf. How can they think a body can live in this country for twenty years and not learn the language? But let them think this. Let them think what they will, for they will. Solly, Obāchan no speeku Eeenglishu. Maybe I'm the fool, but stubborn I am and I will remain. (GOTO, 1997, p. 4)

Muriel then is the character who finds herself caught in the middle, straddling the line between her mother's acceptance of "the great Canadian melting pot" (GOTO, 1997, p. 175)

and her grandmother's rejection to be "converted from rice and *daikon* to wieners and beans" (GOTO, 1997, p. 13, italics in original). She comes to realize, as she has grown older, that her history is not only Occidental; that, albeit a natural-born Canadian, her slanted eyes give her away, thereby revealing her Oriental heritage. In short, by the time she reaches adulthood, the more Muriel becomes acquainted with her family's diasporic past, the more she gets conscious of her twofold origin.

## REVIEWING THE CONCEPT OF DIASPORA

The term *diaspora* derives from the Greek *diasperien* and stands for "dispersion". More specifically, it means "to sow or scatter seeds" (BRAZIEL & MANNUR, 2003, p. 1) across somewhere. Diaspora described initially Jewish, Greek, and Armenian mass exodus. Later on, it broadened its meaning by referring, as Walker Connor did, to "that segment of a people living outside the homeland" (cited by SAFRAN, 1991, p. 83). Put this way, such definition could consequently envelop a generous semantic scope, ranging from expatriate, immigrant, refugee, and guest-worker to overseas community, exile community and ethnic community (TÖLÖLIAN, 1991, pp. 4-5). For the sake of theoretical accuracy, however, it was worth moving away from an almost all-embracing definition to a concept able to be neither too broad nor too narrow.

William Safran (1991, p. 83) defines diaspora out of a range of collective experiences, and accordingly presents six features. His framework is grounded on the definition of diasporas as "expatriate minority communities". The members of these communities thus have many of the following elements in common: 1) they, or even their predecessors, have been moved from their homeland to at least two foreign regions; 2) they keep collective memories and myths about their homeland, be it history, landscape, triumphs, traditions; 3) they conceive of the host land and its inhabitants as unsympathetic to their presence, so they feel isolated; 4) they idealize

their homeland as the only hospitable and kindhearted place to be, longing to move back to it when the time is right; 5) they understand that, as a community, they must be capable of keeping, restoring, improving, and promoting their homeland; and finally 6) their collective consciousness and supportive behavior toward compatriots are kept alive through this connection with homeland.

We should bear in mind that, even though some communities might hold many of those features, it does not mean that expatriate groups which only have two or three of such characteristics are less diasporic. Just as James Clifford (1994, p. 306) asserts, “societies may wax and wane in diasporism, depending on changing possibilities [...] in their host countries and transnationally”. That is to say, communities may have more or less features in regards not only to diasporic moves, but to a certain spectrum of issues involved also, such as historical events, homeland traditions, host country milieu and hospitality, language barrier, and so on.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Naoe Kiyokawa is possibly the character who, by the beginning of the narrative, most entirely portrays Safran’s assertions. When younger, Naoe had escaped repeatedly from city to city before settling in Alberta. World War Two forced her to leave her family behind as she had to struggle to survive:

[...] and Keiko and I we leave, we leave and join Shige and Fumiko and Otōsan too weak to travel, too ill to travel from Pekin to Kinken to Manshū to Chosen to Hong Kong to Japan, so very far away, and Otōsan says you must leave while there is time, no need to wait for the old to die when there is time for the young to live, take Keiko home, home to Japan and Shige and Fumi can watch over me and you and Keiko will be fine and remember and grow, and we leave again, again, always leaving and the train and the dust and the wind howling with war and the gas masks we clutch in our hands, the ship, the life jackets, the nauseous fear of mines unseen [...]. (GOTO, 1997, p. 50)

This diasporic issue seems to have brought about a condition of animosity for foreign languages, for Naoe is unable to learn “Mandarin, Cantonese or any other dialect” (GOTO, 1997, p. 45), though she has lived in China for ten years. Similarly, once in Canada, she resolves she must not speak English at all. In addition, Naoe prevents herself from being in touch with

the outside Canada, so she deliberately spends her days home, sitting silently on a rocking chair, pretending to be disabled to walk.

