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Feminism in Women's Canadian Literature in the 1960s and the 1970s

Feminismus v Ženské Kanadské Literatuře Šedesátých a Sedmdesátých Let

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Declaration

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V Praze dne

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Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used to study purposes.

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis focuses on feminism in selected Canadian novels published in the 1960s and 1970s. The discussed novels are Marian Engel's *Bear*, Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. This thesis will concentrate on the feminist aspect of each work, and primarily on the rebellion against the patriarchal society - each of the protagonist rebels in a different way. Lou from *Bear* is using a feminine language to overpower men, as well as her sexual awaking and a rebirth into a new woman. Hagar's rebellion in *The Stone Angel* manages to subvert the male-dominated society, primarily thanks to her hidden femininity in the beginning, and also because of Laurence's usage of the first-person narrative in the present tense, which seemed to have been unusual in her time. Del from the *Lives of Girls and Women* subverted the society by choosing her own path, in the form of becoming a writer, as well as her breaking the taboos about women's sexuality by not only reading and talking about it but also by experimenting. The no-name narrator from *Surfacing* then again uses her language to take a feminine stance in society. Her rebellion is then also pictured by her quest for a better woman inside her.

The second main focus of this thesis will be on the typical features of Canadian literature present in the novels. These features are introduced in the second chapter and later discussed with the individual novels in their own chapters. Primarily, the aspect of Canadian nature and to that connected wilderness, survival, regionalism and its comparison with the cities will be discussed. Also, the notion of telling stories and the shared history will be analysed in the respective chapters.

Each of the novels was given their individual chapters to capture the rebellions and the Canadian features in depth. For the Canadian literature and its typical features, Faye Hammill's book *Canadian Literature* was used, as it seem to be one of the few books on Canadian literature, which deals with the individual features in great detail. Books by

Margaret Atwood, *Survival* and *Strange Things* were used to delineate those features more clearly. The feminist aspect is explained on a general theory provided by Deborah Cameron from her book *Feminism*. Other than these sources, essays and books on the respective novels are discussed to strengthen the argument of this thesis.

Key Words: feminism, Canadian literature, Marian Engel, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, rebellion, nature

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na vybraná díla Kanadské literatury vydané v šedesátých a sedmdesátých letech minulého století. Probíranými romány jsou *Bear* od Marian Engel, *The Stone Angel* od Margaret Laurence, *Lives of Girls and Women* od Alice Munro a *Surfacing* od Margaret Atwood. Tato práce se bude soustředit na feministický aspekt každého díla a především na revoltu vůči patriachální společnosti, která je v každém románu rozdílná. Lou z románu *Bear* užívá jak ženský jazyk, tak její vlastní sexuální probuzení a znovuzrození v novou ženu, aby pokořila muže. Hlavní hrdinka Hagar z *The Stone Angel* je schopná rozvracet muži ovládanou společnost hlavně díky své skryté feminitě na začátku knihy, a také díky užití první osoby ve vyprávění. Tento styl užití ich-formy v přítomném čase byl velmi neobvyklý v době vydání tohoto románu. Del z románu *Lives of Girls and Women* podkopává společnost tím, že si volí vlastní cestu co se povolání týče (stala se spisovatelkou navzdory obtížím, které musela překonat). Její další revoltou je její bourání tabu o ženské sexualitě tím, že o ní nejen čte a mluví, ale také tím, že s ní experimentuje. Bezejmenná vypravěčka v *Surfacing* opět užívá ženského jazyka, čímž zastává ženský postoj ve společnosti. Její revolta je také ukázána na jejím pátrání po lepší ženě, která se uvnitř ní skrývá. Rozebíraná bude také historie a vyprávění příběhů v daných kapitolách, což jsou opět prvky typické pro Kanadskou literaturu.

Tato práce se také zabývá typickými znaky Kanadské literatury nacházející se ve vybraných románech. Tyto prvky jsou představeny v druhé, teoretické, kapitole a dále jsou do podrobnosti rozebírány v kapitolách o jednotlivých románech. Především bude projednáván prvek Kanadské přírody a s ní spojené divočiny, přežití, regionalismus a jeho porovnání s městy.

