

THE ORIGIN OF A CANADIAN PHILOSOPHY DEMONSTRATED THROUGH LITERATURE

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CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

The Origin of a Canadian Philosophy Demonstrated Through Literature

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Using the medium of Canadian literature my capstone thesis explores the origin of the distinct Canadian philosophy. I suggest that these three authors intended this to be a dominant theme in their writing, illustrating the birth of a nation.

Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, and Carol Shields, use their female characters to symbolically reel against the mother-country and all the restrictions she stood for. Their protagonists are female. Notable because while Canada is asserting its independence from the mother-country Canadian women are seeking equality and independence from their own limits of maternity. These authors seek to answer the question: is there such a thing as a Canadian philosophy. And if so. What is its origin. This paper will present its origin as the product of Canada's quest for dominion, a country taking agency away from its ancestral mother. Women were empowered to lead a similar path toward independence. Canadian nationalism and the Canadian women's suffrage movement were born of the same era and followed the same course. Both factions fighting parallel paths for independence.

The Origin of a Canadian Philosophy Demonstrated Through Literature

A Canadian philosophy might at first seem less obvious, lacking any unique focus or substantive doctrine. Using the medium of Canadian literature this thesis reinforces the existence of a distinct Canadian philosophy and gives context to its origin. I suggest that these three authors intended this to be a dominant theme in their writing, ready to bring the birth of a nation and its distinct view to the issues on the world stage. This thesis will focus on three novels set during a pivotal time in Canadian history, a significant time-stamp that sheds light on the development of a distinct Canadian philosophy.

Following Confederation a wave of change was underway in Canada, these authors write about this experience from their own biographical perspective. Canadians were seizing what made them distinct from their British heritage, and building a philosophy for an independent nation on these new merits and principles. A Canadian otherness arose during this liminal stage, and I will show how the result features as a character in each of these novels and is the dominant undertone of each story.

Apparent and often seen more as a practice than as a mantra, the Canadian ideology includes the approach of trying to recognize the need of the individual while encouraging the individual to claim their place in the whole. Pluralism is a part of this philosophy. Canadians live life agreeing to disagree on many things, but they agree unanimously that they are a nation up to the task, rising about the fray always as Canadians. This paper will show that the Canadian philosophy is the unnamed character

in each of these authors stories, as the ever-present mother, judging, criticizing, guiding, correcting. “To speak of tolerance and mutual respect is to invoke the concept of the “other,” a core concept in the Canadian philosophy” (Madison 16). Canadians are not patriotic as to a paternal father, but matriarchal, coming of age under the stern judgmental glare of the Empire mother, whose feminist influence contributed in a most unique way to what is the Canadian philosophy.

Canadian nationalism and the Canadian women’s suffrage movement were born of the same era and followed the same path, both factions fighting for independence and often surprised at the parallel nature of their journey. *Votes for Women* columns in 1913 were accredited to a suffragist, journalist and nationalist. In 1915 the column heading was changed to “For Equal Citizenship” (Sangster 577). Suffragists saw their cause as walking in step with the nationalist political movement and this association gained them strength. Suffragists varied in their approach and ideology as did Canadian citizens, depending mostly on their origin. “Working-class Canadians were less closely tied to British imperialist organization” (Sangster 577). Their prosperity was a reflection of their own hard work nothing else, least of all a monarch.

These three novels are offered as works of fiction, a fact that I would argue is only partly true. Their characters are indeed fictitious but the world they represent physically and philosophically is not. Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Carol Shields, award winning and renowned Canadian authors, use their female characters to symbolically rail against the mother-country and all the restrictions she stood for. Their protagonists lives occur between the wars, a significant time placement that renders a common thread between emerging Canadian feminism and the further separation of

Canada from the Empire. As Barbara Hill Rigney states about Atwood, “the literary tradition of Canada inhibits Atwood as artist, yet paradoxically serves her as guide” (Rigney 4). Unlike Americans, Canadians have remained subservient to the ideal of the mother-country and the ironically paternal structure that rules it. The Jamestown Puritans of 1607 gave the British until 1783 before seizing their independence, whereas Canada took until 1982 to fully separate, and still recognizes the British monarch as head of state. Each of these authors has through their writing, given insight to the uniqueness of the Canadian national identity and its feminist origins. “The Canadian civic philosophy is one that articulates a way of life and a philosophy of pluralism within a framework of individual rights” (Madison 3). Canadian literature often describes Canadians as survivalists in the positive sense, or victims in the negative, an apt description many women of the past and present day might resonate with.

Canada has a unique coming of age process from wilderness to colony, Dominion to Confederation, and finally to a constitutionally independent nation, ... of sorts. After WWI it was thought that the Empire would knit itself back together on the jubilant upswing of victory contributed to by the allied colonies. This didn't happen and separation from the Empire began with development of a distinct Canadian national identity.¹

As a developing nation Canada was already accustomed to compromise when its beginnings included French as well as English speaking colonies, both then and still now demanding to have their differences acknowledged and respected. “The French

¹ Stevenson, J. A. (1926). “Canadian nationalism.” *The Edinburgh Review*, 244(497), 18. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/1298976483?accountid=13626> .

Canadians had always been suspicious of the Imperial tie,” a force which hastened Canadian extradition from the meddling hand of the Empire (Stevenson 20). The path to Canadian nationalism had been decided upon.² Has the Canadian culture incorporated its citizens shared aspirations including those differences between men and women, while still recognizing each as individual, establishing a workable political system that represents all and one equally?

Literary works of fiction, allow us to analyze realities in an imaginative space. Can a philosophy be confirmed simply by demonstration? Using the mother as the emblematic figure colonial Canada is escaping is an easy parallel. The “other” character in each these novels is independence. Canada was a nation searching for a way out, willing to take the risks of a new path because continuing on the old one was simply not a possibility that could script a future. The female characters in these novels negotiate a way forward for themselves, acutely aware of how past restrictions held their own mothers back. These women want more: choice, control, and their own voices heard. As Canada forged independence from the Empire Mother, women were breaking the bonds that had limited them at home. The over-arching philosophy of Canadians developed from these struggles, while Canadians banded together on a feminist and nationalist island of their own making.

As Joan Sangster notes Canadians were “not considered early leaders in the enfranchisement of women” (567). Canadian women’s exposure to and support of the suffrage movement was heavily influenced by the colonial attitudes within their own

² Stevenson, J. A. (1926). “Canadian nationalism.” *The Edinburgh Review*, 244(497), 18. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/1298976483?accountid=13626> .

families immigrant beliefs. History has exposed “how imperialist discourses were situated at the heart of British suffrage movement, and, in turn, how feminists in colonized countries merged anti-colonial, nationalist and feminist ideas in their suffrage movements” (Sangster 567). The mothers of these families were deeply entrenched in the beliefs of their own generation and held tightly to those, as they were already feeling displaced as immigrants to a new country. With one hand holding tight to the apron strings of the Empire, the other subtly encouraged their daughters toward change. “Canadian suffragists had an ambiguous relationship to British influences, sometimes imitating and celebrating them, but also laying claim to their own national character”(Sangster 567).