Naoe believes her host country cannot be a place worth living in. Her first lines in the novel let us know how peevish and ill-tempered she can be, bothered by a wind that “just blows and blows and blows” (GOTO, 1997, p. 3). She constantly recollects her childhood, her parents, her ex-husband Makoto Dai and her wartime memories, as though she was eager to be bound to any history about Japan. Conversely, no memory of her days in Canada are looked back on, even though she has been living there for twenty years. Alberta is apparently seen as a besieged city she stubbornly cages in, a place from where she believes she cannot move away, and must be there while watching the days go by:

Eighty-five years old and cast from my home. Ahhh, at least the dust here is familiar. Every grain, every mote as familiar as the smell of my body. No time now to learn new dust in a new home. Let me just sit here. Let me sit here in the hall by the door. (GOTO, 1997, p. 4)

As a behavior of crossing geopolitical lines, diaspora also shares some aspects of a borderland. While both may accommodate practices of crossing and communication, diaspora, to a great extent, involves “longer distances and a separation more like an exile” (CLIFFORD, 1994, p. 304). For several reasons, coming back to the homeland constitutes a tough enterprise. Thus, return is frequently taken as a faint possibility further forward in time, an unknown moment ahead one cannot attain easily.

The act of treading longer distances to be dispersed elsewhere, dislocated from homeland owing mostly to exile, migration or immigration, culminates in dealing with, to say the least, two *ethos*: a set of values, attitudes, beliefs, and customs belonging to the native group and another one belonging to the new group. These sets crashing head-on, blending into a symbiotic relationship, constitutes what it is essentially like to have a diasporic experience.

Both Naoe and Keiko, nonetheless, would rather opt for thwarting any potential blend of sets. If the former is the character who rejects Canada for the maintenance of her Japanese

roots, the latter is the one who tries to hold firmly on to the new country by assimilating the Canadian lifestyle. Naoe, as I have said, refuses the English language. Keiko, in turn, renames herself Kay and puts her native language aside altogether, to the point of unlearning it. Intentionally or not, she spurns her Eastern background once she takes for granted that “If you live in Canada, you should live like a Canadian and that’s how I raised my own daughter. It’s very simple, really” (GOTO, 1997, p. 189).

Naoe and Keiko may be wishing for a fixed identity, that one believed to be possessed by Enlightenment individuals (HALL, 2007, p. 597). Because humanist and positivist ideologies were in vogue, this individual was seen as totally fulfilled, centered, unified, and provided with skills for reasoning, judging and acting. He<sup>1</sup> had an essence, an inner core that never changed; the self was single and individualistic. Even though Naoe and Keiko choose to tread opposite paths, they both strive to be attached to a fixed identity: Naoe recalling her Japanese self longingly whereas rebuffing the Canadian *ethos*; Keiko accepting her Canadian ground unrestrainedly whereas ignoring her Japanese *ethos*.

When it comes to diasporic fiction, I tend to agree that “ethnic minority writing is predominantly the writing of identity” (ŠLAPKAUSKAITĖ, 2011, p. 214). Particularly for contemporary beings, or “post-modern subjects” (HALL, 2007, p. 597), hiding behind a fixed identity does not seem to be as simple as Keiko avows. Our mindset is interpreted currently as no longer composed of a single identity, but rather of several, many times incompatible and contrary to one another. In this sense, identity becomes plural, unfulfilled and ever-changing. It is ultimately open to negotiation, inasmuch as it assumes different positions at different times in that “It is historically, not biologically, defined” (HALL, 2007, p. 598). Naoe accuses her daughter of having “forsaken identity” (GOTO, 1997, p. 13), complaining that “This Western food has changed you and you’ve grown more opaque even as your heart has brittled” (GOTO,

---

<sup>1</sup> Enlightenment individuals, according to Stuart Hall, were depicted as male.

1997, p. 13). Keiko gives up her native language and birth name for fitting thoroughly into a new culture. Nonetheless, both of them are apparently unaware of the fact that a postmodern identity is what it is precisely for being decentered and unfinished, and for being capable of reshaping and reconstructing itself anew.