Každému z děl byla přidělena vlastní kapitola, aby již zmíněné revolty a Kanadské prvky byly zachyceny a rozebrány do hloubky. Hlavním zdrojem pro rozbor Kanadské literatury a jejích prvků je kniha *Canadian Literature* od Faye Hammill. Je to jedna z mála knih, která se

do detailu zabývá jednotlivými prvky dané literatury. Mimo to, knihy od Margaret Atwood, *Survival* a *Strange Things* byly použity pro dovysvětlení všech Kanadských prvků do detailu. Feministický aspekt práce je založen na obecné teorii z knihy *Feminism* od Deborah Cameron. Mimo tyto zdroje, knihy a eseje zabývající se jednotlivými romány a jejich prvky byly použity pro posílení argumentu celé práce.

Klíčová Slova: feminismum, Kanadská literatura, Marian Engel, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, revolta, příroda

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1. Introduction

Feminism in Canadian literature in the 1960s and the 1970s is not a topic widely talked about, which might be caused by the fact that Canadian literature, in general, is not one of the mainstream topics. Feminism, on the other hand, is now a movement gaining more and more popularity. At the same time, it is quite challenging to define what feminism is, as it has too many branches with too many definitions. This thesis will analyse four novels and that Marien Engel's *Bear*, Margaret Lawrence's *The Stone Angel*, Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. The focus will be on women in the chosen novels and their rebellion against the oppressing patriarchal society surrounding them. At the same time, it will outline the Canadian aspect of each novel to create a common idea of what Canadian writing is. These notions will be analysed and defined in the first chapter. For this thesis, themes such as feminism, Canadian literature and history of the 1960s and 1970s will be discussed to delineate the thesis accurately. Each novel will be discussed in a separate chapter of this thesis to create a wholesome picture of all of the themes and notions mentioned above. The main focus will be on the women's treatment by the society, therefore, the reasons why the women chose to rebel against it and, of course, the rebellion itself, which is vastly different in every novel. Other than that, the focus will be on the Canadian aspect of nature, its dangers, but also the cooperation and a certain symbiosis between women and nature.

Feminism as such has evolved and is still developing to this day, concerning its principal thoughts, its universal plan, but also its general definition. For this thesis, two main definitions expressed by Deborah Cameron in her book *Feminism* have been chosen. She expressed two basic definitions, the first being a "feminist idea: the radical notion that women are people," while the second one is described as "an intellectual framework: a mode of analysis, a way of asking questions and searching for answers."¹ This thesis will build on

¹ Deborah Cameron, *Feminism: Ideas in Profile, Small Introduction to Big Topics*, (London: Profile Books, 2018): 2

these definitions, trying to prove that women in the selected novels are considered somehow lesser than men, and will try to present their rebellion against the patriarchal society in which they live. By no means, then, does this thesis (or the novels examined in it) consider women the ‘better gender’, as it was vastly believed when feminism was discussed, especially in the era of the publication of the analysed novels²; it only means that the female writers and their protagonists are viewing themselves as equal to men; as fellow human beings. At the same time, this bachelor thesis will outline the Canadian aspect of each novel to create a common idea of what Canadian writing is.

Canadian literature is a term much more challenging when it comes to its definition and identifying its core aspects. It is crucial to understand that Canadian literature is vastly different from the American one, not only considering its themes but also because American literature seems to be much more widely taught and because of the fame its authors reached globally.³ W.H.New believes that the term Canadian literature is a problem of itself: “[it] is not bounded by citizenship [...]. It is not restricted to Canadian settings.”⁴ He believes that what makes Canadian literature Canadian is an artificially developed community of understanding.

A shared familiarity with popular culture, a localised adaptation to space and distance, reliance on common civil rights and expectations of behaviour, and recognition of local forms of speech and intonation [...] all underlie the more immediately observable regional and linguistic disparities.⁵

All the descriptions mentioned above create an image of what is considered to be Canadian literature, and it shows how this thesis works with this unique type of literature. To define the literature in more detail, the readers and their perception of the literature itself is essential.

There is a difference between how Canadians perceive Canlit and how everyone else

² Cameron, 2.

³ Justin Quin (ed.), *Lectures on American Literature* (Praha: Karolinum, 2011).