How would one establish that all members of the nation actually believe, think, or hold true the same things? Is it not simpler to locate the principle of unity in the visible sphere of action? If all act together, then this is sufficient ground for asserting that they have the same will. Admittedly, this is not much by way of philosophy, but it is the best there is. (Weiler 124)

Canadians share with their American neighbors individual differences of politics, religion and how to move the future forward using lessons from the past. The difference of Canadians toward this is pivotal, that is “to fashion a political order that is capable of accommodating recognition of cultural and other differences without viewing these as moral differences” (Madison 1). Canada is a true multi-cultural society not the American melting pot.

Mothers feature prominently in each of these novels. The role of the mother is revered yet subservient. In her article *The Mother Country: Tracing Intersections of Motherhood and the National Story in Recent Canadian Historiography*, Kim Anderson concludes, “We can see how, in times of crisis, insecurity, or need, public discourse has

turned to ideologies of motherhood to lay blame or to seek solace. Mothers have been used as symbols of the nation's shortcomings, progress and potential, and have been deemed responsible for all three at various times" (1281).

National and Feminist Philosophy in Three Canadian Novels

Alice Munro: *Lives of Girls and Women*

Alice Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013, being the only Canadian and the 13th woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. She was cited by the Nobel committee as a "master of the contemporary short story."

Munro was awarded for short-story writing where her noted ability is to "have a single short story that covers decades, and it works" (Haq). Munro published the novel *Lives of Girls and Women* in 1971 and structured it similarly, spanning the mid to post WWII period of 1942. The setting is the small rural Ontario town of Jubilee, where the main characters, mother Addie Jordan and daughter Del, navigate the chasm that can exist between the generations.

The story begins with a family in a rural setting making a meager living from a fox farm. The mother has married into fox farming and clearly would not have chosen this life, but this was never questioned. "They respected men's work beyond anything; they also laughed at it" (Madison 1). The division of responsibilities was crystal clear in a time teetering on the edge of a tide change. Mother resents, father continues head down with blinders on, while children accept but begin to question these roles. Mothers not fulfilling their expectations in the home are mocked and gossiped about, "They had the Irish gift for rampaging mockery, embroidered with deference" (43). The language Munro chooses is metaphorically feminine. Munro highlights the generational differences toward feminism in her story with the elderly aunties distaste for ability and ambition being showcased in every way. "They liked people turning down things that were offered, marriage, positions, opportunities, money" (44). In *A Mother Country*

Anderson comments that “girls were conditioned for motherhood from an early age” (123). As ‘mothers of the nation,’ British women were preferred immigrants” (Sangster 573).

The mother in Munro’s novel has higher aspirations in life which are expressed with subtlety. “Afraid to stick her head out of her own burrow,” (44) says the mother about other women, the mother herself is strong and determined in spite of custom. She is disappointed with how her life has played out, her living conditions and the uninspiring people she is surrounded with. Somehow the mother manages to rent a house in town where she moves full time with her daughter, while the father and son remain on the farm. Munro allows the mother this move of control and power, a move which interestingly seems to happen without any resistance from her husband. Munro shows the farmhouse subsequently deteriorating in both order and filth with the father, son, and hired hand living there and no woman to maintain it for them. The parents drift apart with the father and son coming to the house in town more infrequently as time goes by, and the mother stops going back out to the farm. The daughter is caught between the two lives, a symbol of Canadian women at the time, caught between tradition and the future. Logic and rational thinking present arguments against male dominance, as the decades march on. At the time equality wasn’t considered as a third option. The men were superior and women inferior. If women were seen to move up, that could only mean that men were moving down. “Labor newspapers across Canada wrestled with ambivalent views of wage-earning women, due to a strong male breadwinner ideology” (Sangster 577).

Mother takes up selling encyclopedias door-to-door. In the only avenue open to her, she promotes education and is provided with an opportunity to showcase her own knowledge during her sales pitch. She takes her daughter along who has a remarkable memory for facts, impressing customers of the encyclopedia's potential. The mother is filled with hope that her daughter might be destined to enliven her own unrealized dreams of independence and success that knowledge and education can facilitate. The daughter is not interested, is selfish and yet too naïve to realize the opportunity a partnership with her mother can bring her. The encyclopedia job fades and the mother's disappointment is evident when her daughter states, "knowledge is just an oddity; it stuck out like warts" (74). The powerful influence of the daughter's friends override her mother's example. Munro presents two friends, a girl portrayed as gullible and wanting only marriage and a young man who is on track for university scholarship success, an obvious gender contrast for the purpose of illustration.

Neither mother or daughter speak frankly with one another about their desires, interests, fears. Each recognizes them in the other but their inability to articulate them keeps the two moving on parallel paths of their own, never utilizing the power of their bond. Comparable to the coming-of-age independence struggle between parent and child was the extraction of the Dominion of Canada from the Mother-Empire in 1924. As Stevenson defines the process, "the net result was an abundance of nagging and friction and a conspicuous absence of the spirit and practice of co-operation" (21).

The mother is ridiculed for her unorthodox ways: living apart from her husband, and her encyclopedia job. Her ambition is scorned. "Ambition was what they were alarmed by, for to be ambitious was to court failure and to risk making a fool of oneself.

The worst thing, I gathered, the worst thing that could happen in this life was to have people laughing at you” (44). The opinion of the elders is that choosing not to do something shows the most wisdom. This is not the opinion of the mother. She finds herself railing against it, even though surrounded by it. When she demonstrates otherwise, she is scoffed at. As ambition is discouraged, aspiration departs as well, and what remains is “just my mother in Jubilee” (90).

Del is caught in a bubble, void of information, intentionally kept that way by what is considered proper of the times and also by her own family’s dysfunction: each person operating on their own singular path with blinders on. The level of passive aggressive conversation is startling among the female characters. Each one asserting their own superiority with snide insinuations cloaked as helpful advice.

Is your mother going on the road much these days? they would ask me, and I would say no, oh no, she isn’t going out much anymore, but I knew they knew. Not much time for ironing, they might continue compassionately, examining the sleeve of my blouse Not much time for ironing when she has to go out on the road. (72)

Canadians’ invisible weakness to allow themselves to step forward becomes a national life-altering character flaw. Ambition is seen as vulgar, whereas eyes-lowered passivity commendable. In the book *Is There A Canadian Philosophy*, G.B. Madison notes that Canada was never founded but has simply just grown haphazardly over time and that nothing in Canada exists that has brought the unity of America’s revolutionary beginnings. Madison quotes Sir John A. Mc Donald, Canadian Prime Minister (1867–1873, 1878–1891), as remarking “Canada has too much geography and too little history” (13). Should this be true, is the Canadian philosophy too watered-down to be worth mentioning? Is it so unremarkable that it cannot be represented and recognized as an

unnamed character in books written by Canadian authors? I would disagree. The Canadian philosophy is indeed tangible, intact and easily identified north to south, east to west but with characteristic Canadian subtlety. Canada is like a middle child, whose distinct personality must rise in spite of birth order, coming far after America, its dominant older sibling, and followed by the younger Australia. These children of the Empire were referred to as “sister states” at the Imperial Conference of 1921.³

With ambition beyond your place, especially female ambition being wholly disapproved of, wife and motherhood are the limit of choices for the adult women in Munro’s novel. We witness a character becoming a “wrecked survivor of the female life,” (46) resulting from the toll of pregnancy and childbirth. Women who choose to remain spinsters rise to the top of female hierarchy, and after fighting off the unspoken urges of the flesh, are admired by the other women even as they wither away. “This is what happened to them when they no longer had a man with them, to nourish and admire” (68).