### **A HYPHENATED IDENTITY**

In the novel, the identity which is open to negotiation from the start belongs to Muriel. Her double-nationality consciousness comes gradually up as she grows older: “It was easy when I was an innocent. I could swallow everything I was told. I’m not finished asking questions and I never will be” (GOTO, 1997, p. 190). Notwithstanding the way she was raised, Muriel discards the name her mother gave her and takes Murasaki instead, the way her grandmother usually calls her: “My name is Murasaki. My mother calls me Muriel, but I out-grew that name when I came to realize that I came from a specific cultural background that wasn’t Occidental. Whatever that means” (p. 189). *Murasaki* refers to both the heroine of the *Genji Monogatari*, or “the tale of Genji”, and the tale’s author, Lady Murasaki Shikibu, which is a pseudonym, as her real name is unknown. Composed in the early eleventh century, the tale is considered to be the oldest literary prose ever written, as well as the key work of Japanese literature:

“She is the first person to write a novel. As far as we know”, Mom amended. “Well, not a novel in the Western sense<sup>2</sup>, because it was written on scrolls but she was the first person to write a long piece of prose that was in fact a story and not just a diary thing or some sort of lesson.” (GOTO, 1997, p. 165)

In order to obtain the answers she is running after, she makes her way into an interaction with her grandmother through telepathy. Not allowed to juggle two cultures, two sets of ideals (as her mother puts it), when a child, Murasaki did not learn how to speak Japanese.

---

<sup>2</sup> Some scholars have indeed questioned the categorization of *The Tale of Genji* as a “novel” (see Donald Keene, 2004, pp. 38-9). Arthur Waley, in a footnote of his well-known English translation, warns readers that, at times, the style used by Murasaki “is a blend of the Court chronicle with the conventional fairytale” (MURASAKI, 1935, p. 7). Despite the note, he still entitles the work “A novel in six parts”.

Nevertheless, this telepathic communication overcomes the language barrier which would have frustrated her plans:

Murasaki: Oh, Obāchan. Am I losing my mind? I can understand what you're saying, and how can we be talking anyway?! I must be insane.

Naoe: *Ara*, Murasaki, that doesn't sound like the granddaughter I know and love. There are stranger things in life than two people who are close being able to understand one another.

Murasaki: Yeah, but over distance and time? Not to mention life. You're dead after all, aren't you?

Naoe: Of course not! As if I would be ready for death. (GOTO, 1997, p. 130, italics in original)

It is through telepathy, furthermore, that Murasaki has the chance to dig deep into her heritage. The stories her grandmother tells bring to the fore Japanese mythological accounts, which is part of what makes up the legacy Murasaki is increasingly eager to get to know. Fundamentally, myths are anonymous narratives concerning supernatural entities or events, whose importance “lies in the way in which it encapsulates and expresses beliefs and values that are shared by, and definitive of, a particular cultural group” (EDGAR & SEDGWICK, 2008, p. 217). I contend, thus, that Naoe recognizes such importance, insofar as she appears to comprehend that, by building up identity from myths, her granddaughter may have the capacity to settle down some of her eagerness for answers.

## MYTHS OF WORLD CREATION

Myths are more generally taken as contrasting with logic and actuality. *Mythos*, from Greek, denotes a fable, a story or a tale, and ultimately defines a sort of account that cannot really have happened or existed (WILLIAMS, 1983, p. 210). In spite of their fictional or half-truth characteristic, they serve as distinctive tools to frame the worldview of a group or a people. Myths of world creation, for instance, can be found in numerous societies. They may explain natural phenomena, may explore the roots of a group, the place of that group regarding other groups, and may also delimitate the moral values, customs or ideals of a given society: “the



mythical beliefs transform complex cultural processes into apparently natural, unchangeable and self-evident ones” (EDGAR & SEDGWICK, 2008, p. 219).

When Murasaki’s boyfriend asks for “a true story” (GOTO, 1997, p. 1), he does not understand that truth is not at stake in *Chorus of Mushrooms*. The fairytale phrase “mukāshi, mukāshi, ōmukashi” offers no possibility of a commitment to a logical or actual narrative. The sentence, therefore, not only indicates that a myth is about to come; it also serves as fanciful instants to bridge the gap between the questions Murasaki asks and the answers she looks for. These instants unfold new versions of mythologies which differ somewhat from those largely documented. Such versions finally suggest a postmodern worldview, more compatible with her hyphenated identity.

One of the myths of world creation narrated in the novel is the tale of Izanami and Izanagi, two spiritual powers, or deities. In mythology, they are depicted as either wife and husband, or sister and brother, respectively. They are the spirits chosen by the “the first-formed *kami*<sup>3</sup> to create the world out of chaos and rule it” (ASHKENAZI, 2003, p. 172, italics in original). So, standing on a celestial bridge, they stir the chaos down below with a jeweled spear and bring the island of Onogoro into existence. Once on the island, they decide to build up a dwelling place whose foundation rests around a pillar.