⁴ W. H. New, *A History of Canadian Literature*, (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2003): 4.

⁵ New, 4.

perceives it.⁶ The international readers, according to Atwood, view it as: “a place you escape to from ‘civilisation’, an unspoiled, uncorrupted place imagined as empty or thought of as populated by happy archaic peasants [...], quaint or dull or both.”⁷ Although this notion might still seem like a popular image of Canada, Canadians perceive their literature and the people in it very differently, which will be analysed in this thesis.

The main question for most countries and their works of literature, as Atwood says, is ‘Who am I?’ because in those countries their environment is so well defined, that they do not have to burden themselves with the question ‘Where is here?’ (there, of course, are exceptions in each literature, but the primary notion prevails). However, in Canada, the ‘here’ is undefinable, and it proposes other ideas and themes to concentrate on, and not only the individual notion proposed by other literatures. Atwood continues by saying that by focusing on the environment and the individual’s will to ‘fight’ it or compromise with it or even surrender to it, Canadian literature provides the international readership with a different perspective.⁸ So in the Canadian context, it is not only the description of nature as such that is of high focus of the texts. It is also what it entails to be part of nature- the beauty all around, the difficulties that the protagonists must conquer to survive there, but also the consequences of the environment being stronger than the individual. Nature or wilderness can also be compared with the city and what each of the surroundings provides for the characters, as, for example, in *The Stone Angel*.

The history of both feminism and Canada in the specific era must be thoroughly discussed as well (the motivation of the writers to compose a feminist text, even though some of them did not consider the texts to be primarily feminist⁹), to understand the topic properly. Feminism in Canada, mainly its ‘second-wave’ in the 1960s-1970s, had many great leading

⁶ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, (Toronto: Anansi, 1972): 16.

⁷ Atwood, 16.

⁸ Atwood, 17-18.

⁹ Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists*, (Toronto: Anansi, 1973).

personas, who took upon the uneasy task of writing novels that are as distinctly feminist, just as much as they are Canadian. The challenge of concentrating on Canadian literature also lies in the choice of canonical writers. Since the middle of the previous century, there have been attempts to create a canon of Canadian literature, but because it was created so artificially and rapidly, not accepting that Canada has more than one history- more than one point of view, some authors and their works are more highly appreciated than others.¹⁰ Therefore, the authors and their novels, which were chosen for this thesis might not be highly appraised by some canons, but have been selected because of their possible value to the discussion about Canadian feminism.

The most famous female Canadian author would be Margaret Atwood. She has not only written a vast number of novels, for which she has won numerous awards, but she has also written crucial texts on Canadian literature, e.g. *Survival* or *Strange Things* which will be discussed in this thesis, for they were one of the first books on Canadian literature of its kind.¹¹ For discussing Atwood and her approach to feminism in her novels, her second novel *Surfacing* has been chosen as it comprises both the revolutionary feminist approach to the society, and the Canadian aspect is indeed powerful in it. However, to depict the era accurately and to set the whole image (and not only its limited version if it was to focus solely on Atwood and her work) other female authors, who did arguably as much for Canadian literature as Atwood did, need to be discussed. These authors are Marian Engel Margaret Laurence, and Alice Munro and their novels respectively: *Bear*, *The Stone Angel*, and *Lives of Girls and Women*. Each one of these writers chose slightly different perspectives in their novels, approaching the issue of women in Canadian society, but what all of their novels share is the concept of female rebellion against the aforesaid patriarchal society. This thesis will widely use the term patriarchal society, which might have a different meaning in general

¹⁰ Robert Lecker, "The Canonisation of Canadian Literature: An Inquiry to Value," *Critical Inquiry* 16.3 (1990): 659, JSTOR<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343645>> 22 Apr 2019.

¹¹ Atwood, 11.

terms than it has from the feminist perspective, which is a perspective used in this thesis. Patriarchal society means “the rule of the father” however feminists elevated it, so it now signifies “male dominance”.¹² “This is not a claim about the attitudes, intentions or behaviour of individual men. Rather it’s a claim about social structures. A male-dominated/patriarchal society is one whose structures and institutions-[...]- put men in a position of power over women.”¹³ This type of society oppresses women daily, not only in the line of work but also in their personal lives. That is the reason why the protagonists of the selected Canadian novels chose to rebel against it and tried to find their own way- a feminist way.