The story continues to contrast boys vs girls and men vs women: roles, expectations, outcomes. Told from a female perspective with the daughter as narrator, the reader is seeing the world through the eyes of a young girl in the small rural Ontario town of Jubilee. Racism, sexism and ageism all impact the choices made as life moves forward. This is the distinctly “Canadian form of feminism,” where a hybrid mix of race, class and feminist reform is being campaigned for (Sangster 574). Judgement is the constant oppressor that limits freedom of choice more than anything else geographic or

³ 1. Stevenson J.A. “Canadian nationalism.” *The Edinburgh Review*. 1926;244(497):18. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/1298976483?accountid=13626>.

economic might. Boys are conditioned to diminish girls from an early age, and promote their own superiority without reproach. “The things they said stripped away freedom to be what you wanted, reduced you to what it was they saw, and that, plainly, was enough to make them gag” (129). In this time period, boys live a freedom that girls are never afforded. Boys are not accountable for their actions, which are solely attributed to the uncontrollable features of their gender. Boys live in an “adjacent world” (148). Sexual assault is the girl’s fault. This is made clear by parents and the church. It is the girl who lured and coerced. Girls are thought to be serving up sexuality impossible for a male to resist and who is therefore drawn in by it and could then not be held responsible. “ ‘A boy can’t help himself,’ she instructed me, in a foreboding, yet oddly permissive, tone of voice, which acknowledged the anarchy, the mysterious brutality prevalent in that adjacent world” (148).

Communities are made up of church congregations who judge not only on Sundays but out about town from Monday to Saturday also. Even though not at church, church membership was an identity “social and religious life were apt to be one and the same” (191). Christianity being the dominant religion in Canada mid twentieth century, church affiliation was almost in stride with success at any level. Canada has two public school systems Protestant and Catholic, certainly emblematic of differences recognized and respected within the Canadian philosophy of pluralism. In doing so, the federal government acknowledges the dominantly Catholic French-Canadians. Endorsing the separate but together ideal, the Ministry of Education introduces both parochial and secular publicly funded education to Canada made into law and practice with “the

inevitability of gradualness”⁴. Religion was in church, in school and at home. Well known Canadian Suffragist Ida Douglas-Fearns struggled with the Catholic churches “antipathy to suffrage” (Sangster 574). Women in Quebec were not granted the vote for a further fifteen years beyond other provinces a result “attributed to an unprogressive Catholic culture” (Sangster 578). Church membership was a badge of prominence and piety. The church provided a continuum of security that was struggled for in the years immediately following the end of the war. The church was ordered and reliably unchanging and held up a standard people could hold themselves to, and also judge others by.

The title of Munro’s novel *Lives of Girls and Women* appears in the narrative in the form of advice from mother to daughter. “There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women. Yes. But it is up to us to make it come. All women have had up till now has been their connection with men. All we have had. No more lives of our own, really, than domestic animals” (193). It is a prophesy, a promise with a tone of foreboding; it is encouragement and a call to strength. This is still two decades before birth control will be widely available. “By 1960, the birth control pill was available in Canada, although doctors could only prescribe it for therapeutic and not for birth control reasons” (www.cpha.ca). Lack of sex education in school and the unprepared parent at home left a great and dangerous void of practical information. The generation gap prevents most parents from stepping-up, acknowledging new ways of thinking about relationships and sex and instituting the needed advice. It is the mother of Del’s friend

⁴ 1. Stevenson J.A. “Canadian nationalism.” *The Edinburgh Review*. 1926;244(497):18. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/docview/1298976483?accountid=13626>.

Jerry who discusses birth control, telling Del her own mother should have had her fitted for a diaphragm by now. Her implication that an irresponsible girl was not going to derail her son's education by becoming pregnant. "I thought of my mother, who would publicly campaign for birth control but would never even think she needed to talk to me, so firmly was she convinced that sex was something no woman--no intelligent woman--would ever submit to unless she had to" (222). The pregnancy of the unmarried boarder character in the novel is implied but never confirmed, a metaphor for such things being kept hidden and considered shameful.

The conflicted or split identity that girls are made to confront is unjust. The teaching that every agency proffered – church, school and home, is that you couldn't be both smart and feminine. Whether feminism even has a place is not even remotely within consideration. Gender stereotyping is so ingrained it seems impossible to look at a female and not assess how she measures up against some feminine checklist. Propaganda at the time promoted this psychology, making it hard to escape from. " 'Femininity – It's Making a Comeback!' or a quiz for teenagers with the heading 'Is Your Problem that You're Trying To Be a Boy?' " (198). Girls are directed to business courses in school that bypassed science and math, focusing on typing and shorthand. The standard female stereotypes exist when compared with boys "What I possessed, he told me frankly when we discussed the future, was a first-rate memory, a not unusual feminine gift for language, fairly weak reasoning powers, and almost no capacity for abstract thought" (215). *Lives of Girls and Women* is a novel that focuses on a small moment in time and place as gender bias plays emblematic to the much larger picture, where Munro creates

intense empathy for small town characters quite shut off from where a nations politics and future are moving toward change.

Carol Shields: *The Stone Diaries*

Carol Shields' many achievements as an author include a 1995 Pulitzer Prize awarded for her fictional work *The Stone Diaries*. The only book to receive both the American Pulitzer Prize and the Canadian Governor General's Award, *The Stone Diaries* novel, published in 1993, spans both WWI and WWII. The novel begins in small town Tyndale Manitoba where Mercy Goodwill dies during the birth of her daughter Daisy. Through the course of her life Daisy moves from a small town to the city, Canada to the US and back again.

The story begins with the mother of Daisy dying in childbirth and the father, being unable to cope, relinquishes Daisy to live with Clementine, a female neighbor, who subsequently leaves her own husband and moves from small rural town to large city. Canadian small town thinking punctuates this story. To these characters the world is only what is within walking distance. No information is imparted unless it is entirely practical and relates directly to a necessary function. There is no searching for any explanation of life, or the meaning of events within it. The characters accept the positives while silently shouldering and moving on from the negatives.