As they need to populate their newly-created world, the pillar becomes the reference point around which Izanami and Izanagi conduct their courtship ritual. She takes the right while he takes the left, and then both encircle the pillar in order to meet one another face to face some steps ahead. It is told that Izanami cannot help waiting and praises her lover as they meet: “Oh, what a comely youth!” (GOTO, 1997, p. 173). Izanagi explains therefore that the woman is only consented to praise after the man does it. They copulate regardless of this incident, but

---

<sup>3</sup> A deity.

because Izanami has acted against the rule of nature, she gives birth to a child as ugly and disgusting as a monster.

The courtship ritual takes place once again, but Izanagi praises first this time. Their copulation succeeds, and Izanami gives birth to many other islands as well as spirits of sea, winds and mountains. Among many spirits she spawns, there is a kami of fire who scorches her body all over. Her death makes Izanagi grow angry and mournful. He kills the kami of fire, causing eight belligerent deities to be born from the spilled blood. To rescue his lover, Izanagi decides to come down to the *Yōmi*, the underworld. However, as a *Yōmi*'s dweller, Izanami has lost all her beauty, having maggots crawling over her rotten flesh. The moment Izanagi gazes at such gruesome image, he recoils in horror and runs away. Izanami then vows to take her revenge for not being rescued, but Izanagi cleverly shuts her in the underworld by obstructing its passage with a mountain rock. From this moment on, Izanami has turned into the deity of *Yōmi*.

This myth of Izanami and Izanagi, as fanciful as it should be, reveals the worldview of the early Japanese society. Influenced by the teachings of Chinese philosopher Confucius, the tale displays a cultural turning point: from interdependence between women and men to women's social inferiority (ASHKENAZI, 2003, p. 176). Confucianism exhorted that women were to be unquestionably subjugated to men. The feminine behavior was supposed to be shaped by three responsibilities<sup>4</sup>, that is, three rules that a woman had to follow in order to be "a virtuous female" (SEKIGUCHI, 2003, p. 28). In the tale, women's subjugation is conspicuous in Izanagi's explanation during the courtship ritual. The hierarchy he claims must be acknowledged as a given, as a natural condition. Izanami's reckless manner, being the first to praise, brings forth, as a consequence, a monstrous child. In the end, her ignorance of the

---

<sup>4</sup> The three responsibilities, according to the book *Etiquette and Cerimonial*, were: "to follow her father at home, her husband when she married, and her sons if widowed" (SEKIGUCHI, 2003, p. 28).

patriarchal prescription puts her to death, sentences her to imprisonment and isolation in the underworld.

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, this tale delivers another worldview. Naoe, as she recalls her early days of wartime, mentions the myth to teach Murasaki about genesis, origins and heritage. In Naoe's version, Izanami and Izanagi are still spiritual powers in charge of world creation, or rather, the foundation of Japan:

The pattern has been set long before the sister and brother, Izanami and Izanagi, left their celestial home to create the world. Japan. Yes, Japan was the world, a long time ago when people called what they could see with their eyes, the mountains, the trees, lakes, and stones. The very soil beneath their feet. That was where their world began and where their world ended. Japan. Island to itself and don't leave your home. (GOTO, 1997, p. 45)

Nevertheless, as the excerpt cites, the two deities are not lovers, but brother and sister. Moreover, Izanami seems to be older, cleverer and more skillful than Izanagi. She leads the way from the celestial bridge downwards and commands her brother openly: "Hurry! Or the bridge will fade out under feet'. Izanagi looked back, and sure enough, the bridge was slowly fading, its colours evaporating like mist" (GOTO, 1997, p. 30). Izanami's experience provides her with a position of control over the creation endeavor, hierarchically above, always telling her brother what to do:

"No! No!" Izanami shouted. "That's not the way to do it. Take it back!"  
 "You said there were no rules!" her brother complained in his normal voice.  
 "I said there were no rules, but there is such a thing as good taste and understated beauty. Make this *mittomonai* light go away", Izanami said. "Besides, the sky and water aren't blue anymore. You made them turn into a sickly olive colour with that awful light".  
 "Okay, I take it back", Izanagi muttered. The sky and water turned blue again and the sickly bright light disappeared. (GOTO, 1997, p. 31, italics in original)

The novel brings out as well the myth of Yama-Uba, a powerfully magic woman who lives in the mountains, frequently portrayed as a witch or a nun. She is traditionally described as a frightening figure: an incredibly strong cannibal with hair made of snakes, and a sharp-toothed mouth hidden under her threads with which she devours children. Yama-Uba is said to be merciful and merciless at once. Men coming across her in the mountains are asked to hold her baby for a while as she tells them she needs to run some errands. As time goes by, the baby

becomes heavier. If the man endures the baby's weight, Yama-Uba returns and grants him with supernatural strength. On the other hand, if the man cannot withstand the weight, the baby "turns into a rock that crashes him" (ASHKENAZI, 2003, p. 290).