¹² Cameron, 14.

¹³ Cameron, 15.

2. Historical Background

2.1. Feminism and Patriarchal Society in General

To understand where Canadian feminism was stemming from, one has to understand feminism in general and especially in the US as the general history of the movement was very similar everywhere. Feminism worldwide rose because of the conditions established early on in our societies. They changed from matriarchal to patriarchal, and the male oppression began.¹⁴ With this change of societies' leadership came new roles for both genders, such as viewing men as natural leaders and women as more nurturing and caring for their family, not deciding the fate of the society.¹⁵ Even though these roles are no longer accurate or necessary for the survival of the society, many women hide behind them as they believe they are naturally subordinate to men, because of the roles imposed on them by family, religion and education, or more precisely the lack of it.¹⁶ It was not until 1800 that women and their male allies in North America and Europe agitated for equal education and economic and political opportunities. By 1900, the movement reached Latin America, the Middle East and Asia, and by the 1970s, feminism has spread globally.¹⁷ Feminist movements as such then came to the public knowledge in many 'waves', as each of the new generations wanted to differentiate from the previous one.¹⁸ The 'first wave' of feminism came in the mid-nineteenth century and ended with the victory of the suffrage movement in the 1920s. This wave is remembered for women coming together to demand legal and civil rights for themselves. The 'second wave', which started in the late 1960s in the US, wanted to "emphasise the continuity between their own movement and the more radical elements of 19th-century feminism."¹⁹ The 'third wave' then upsurged in the late 1980s, and the early 1990s and these feminists explicitly contrasted

¹⁴ Cameron, 20.

¹⁵ Cameron, 19.

¹⁶ Cameron, 28.

¹⁷ Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, (New York City: Ballantine Books, 2003): 2.

¹⁸ Cameron, 5.

¹⁹ Cameron, 6.

their approach with their ‘second wave’ predecessors. The wave distinction receives a lot of criticism (it is accused of oversimplifying the history, encouraging over-generalisation or diminishing the continuity of feminist activism), but it is still the most used distinction when discussing feminist ‘eras’ world-wide.²⁰

Women’s Rights Movement during the 1850s in America was a landmark for all of the feminists, as both the ‘private’ (mostly familiar relationships and friendships) and the ‘public’ (job, education, religion,..) male-domination was clearly identified. These women made it possible for later generations to fight not only for their fundamental rights, such as the right to vote but also for them to realise that they did not have to condescend to, for example, gender profiling. The most pronounced group of feminist advocating these rights was the Women’s Liberation Movement. Many believe that it was Betty Friedan’s book *The Feminine Mystique* published in 1963 that put the whole notion in motion. She believed that women, in general, are unhappy with the roles imposed on them (the perfect housewife, mother, part of the gardening committee, and others) and this unhappiness tends to be demonstrated by several mental issues, such as anxiety or depression.²¹ At the same time, women were taught that they have nothing more to aspire to than the roles mentioned above and that having careers, or even thinking for themselves was not the feminine way; therefore, it was the wrong way.²² Certain women realised this pattern was damaging and tried to do something about it; they, in their own ways, rebelled against the patriarchal society.

The literature played a crucial role in raising awareness about the feminist issue. “The [consciousness-raising novels were] important and influential in introducing feminist ideas to a broader reading public, and particularly in circulating feminist ideas beyond the small-group networks that made up radical feminism in the early part of the decade.”²³ It was then books

²⁰ Cameron, 6-7.

²¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1983): 15; 29.

²² Friedan, 16.

²³ Lisa Maria Hogeland, *Feminism and its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women’s Liberation Movement*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 1998) IX.

such as *The Feminine Mystique* that tried to teach the women their value in the society rationally, but Hogeland believes that it was thanks to fiction novels, such as Marge Pierce's *Small Changes* or Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, that the women embraced the ideas of feminism and realised that the change was indeed possible.²⁴ It was, therefore, thanks to media coverage and novels that the feminist ideas surfaced enough for the women to realise that their role in the society was not limited to being mothers and wives and to only aspire to have a nice suburban house, five children and a happy husband.²⁵ Thanks to the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, women started to vouch for themselves, and they tried to be their own masters. It took many years for them to achieve at least some of the goals, and even in the 21st century, not all of the issues are resolved. However, the change in the minds of women and their male allies started to be palpable in that specific era.