Daisy glides along this way, as others plan her life. Clementine and Daisy move from rural Tyndall to Winnipeg, arriving unannounced on the doorstep of Clementine's own youngest son Barker. The three live together, each harboring their own resentments of the situation but never discussing them. A tragic accident kills Clementine and after a short while during which Barker wrestles with sexual feelings toward the small child,

Daisy is sent to live in Bloomington Indiana with her father Cuyler Goodwill. Shields gives Daisy dual citizenship, bringing her from Manitoba to Indiana, and quickly sweeping her up in the American cultural machine. “You should know that when Cuyler Goodwill speaks, as he often does these days, about ‘living in a progressive country’ or ‘being a citizen of a proud, free nation,’ he is referring to the United States of America and not to the Dominion of Canada” (68). In Bloomington Daisy matures into a typical affluent American teenager, socializing with other affluent families whose life centers around the country club.

There are educated Bloomingtonians – he meets them every day – who have never heard of the province of Manitoba, or if they have, they’re unable to spell it correctly or locate it on a map. They think Ottawa is a town in south-central Illinois, and that Toronto lies somewhere in the northern counties of Ohio. It’s as though a huge eraser has come down from the heavens and wiped out the top of the continent. (68)

Shields continues to compare the two nations that her characters straddle, making this comparison significant to her story.

The newspaper-reading public of America, so preoccupied with its own vital and combustible ethos, can scarcely be expected to take an interest in the snail-like growth of its polite northerly neighbor, however immense, with its crotchety old king and the relatively low-temperature setting of its melting pot. Canada seems to them a country where nothing ever happens. A country always dressed in its Sunday go-to-meeting clothes. A country you wouldn’t ask to dance a second waltz. Clean. Christian, Dull, Quiescent. (68,69)

Shields is making a stark cultural comparison. Mocking Americans for both not knowing their geography, as well as not caring about it. With the novel set in a time period pivotal for both nations, the comparisons Shields intentionally makes shed light on the differences. Daisy’s father has been fully indoctrinated into what is made out to sound like a cult, and he is being swept right along. Shields constructs Daisy as a child who has

lost the embrace of her mother and her mother country, and resultingly sees nothing but emptiness in her own reflection. Daisy returns from college for marriage and is warned by her mother-in-law to not “let this advantage impinge on normal marital harmony”; she is encouraged to not “parade” her knowledge (75). Daisy marries the country club scene’s most cherished son. Position and place are the advertised American constructs of happily ever after. But the Hollywood ending vanishes when her new husband dies on their honeymoon, in truth relieving Daisy of what she already knew would be a miserable life yet one she had been tied to by the forces around her. Daisy feels a magnetic pull to return to Canada; she has worn Indiana uncomfortably. After contacting Uncle Barker in Winnipeg she abruptly leaves Indiana to visit him, her inner self already acknowledging it will be more. They marry, and she has hopes of finding satisfaction as a wife and mother, but is emotionally limited to just following the status quo in joyless duty, which she acknowledges, but has no explanation for.

Sexuality is handled in a similar invisible way in this story, including much unspoken but burdensome humiliation. In a marriage when the husband begins referring to his wife as ‘mother’, their private sexual relationship is blunted, which trickles into other areas between the two. “If you’re willing, Mother,” is how the invitation is delivered (14). No conversation other than what is necessary for operational purposes, with everything from sex to “the rearing of three sons, for the ordering of supplies, the discussions concerning weather, illness, what manner of vegetables should be planted in the garden” (14). Physical and emotional love are deemed unnecessary in the operation of day-to-day life, so therefore not bothered with; emotions are not even remotely considered a real thing. “Embrace me, she says to the dripping sheets and pillowslips,

hold me. But she says it dully, without hope” (16). Daisy is the narrator of her own story, with some of the scenes she describes taking place before her birth, and many others happening out of her eyesight. The reader is left to wonder if these are her own inventions, as she fills in the blanks to parts of her life that are untold to her, so she has created them in the way she wants.

Religion exists for Daisy as a shield to hold up against misunderstanding, also as an excuse, an obscure Bible passage that can be manipulated to have the meaning you want wrung out of it. Religion seems to exist only on the outward plane of the individual, only there for the purpose of appearance and unearned credibility, with the bonus of appropriate business associations being crafted within the cloistered ring of members. As Madison remarked, “religion is the cement that seals shut their door on the world” (1).

Daisy knows no other way of existing; she is hollow, her independent personality never forged. Munro constructs Daisy as an empty shell, a symbol of Canada while dominated by the Empire before claiming its own self-rule. Daisy sees a glimpse of her own identity, when as a widow with an empty house, she writes a newspaper column about gardening. “She was suddenly a different person, a person who worked. Who worked ‘outside the home,’ as people said in those quaint days” (177). This period of Daisy working is short-lived as she is abruptly replaced at the newspaper by a male journalist. “Women’s journalism was considered inferior, gossipy and personal: good for the newspaper’s sales, but not for its front page” (Thieme 89). Deep depression results when that endeavor ends, and Daisy reviews her life’s roads not traveled.

Canadian women were permitting themselves to acknowledge their lack of fulfillment while their role as wife and mother moved into their past.

The novel is written and formatted in the life chronology of the main character: Birth, Childhood, Marriage, Love, Motherhood, Work, Sorrow, Ease, Illness and Decline, Death. Daisy's oneness never appears in any of these marks of time passage, only the expected trajectory of the female life of acceptance. The story of peoples unique beginning stays with them throughout life, acknowledged or not. In this novel the main character knows that her birth is the cause of her mother's death. "The illness she suffers is orphan-hood – she recognizes it in the same way you recognize a migraine coming on: here it comes again – and again – and here she lies. Stranded, genderless, ageless, alone" (188). This heavy truth is never discussed, but the reader sees Daisy carry the repercussions of it. She keeps a thin protective sheet of separation between herself and those she holds dear, if only from obligation. Daisy never exhibits any natural warmth or connection to her surviving parent, her husband or her children. These relationships are admired accomplishments, all lacking the ingredient of affection, and with her efficient management of them this missing piece goes unnoticed. She lives as her story began, with unexpected sadness followed by absence. This was the label she was assigned at birth and she has never been able to leave it behind. "Yet wherever she goes, her story marches ahead of her. Announces her. Declares and cancels her true self. Oh, she did so want to be happy, but what choice did she have, stepping to the beat of that ragbag history of hers?" (122).

Daisy can feel that tragedy follows her; she feels herself a talisman of bad luck. Her mother dies giving birth to her and then her sneeze startles her newlywed husband off the window ledge to his own death on the street below. A tragic combination of circumstances that affect her but are never put into words, words that could place them in the past allowing life to move onward, instead she buries them.

Men, it seemed to me in those days, were uniquely honored by the stories that erupted in their lives, where-as women were more likely to be smothered by theirs. Why? Why should this be? Why should men be allowed to strut under the privilege of their life adventures, wearing them like a breast full of medals, while women went all gray and silent beneath the weight of theirs. (121)

Daisy feels herself “powerless, anchorless, soft-tissued – a woman” (150). She decides this is an observation that can really be the sum of all the blame. This is something tangible that can be accepted as she is of the flawed gender, a burden to bear stoically without giving any more thought to it. Everything that has happened to her can now be attributed to this one flaw, and somehow this insight makes everything so simple. It comes as a relief because there is nothing she can do to fix it. She can now stop thinking about what she needs to change about herself because the one thing she cannot change, that she is a woman, is the cause of each and every unfortunate circumstance that has been chiseled out as her life. Life proceeds to happen to Daisy and she feels the loss of any connection to the world, and she views it in this way.