In another version, Yama-Uba is portrayed as a "fairy of the mountains, which have been under her care since the world began" (WALEY, 1922, p. 247). She is very old, has a thin face, and messy white hair comes down her shoulders. Her responsibility as a spirit of nature is to overlay the mountain top with snow in Winter, and furnish it with flowers in full blossom in the Fall.

In Naoe's version of the myth, on the contrary, Yama-Uba (or Yamanba, as spelt in the novel) looks younger than in traditional accounts. She is a giant mountain woman, "very very strong and had thick arms and legs like the root of the *daikon*" (GOTO, 1997, p. 115, italics in original), who lives alone in a small house while spends her days gardening, growing vegetables, and reading books:

She lived quietly, tending her small garden where she planted burdock and *satoimo* during the day, and at night, she lingered by the fire in the *irori*, sipping from a jug of *sake* and reading from her books. She did not care for the company of humans, because they were small and bothersome. She just watched the birds in the trees and picked mushrooms in the forest. Her life with herself was complete and she felt little need ever to change it. (GOTO, 1997, p. 115, italics in original)

In Japanese mythology, Yama-Uba is usually represented as a spiritual power, but she is not as powerful as Izanami and Izanagi. For this reason, she is unable to create the world as those deities do. But in *Chorus of Mushrooms*, she turns into a maker; she can create, or more accurately, re-create the world. One day, as she is looking for somebody to talk to, Yama-Uba decides to go further away than usual from her house. She comes down the mountain and stands stunned once she finds the world laid waste, lifeless and sterile, overrun completely by maggots:

"Where are the green things, the water and the breeze?"  
 "They are gone away. I don't know why. My brothers and sisters are eating their bones. When there is nothing more to eat, we will go away too."  
 "Tell me, Little Maggot, where are my sisters? Where have the other mountain women gone to so that I may join them?"  
 "We ate their bones yesterday. We ate them yesterday. And we will eat you tomorrow. That is the way of maggots." (GOTO, 1997, p. 116)

I would highlight that the mythological Yama-Uba, to a certain extent, resembles a maggot because they both eat human flesh. Maggots are wormlike larvae which are considered to be disgusting for feeding from decaying matter. Similarly, Yama-Uba's cannibalism relegates her to the status of a death-oriented creature, possibly holding a low rank and a worthless reputation among mythical beings.

Naoe's Yama-Uba, contrarily, is placed high above. She abnegates her low position by refusing to let the maggots swarm over the land: "I am *yamanba* and I am strong. I will speak my words and shape the earth again" (GOTO, 1997, p. 116, italics in original). So, she swallows all maggots and then squeezes her breasts so that the grubs could be squirted. As they come out, they soon transform into people:

When the maggots touched the earth, they squirmed, swelled, flipped about at her feet. Their bodies grew longer and taller and limbs began to form. Fingers, hands, calves, and feet. Some were tall and slender while others stayed plump and soft. They grew and clamoured around her. In wonder, they called her mother. When the *yamanba* squeezed the last maggots from her breasts, there were millions of soft-skinned people around her. (GOTO, 1997, p. 118, italics in original)

No longer a haggish and deadly old woman, Yama-Uba becomes, in Naoe's version, a world creator, a spirit capable of giving rise to life from death. She populates the land making use of the same elements which "churn in the bones of the dead" (GOTO, 1997, p. 117). Her cannibal maneuver results in vitality rather than sterility.

## CONCLUSION

On the first pages of her *Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon (1988, p. 7) immediately posits that a postmodern narrative is to be regarded as a contradictory attitude. It brings conventions, common sense and totalizing (or master) discourses into play while at the same time it sabotages their effectiveness, breaking down the consensus to exhibit "the illusion of consensus". The phenomenon is frequently described with adjectives that imply "the opposite of", such as deconstructive, decentering, and dislocating. In other words, a postmodern

narrative deconstructs what has been constructed, decentralizes what has been centralized, and dislocates what has been located. In this case, the prefix *post* establishes, thus, not an overcoming of modern thought, but rather a questioning of all positivistic discourses of modernity.