Shields motherless character lacks a maternal force in her life. As Canada progressed from a colony to independent nation, and Canadian women stepped into the daylight of their liberation, Shields story illustrates that origin is a tremendously important factor on the path to freedom.

Margaret Atwood: *Cat's Eye*

Margaret Atwood, Governor General's Award recipient, and finalist for the 1988 and 1989 Booker Prize, gained world-wide recognition as a writer with *Cat's Eye*, a novel published in 1988, that spans post WW11 through the 1980's. The novel is set in Toronto, Ontario centering around the main character, Elaine Risley.

The novel is a recollection, by the protagonist Elaine who as an adult examines her life and it's cast of players. The novel begins by highlighting the formative relationships between parents and siblings which is reflected in Elaine's self-identity. Their early life takes place in a bubble that although idyllic, doesn't provide the tools needed for integrating into the competitive world of neighborhood and school. To accommodate the husband's job, the family of four shuttles between remote northern Ontario in the summer and a suburb of Toronto during the school year. This transition and the distinct differences in the interpersonal relationships to be navigated create Elaine's insecurities. "In her novels, Margaret Atwood creates situations in which women, burdened by the rules and inequalities of their society's, discover that they must reconstruct braver, self-reliant personae in order to survive" (Goldblatt 275).

Elaine now lives in British Columbia, as far away from Toronto and her memories as she can get. She is back in Toronto for a retrospective of her paintings and staying at her ex-husband's apartment while he is out of town. "There is always, in Atwood, the necessity to redefine the mother, to return to one's childhood home, to explore the past in order to confront the present" (Rigney 4). "Until we moved to Toronto I was happy," this is the line of demarcation in Elaine's memory (22). Before Toronto Elaine's world is very small: father, mother, and brother. The family lived a wartime life, subsisting on

sardines and bread and staying in cheap motel rooms in the remote north while Elaine's father went about his work collecting bug samples. The camaraderie of the sibling relationship is both a shelter and secret a world. "How long did we live this way, like nomads on the far edges of the war?" (26). Elaine reads a book about Dick and Jane and nothing about it resembles her life. Elaine wants a girl as a friend, and she draws girls and dresses while her brother draws war.

In the fall the family returns to Toronto; where life follows convention. Mother wears dresses with stockings and lipstick when she goes out; father is now a university professor and wears a suit. There exists an unspoken abyss between Atwood's mothers and daughters "filled with wordlessness" (98). No explanation is given when Elaine's mother suffers a miscarriage. Atwood uses fertility as an inverted metaphor for art. Babies are aborted, born dead or malformed, just as art is sometimes misconceived.

Toronto played a prominent role in the Canadian suffrage campaign, with well-known speakers attracting large often militant working-class crowds. "They were quickly shushed by a local suffrage organization leader who assured reporters that this was the Canadian way, where such unladylike tactics were not yet needed" (Sangster 571). The girls in the novel judge the ladies they encounter on the streetcar, rating them by their appearance, estimating their age. Appearance is noted as the baseline measurement for women. The girls themselves, as well as their respective mothers all have their personalities decided based on their clothing choices. Atwood makes this apparent, a nod to what has always seemed to be the case: women being judged by appearance. A suffrage rally speaker is not described by her message but as "a lady, singularly attractive in appearance, graceful in carriage, dignified in bearing, and a public

speaker of culture as well as force” (Thieme 89). The girls feel aging needs to be accepted and given-in to, and anything other than this approach is obvious and ridiculous; they take note of all of this and criticize it. Thinking back on this practice Elaine decides, “Vanity is becoming a nuisance; I can see why women give it up, eventually. But I’m not ready for that yet” (6). These childhood obsessions now twist in Elaine’s mind as she blames her friend for making her see people in that cruel way. Elaine hasn’t seen her friend for years and imagines the numerous terrible outcomes that may have befallen her, which she feels deservedly so.

Elaine suffers from depression. She continues to measure herself against past friends even though she is unaware of the details of their adult life. She feels left behind by language as she hears and misunderstands current colloquialisms. Every sight and sound recreate a memory for Elaine; being in Toronto is bad for her mental health. When she did attend public school girls had to wear dresses and enter through their own door away from the boys. Elaine and her brother entered through different doors at school and she was instructed not to talk to him there. Elaine’s friend Carol goes to the hairdresser as does Carol’s mother. Carol has a closet full of fancy girls clothes that she wears to church on Sunday. Elaine’s family doesn’t go to church or participate in religion. At Carol’s house Elaine learns about chintz, twin-sets, a coat-tree and a cold-wave. “Playing with girls is different and at first I feel strange as I do it, self-conscious, as if I’m only doing an imitation of a girl” (55). Elaine’s early life haunts her as the girlfriends make cut-out homes from the catalogue. “I find this game tiring – it’s the weight, the accumulation of all these objects, these possessions that would have to be taken care of, packed, stuffed into cars, unpacked” (56). Elaine lacks the confidence to thwart her

feelings of inadequacy, while she sees her unusual past as a minus instead of a plus. She remembers the catalogue pages instead as toilet paper in northern outhouses. Elaine feels she can transform herself into this other type of girl and starts to acquire the items necessary for that such, as a purse. What Elaine does know about has no value to the other girls, so she hides these skills. Elaine compares the mothers of her friends to her own mother. She remembers these other mothers now and wonders, “ Why do I hate her so much? Why do I care, in any way what went on in her head?” (63). The lives of boys and girls continue to diverge further and further while their games, pastimes, and school activities take on distant paths. As her family leave the city for the summer and go back to the north, Elaine feels like a passenger in life, not understanding why things happen to her.

Returning to school Elaine is introduced to Cordelia, now they are a group of four friends. The group laments the requirement of wearing skirts and the restrictive movement. “Now that I’ve changed back from pants to skirt, I have to remember the moves” (81). Teachers are mostly male or women above a certain age. “Married women don’t have jobs; we know this from our own mothers” (82).

God is presented as dispenser of judgement, as an ever-present watchful eye waiting to catch and condemn every mistake. Christianity judges other religions to be blasphemous. Elaine finds empowerment through inner rebellion. She finds sorority with the Virgin Mary as female, and decides to pray to Her rather than Jesus. “The decision makes me nervous, as if I’m about to steal” (194). Elaine knows this choice is “scandalous,” but that energizes her to do it even more (194). It’s the power of choice she feels and revels in, without understanding why. Elaine glimpses independence but has

yet to find her self-confidence. During the separation of Canada from The Empire, possession and monetizing of Canada's natural resources creates contention. Creating a new nation away from over-sight and the history of other's mistakes of the past, Canadians wanted full all-encompassing power to choose and control their own direction. "When the British government conceded self-government to the colonies, it was intended that control over colonial trade relations should remain in the hands of the imperial government" (Skelton 137). Friends with benefits was the Mother Country's point of view toward Canada. Canada having the will and joint political confidence to pursue Confederation as the first step toward full separation, and had to be eased into because it was an irreversible maneuver.

Cat's Eye switches from past to present throughout. In the present, Elaine is back in Toronto for a gallery exhibit of her paintings. Being in Toronto is psychologically draining for Elaine and this causes her to wander back analyzing her troubles. "In her novels, almost all dwell on their childhood years in flashback or in the chronological telling of their stories" (Goldblatt 275). Elaine had been bullied as a child, left unarmed by her parents to face the pressures of life found outside the home and beyond their way of life. Elaine is easily intimidated and always feels inspected, at risk of being found a disappointing failure. Friend Cordelia was particularly responsible for the bullying of Elaine throughout the school years, until Elaine found some confidence in getting good grades. Elaine remains indignant to the double-standard of boys to girls which she sees continue into adult life. Only paintings of women feature in her gallery exhibit and she is asked why by a journalist. Elaine wonders why this same question was not asked of Rembrandt. Elaine is a feminist, deeply aware of every double standard and it twists her

the same way the injustices did when she was a child. Elaine is defensive of her attitude and outlook and this becomes off-putting in conversation. When pushed, her inner voice translates questioning into criticism “What I hear is what she isn’t saying. Your clothes are stupid. Your art is crap. Sit up straight and don’t answer back” (94). Everything Elaine hears about her is converted to a judgement. She is a feminist, but resists the label because it’s a label, even though her principles align with the platform. But, isn’t that the pivotal point of feminism, not to be labelled? Yet the world wants a label on everything and everyone.

Elaine confuses bullying with friendship. She thinks her girlfriends bully her because they are her friends, and her parents don’t decipher this for her. “All of this is for my own good, because they are my best friends and they want to help me improve.” Elaine believes herself to be the cause of the isolation and criticism she receives from her friends, she thinks this is deserved. “It’s the kind of things girls of this age do to one another, or did then, but I’d had no practice in it” (124). Elaine convinces herself that the girls are her friends and they treat her this way because they want to help her, and she wants to keep them as her friends. She buys candy and gives to these friends to feel loved by them. Is Atwood illustrating how the “three characteristic themes of the Canadian philosophy—tolerance, restraint, and mutual respect,” can be a handicap (Madison 16)?

Present day Elaine does recognize her weakness in extracting truth. She may even consider herself easily fooled, unable to see what is genuine. A young Elaine realized she was vulnerable to the suggestions of others, beyond even her self-harm behavior, but going further to killing herself if the taunt was made to her. Elaine laments that none of

the abuse she endures from her friends leave any physical scars, therefore she won't ask for help from mother or brother for fear of not being believed with no evidence to back up her claims. She suspects this would leave her open to further ridicule, being called a sissy by her brother or simply dismissed for making a fuss. Now an adult Elaine has her own children. She has two daughters and she is very vigilant, looking for signs of their distress and any psychological warfare they might be waging on themselves as she once did. Elaine's parents were oblivious to her struggle and she suffered in isolation.

What would I have done if I had been my mother? She must have realized what was happening to me, or that something was. Even toward the beginning she must have noted my silences, my bitten fingers, the dark scabs on my lips where I'd pulled off patches of the skin. If it were happening now, to a child of my own, I would know what to do. But then? There were fewer choices, and a great deal less was said. (160)

Feeling she deserves it, Elaine inflicts punishment on herself rather than confront her tormenters. Elaine blames herself: everything that happens to her is due to her own failing. " 'You have to learn to stand up for yourself,' says my mother. 'Don't let them push you around. Don't be spineless. You have to have more backbone' " (167).

Furthering her isolation Elaine's mother admits she is powerless. " 'I wish I knew what to do,' she says. This is a confession," (167). But then Elaine discovers a power she had never before considered, but was well acquainted with: meanness. It has been used against her but now she sees how it can be used as a weapon, not necessarily against others because Elaine is not cruel, but as a way to shield herself. Meanness as a shield becomes a powerful and confident strength. Her epiphany comes with her best friend who is also her worst enemy, who has taunted her, humiliated her, alienated her from others, and verbally abused her for years. "I have a denser, more malevolent little triumph to finger: energy has passed between us, and I am stronger" (246).

Maturity presents the usual adolescent insecurities but Elaine doesn't struggle with those. She feels smarter than friends, boyfriends, and wiser than her parents. From this she derives a confident power where she sees what happens to her is her choice not her curse. Her sexual partners are absent from her emotionally and this is a freedom she enjoys, but eventually grows weary of. "It strikes me with no warning that I am miserable" (313). Sex does include the ever-present worry about unwanted pregnancy, which is known to be always the girl's fault, "girls who went too far in back seats" (360). Diaphragms are only available to married women and condoms are sold only to men. It's the girl's fault, but she is left floating in a sea without a life raft. Elaine's friend becomes pregnant and causes an abortion herself with life-threatening consequences; these are the times.

Motherhood is the height of female accomplishment at the time, and is recognized as such with a true story injected into Atwood's fictional one. The Dionne Quintuplets were a phenomenon, their birth sensationalized to the entire western world. Canadians especially were fixated on these five little girls, their birth and survival. They were set out in the front garden on schedule as tourists queued past three times a day. Their Catholic French-Canadian parents were treated with derision, the mother rarely mentioned, and only the father invited to be a member of the Ontario government board organized to protect / exploit them. Their mother gave birth to a combined total of fifteen children between the years of 1926 and 1946 yet that was never part of any story, herself a victim of that generation's view and purpose of women. In *The Mother Country*, Kim Anderson notes Canadian nationalist history includes women following a "linear progression toward motherhood which represented the climax in a woman's life

narrative” (123). By weaving the birth of the Dionne quintuplets into her fictional story, Atwood is using an extreme representation reinforcing stereotypes of the prolific French-Canadian mother to make her point about the narrow path women walked and the limited options open to them, a recurring theme in Atwood novels.

Pregnancy and childbirth are represented as part of Elaine’s story in *Cat’s Eye*. In addition to her friend’s graphic self-induced abortion, Elaine herself has an unplanned pregnancy and considers her first child not “as a gift I have given him, but one he has allowed me” (356). Maternal conditioning is woven into the lives of girls. Toys, games, clothing and expectations all represent the assumed role every girl will one day fill. Even mothers who aren’t nurturing realize the expectation is that they produce offspring, and they seek raising them as a job. Elaine’s mother kept her children clean and fed, but offered little else in the way of camaraderie or connection with them, “a figure of love and self-sacrifice as promoted by priests, doctors and politicians,” with birth control being seen as a rejection of such an ideal (Anderson 124). In the book *O Canada*, author Edmund Wilson quotes M. Le Moyne’s description of the French-Canadian mother of his decade –

He depicts her in an apotheosis: She stands on her linoleum, in calico, in front of a stove and a cooking pot, an infant on her left hip, a large spoon in her right hand, a cluster of little ones about her legs, and a baby in the cradle next to the wood-box. But the paradox is, that with all her fecundity, she is supposed to be inaccessible, since, as mother, like the Virgin, she is sacred. (133)

Elaine now has a new group of friends who question and rebel. “Why, for instance, do we shave our legs? Wear lipstick? Dress up in slinky clothing? Alter our shapes? What is wrong with us the way we are” (360)? Other inequalities are discussed: lower salaries, missed promotions, ridiculed art. Elaine is now married to Jon and they

share a daughter making her an outsider again, in this feminist friend group. But yet these women clearly have a double standard; “If you stay with the man, whatever problems you are having are your own fault” (361). This is a black and white proclamation, yet has too many variables to be claimed as finite. Elaine does feel the empowerment the rage of these women creates. She reflects back on women that she had declared stupid and watered-down, but she reconsiders, and wonders if they were actually the smart ones in charge of some complicated game play they were manipulating. In the end Elaine misses what hasn’t happened and she cannot make happen. She misses an ending with friend and bully Cordelia. She deserves a closing chapter, a conclusion to their story; and she is haunted by this void.