It is these sabotage and subversion of standards that we, to a great extent, can notice in Naoe's versions of Japanese myths. In this respect, conventional discourses are brought into the novel to be overturned, and consequently put into question. The myths of Izanami and Izanagi and Yama-Uba are deliberately subverted to contend that it was about time that new worldviews must overlap old ones.

As Murasaki listens to these tales, these new versions of old discourses, she neither stands her Canadian ground without questioning it, as her mother does, nor yearns wistfully for her Japanese background, as her grandmother does. She is precisely the woman who, similar to Yama-Uba, re-creates a rather unfriendly host country so as to make it a more suitable place for a hyphenated identity. She is the character who, albeit born in the West, is proud of being nicknamed after an ancient novelist regarded as the first of her kind in world's literature. Like Izanami, Murasaki also takes control over her moves, because she has grown older, is more experienced and more conscious of her own skills: "You can't move on until you've arrived. I've finally arrived and now I can go" (GOTO, 1997, p. 198).

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, there are three generations at stake. Two of them choose to take roads that somewhat draw them apart from one another. Murasaki/Muriel finds herself between these roads taken, but even so she is skillful enough to see that the novel is "An Immigrant Story With a Happy Ending" (GOTO, 1997, p. 159, capitals in original). And she is so because she realizes that being a Japanese-Canadian is nothing to reject; on the contrary, it is to celebrate as she can, from now on, juggle two cultures:

And you know what I learned, Obāchan, I learned to speak Japanese after you left. Because I wanted to. It's a good reason. And you know what I learned, Obāchan? I learned that there's no way to say I love you in Japanese except to a spouse or lover.

Not to your sister or brother or daughter or son or aunt or uncle or cousin or mother or father. Or grandmother. All you can say is *Daisuki yo*. A tepid, I like you very much. But I'm glad I learned Japanese because now I can juggle two languages and when there isn't one word in English, it will be there in Japanese and if there's something lacking in your tongue, I'll reach for it in English. So I say to you in English. I love you, Obāchan. (GOTO, 1997, p. 54)

## REFERENCES

- ASHKENAZI, Michael. **Handbook of Japanese Mythology (handbooks of world mythology)**. California: ABC-CLIO, 2003.
- BRAZIEL, Jana Evans & MANNUR, Anita. Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies. In: **Theorizing Diaspora: a reader**. Edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003, pp. 1-22.
- CLIFFORD, James. Diasporas. In: **Cultural Anthropology**, Vol. 9, No. 3, *Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future*, pp. 302-338, 1994.
- EDGAR, Andrew & SEDGWICK, Peter. **Cultural Theory: the key concepts**. Second edition. London and New York: Routledge, 2008.
- GOTO, Hiromi. **Chorus of Mushrooms**. London: The Women's Press, 1997.
- HALL, Stuart. The Question of Cultural Identity. In: **Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies**. Edited by Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert, and Kenneth Thompson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, pp. 596-632.
- HUTCHEON, Linda. **A poetics of postmodernism: history, theory, fiction**. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- JOYCE, James. **The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man**. New York: Dover Publications, 1994.
- KEENE, Donald. The Tale of Genji. In: **Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: The Tale of Genji**. Edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004, pp. 9-42.
- MURASAKI, Lady. **The Tale of Genji: a novel in six parts by Murasaki**. Translated from the Japanese by Arthur Waley. London: Alden Press, Oxford, 1935.
- SAFRAN, William. Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return. In: **Diaspora: a journal of Transnational Studies**. Volume 1, number 1, pp. 83-99, 1991.
- ŠLAPKAUSKAITĖ, Ruta. Story of Identity, Identity of Story: Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*. In: **Embracing Otherness. Canadian Minority Discourses in Transcultural Perspectives**. Sojka, Eugenia and Tomasz Sikora (eds.). Torun: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, pp. 210-23, 2011.
- SEKIGUCHI, Hiroko. The Patriarchal Family Paradigm in Eighth-Century Japan. In: **Women and Confucian Cultures in China, Korea, and Japan**. Edited by Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott. California, London: University of California Press, 2003, pp. 27-46.
- TÖLÖLIAN, Khachig. The Nation States and Its Others. In: **Milieu of a Preface. Diaspora** 1(1): 3-7. VEGA, Ana Lydia, 1991.
- WALEY, Arthur. **The Nō Plays of Japan**. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922.
- WILLIAMS, Raymond. **Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society**. Revised edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Recebido em: 20/08/2017

Aceito em: 19/10/2017