The mother of Elaine, the central character, is present in her daughter’s life yet absent at the same time. It is as if she became a mother out of convention, but for no other reason. She didn’t establish any connection with her daughter that would have provided an anchor when Elaine encountered bullying. “Mothers who themselves have not found acceptance, success, or ease in society persist in transmitting the old messages of conformity” (Goldblatt 279). Elaine’s parents were refined hippies whose bohemian lifestyle came to overshadow everything Elaine did. It seems Atwood leaves the mother absent of identity intentionally and not even naming her, instead she has her following alongside her husband’s pursuits like a dreamy flower child. “Men uphold the values of the patriarchy and women conform, few trespassing into gardens of their own design” (Goldblatt 276). When the husband settles into a traditional career, Elaine is dumped into the judgmental world of public school with no tools to cope. “I am a little resentful. There are things my parents have been keeping from me, things I need to know” (106).

Her vulnerability is immediately sniffed out by her peers; those she has long imagined and longed for, and converted into a daily onslaught of criticism and incredulity directed at what Elaine lacks in cultural subtleties and convention. “ ‘You didn’t know what a cold wave is?’ she says, delighted. She’s eager to explain things to me, name them, display them. Standing in the downstairs hall, where there is a coat tree— ‘You’ve never seen a coat tree?’ ” (55). Elaine studies the mothers of her friends. How different they each are and all different than her own mother. Although different, these women are all one-dimensional constructs representing the every woman of the times in Canada.

Elaine becomes a painter and her paintings reflect her inner struggles. She hated Mrs. Smeath, who said Elaine was a heathen, her family a lost cause. “This wave is shame, which I have felt before, but it is also hatred, which I have not, not in this pure form” (191). Elaine paints many images of Mrs. Smeath. These images are meant to exorcise from her soul this long ago but still vivid hatred of the real Mrs. Smeath. The burning slap of humiliation and of betrayal is something that never dulls with time; the only possible cleanser is revenge. Elaine is “exerting power in paint over the people who have condemned her” (Goldblatt 275). The Mrs. Smeaths are not flattering, “It’s women as anticheesecake,” Elaine is told (365). At Elaine’s retrospective Mrs. Smeath is on full display, raw and vulnerable as she deserves, and Elaine relishes in her satisfaction through the second-hand humiliation of her childhood tormentor. Each of the panels of Elaine’s polyptych of Smeaths extracts revenge for a memory: Mrs. Smeath wrapped in white-gift tissue with just her head out “half her face peeling off,” next one with her partially unwrapped showing her “saggy-legged cotton underpants, her heart is the heart of a dying turtle; reptilian dark-red, diseased, the hulky big-boned frame, glittering

spectacles and hairpin crown” (369). Elaine relishes in the disgust the images invoke. The disgust is not directed at her, but at Mrs. Smeath. “She is making a spectacle of herself, at last, and I am in control” (370). This is Elaine freeing herself from her past. This is Atwood attacking “what she sees as her country's voluntary assumption of victim positions;” (Wilson, S 16) her protagonist’s revolt through her art is also Atwood’s because they are one and the same. Atwood is also a visual artist but downplays her talent and has had little to no acknowledgement of her art in a public forum. Atwood, like Elaine, uses her art as a means to communicate.

Elaine’s past is compartmentalized in her friends Carol Campbell, Grace Smeath, and Cordelia, compartmentalized and left behind in Toronto. Elaine has collected the cruelty she endured through the bullying and vulnerability and uses her painting as an outlet to relive and then relieve herself of it. How our memories continue to define us is a possible subtext to this novel. We birth ourselves out of the boundaries of family, only to find it remains as our framework. Elaine resented her mother’s aloofness and self-absorbed singular pursuits; her nonconforming approach to womanhood, yet Elaine sees the parallels in herself and reels at the discomfort of that. Elaine lets a boyfriend choose her clothes when the ones she would choose for herself are dowdy and unbecoming just like her mother; the velour track suit she wears to the gallery anonymizes her. In spite of school and all the studying, memorizing, and testing, children become what they see their parents doing day in and day out at home. They see what their parents prioritize, read, and talk about. Elaine emulates that with what she accepts as normal in her life and she quarrels with it. We are trapped between convention and expectation and left each to our own, to find the island in between. We become our parents no matter how much we fight

it: railing at unfamiliar buzz words, and the falling off of traditions; change in general.

The gallery owners name is Charna. Atwood mocks the new generation who see no need for a last name. Reminiscent of Nora Ephron's witty work in the movie *Who's Got Mail*, "Hi I'm Kimberly, Hi I'm Janice. What's wrong with them, don't they know you're supposed to have a last name?" Elaine gives her daughters sensible names, Sarah and Anne.

Inequality of the time follows the characters throughout this novel. As Sonia Chadha notes regarding Atwood's writing, "most of her works are written from a woman's point of view and the main focus is on the relationships shared by men and women." Boys and men are always prioritized. Elaine receives gifts that are of no consequence, simply time fillers such as paper doll books of Canadian figure skater Barbara Ann Scott; her brother receives a chemistry set. Elaine's family life revolves around her father's career, her mother has no career and makes no connections in the city, knowing they will soon be uprooted to follow her husband back north. When a passerby draws a beard on Elaine's gallery poster, she feels it will give her exhibit legitimacy because people will think the exhibit is featuring a man's paintings. "The ageing man is clearly read very differently from the ageing woman...the way she is both marginalized and stereotyped in terms of both age and gender" (Falcus 318).

Conclusion:

These three authors have advanced the task of establishing a Canadian identity through literature. Literary scholar Marta Dvorák notes "when a picture is traded for language, and language for picture, the receiver is projected into a world of dissolved boundaries." To be a successful female writer already includes obstacles not faced by

men in the same industry. To achieve success and recognition amongst your peers and find your audience beyond the border as a female Canadian writer is even more daunting. Each of these authors has chosen to write from a place of Canadian perspective, which has made their journey that much more remarkable. “Turn-of-the-century Canadian social reform debates defined their historical moment...suffragism was one among multiple debates which came to describe, and therefore shape, this historical moment” (Thieme 29).

The three novels this paper highlights are intrinsically Canadian, in setting, character and philosophy. To acknowledge this truth and then to realize the extent that their international popularity and recognition has attained in spite of that, is when we can truly realize and appreciate the accomplishment. Other excellent female Canadian authors have come before them, those that might be well-known to Canadians and even possibly British readers by grandmotherly association. But Alice Munro, Carol Shields and Margaret Atwood have stood tall on their predecessors shoulders and achieved an international following that has previously been out of reach. Of the many excellent Canadian male writers, only a small number would have any recognition outside Canada: Malcolm Gladwell and Mordecai Richler, Leonard Cohen and even children’s author Robert Munsch possibly. But none of these men have achieved the acclaim, within their profession and outside of it, that Munro, Shields and Atwood can own.

Being a Canadian author and using Canada as backdrop to a novel is brave. One might say no less brave than an American writer doing the same about America, but Canadians already suffer an inferiority complex about themselves that Americans certainly do not; without one of their own putting examples of it down on the printed

page. Each of these authors “have met with a great deal of predictable criticism, from Canadians as well as others” (Rigney 124). In each of these three novels the writers have taken their protagonist on a search for power and control over their situation. Situations that have been thrust upon them, that they are bewildered by and feel responsible for at the same time, without understanding that the origin is the overarching patriarchy found in their genes. Atwood’s writing contains a common thread, “represented in her works, most notably her feminism, of which she has spoken frequently in interviews” (Jonitha I). An overarching theme infrequently mentioned however, is the presence in Atwood’s novels of the Canadian ‘other’, and how this dramatically affects her characters self-view and resulting choices.

Each central character in these novels is female and the relationship that each one has with their own mother is strategic to their character’s development. In two of these novels, *Cat’s Eye* and *Lives of Girls and Women*, the mother figure is present and integral, for better and worse, in the development of her daughter. In the third novel, *The Stone Diaries*, the mother is absent entirely, an incalculable handicap. The novels center on who holds the power. We see the mother attempt to grasp it but in each, fails.

“Particularly in this sense, Atwood can be seen as a ‘feminist’ writer: she is concerned for the psychological and physical survival of women, and she sees this in terms, not merely of individual survival, but of sisterhood” (Rigney 10). In *Cat’s Eye*, Atwood’s central character Elaine is in awe and at odds with her mother simultaneously. Elaine is witness to her mother trying to carve out her own identity from the shadow of her husband’s, but Elaine also is witness to her failure to do so. In her mother’s quest she also seems to fail

at being a mother; not embracing that role while she is occupied with trying to succeed at the other one, she is unsuccessful at both.

Del Jordan, Munro's protagonist in *Lives of Girls and Women* is a passenger to her mother's drive to be something more than she is in their small Ontario town of Jubilee. Del's mother hopes her husband will follow her off the farm and into town when she rents a house there for herself and Del in an attempt to elevate them, but he does not. Del's mother takes a job selling encyclopedias door to door and uses Del's eidetic memory as a sales tactic until Del starts to feel self-conscious and hides her own intelligence. Del is aware of her mother's aspirations, yet seems unempathetic even obstinate toward them. The two women operate within a forcefield of unspoken emotion between them, eventually the mother becomes resigned to her daughters indifference as Del seems to intentionally go in the opposite direction than her mother would have her go. Del derives more from her friendships than her relationship with her mother. Her friends act with the decisiveness that Del cannot seem to summon, which she admires but can't quite grasp. Her friends' lives progress while Del, having had seemingly more options, is left behind.

By the end of chapter one Daisy Goodwell's mother is dead in Carol Shields novel *The Stone Diaries*. From this point Daisy begins her anchorless drift through life from one caretaker to another. Not lacking love, but lacking a foundation in spite of the heavy symbolic spectacle of stone her father constructs on her mother's grave. Daisy lives an unsatisfied life, moving from place to place and doing what she feels is expected of her, but without any joy. Her college girlfriends give her support throughout her life's journey but everything about Daisy seems hollow. She succeeds scholastically, and then

practically as a wife and mother, even finding success in a later career as a journalist. Yet nothing seems to fill a void that she is unable to identify within herself, and never seems to satisfy. Her life seems a success from the outside but she is left unfulfilled. “Her protagonists are always explorers through tradition and myth in search of a new identity and in search of a voice, a tongue, a language, an art, with which to proclaim that identity” (Rigney 10). Although Barbara Hill Rigney writes this about Atwood her comment can apply equally to Munro and Shields.

The Canadian influence in these novels goes far beyond setting alone. Canada has its own unique identity stemming from its heritage and still current day governmental structure. The Canadian literary tradition is so victim oriented, Atwood states ... largely because of Canada’s political beginnings as a colony. Rigney quotes Atwood as saying “to be a colony, is to be victimized, exploited, as an oppressed minority” (123). Canada began as an undiscovered uncharted wilderness known only to fur traders and its Indigenous population. As the Puritans arrived on the shores of North America and discovered the vastness of the land lying to the west, they included in their gaze the vista spreading to the north as well. Canada, then and since has struggled to establish its own national identity in the great shadow of its southern neighbor who only adds to Canada’s identity crisis by continuing to imply and apply its Americanization.

Canada remains misunderstood by Americans. “In my youth, I always thought of Canada as an inconceivably limitless extension of the wilderness –the ‘North Woods’ of upstate New York,” this comment made by American author and literary critic Edmund Wilson in his 1965 book titled *Oh Canada* (37). Throughout his book Wilson continues the idea that Canada was thought of by Americans as a yet unencompassed arm of the

United States with no identity of its own or even the need for one. “In my youth, of the early nineteen-hundreds, we tended to imagine Canada as a kind of vast hunting preserve convenient to the United States” (Wilson, E 36). The Canadian identity differs from that of America’s due to very different origins of both.

As the pervasive symbol of American literature, according to Atwood, is the frontier, so the dominant image in Canadian fiction is survival, the unheroic survival of victimization: ... our central idea is one which generates, not the excitement and sense of adventure or danger which The Frontier holds out...but an almost intolerable anxiety. Our stories are likely to be tales not of those who made it but of those who made it back, from the awful experience – the North, the snow-storm, the sinking ship – that killed everyone else. The survivor has no triumph or victory but the fact of this survival. (Rigney 123)

Authors Munro, Shields, and Atwood have included the Canadian other as a character in their novels. In stepping away from the Empire Mother, Canada forged its own identity as a nation and its unique origin and existence is confirmed through these examples of Canadian literature. As Canadian nationhood was shaking the bonds of the sovereign so were women in Canada rising from the limitations of daughter, wife, mother, widow. In constructing their stories these authors have filled them with people and places that represent the areas that inform their work. They present the distinct otherness that has been born of Canadian independence and female empowerment rising in tandem during the same political period. This shared history has resulted in a point of reference which gives their work a unique connection. When considered from the place of being both female and Canadian these authors endeavor to explain the Canadian philosophy.

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