2.2. Canada

2.2.1. Canadian Feminism

To talk about Canadian feminism and its history, one can identify it, to an extent, with the American feminism, as the stages or 'waves' were almost identical, and that because Canada as such is "economically, politically, culturally and ideologically dependent on the United States."²⁶ However, some scholars believe that Canadian feminism surpassed the American one, as it achieved its goals sooner and reasonably quieter.²⁷ "American women long struggled to obtain the Equal Rights Amendment, only to lose by three states, while Canadian women effectively secured equality language in the Canadian Charter of Rights and

²⁴ Hogeland, XII.

²⁵ Friedan, 15-16.

²⁶ Margit Eichler, "Sociology of Feminist Research in Canada," *Signs* 3.2 (1977): 409, JSTOR<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173292>> 22 Apr 2019.

²⁷ Sylvia Bashkevin, "Losing Common Ground: Conservatives and Public Policy in Canada during the Mulroney Years," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 29.2 (1996): 211, JSTOR<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3232289>> 22 Apr 2019.

Freedoms.”²⁸ It might not have been so if the people of Quebec had not started their own revolution, which then inevitably supported the feminist cause. This revolution is now known as ‘the Quiet Revolution’ and happened roughly at the same time as the Women’s Liberation Movement in the US, starting around 1960. They were two main reasons why the French-Canadians of the Quebecois province felt the need to ‘rebel’ against the English speaking population and government.

First, they challenged their tradition-oriented way of life and sought to modernise the province. Second, they fought- not for the first time- against their subordinate status and asserted their rights of equality vis-à-vis the English Canadians.²⁹

So, apart from the needed modernisation of the province, new legislation in education was authorised, alongside with legislations awarding more rights to women.³⁰ These changes, alongside with the changes happening in the neighbouring country, led the Canadian feminist movement to rise. Even though the revolution primarily affected Quebec, the ideas did not go unnoticed by Ottawa and other parts of Canada.³¹ The main difference between the English speaking part of the country and their French-speaking fellows was the readiness to accept women as part of the national movement. Thanks to the Quiet Revolution, Quebec needed as many famous personas as it could attain and, therefore, women writers were highly recognised, but at the same time, their being women still caused them to be culturally oppressed. They wanted to strengthen the French-Canadian nationalism, and despite the ambiguity of the authors’ involvement in the national awakening, their novels were used to spread the cause.³²

Because of the central role of the Quebec novel in the construction of national identity and the readiness of Quebec readers to accept certain fictional portrayals as, [...], a ‘mirror’ of their own collective experience, Quebec

²⁸ Bashkevin, 211.

²⁹ Frederick Elkin, “Advertising Themes and Quiet Revolutions: Dilemmas in French Canada,” *American Journal of Sociology* 75.1 (1969): 112, JSTOR<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2775616>> 27 Apr 2019.

³⁰ Elkin, 112.

³¹ Lenka Rovná and Miroslav Jindra, *Dějiny Kanady*, (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 2012): 266.

³² Mary J. Green, *Women and Narrative Identity: Rewriting the Quebec National Text*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001): 3.

literary history has seen the continued production of what I have called ‘identity narratives’, narratives designed and perceived as a statement about always endangered national identity.³³

These ‘identity narratives’ were significant regardless of the gender of the author, and even though the system still oppressed the women, the change was remarkable. That is how French Canada helped women to rise and realise their worth and society’s ability to accept them. At that time, they were only accepted as the society needed more popular figures for their own cause. However, it made them hopeful towards the future that one day, their gender will not be an essential feature when it comes to publishing books and being rewarded for posing as a role-models. One day they will not be appraised for being ‘women-writers’, but simply writers alongside men.

Some events of the late 60s and the early 70s helped Canadian feminism to rise, and that was especially publishing of the book *Women and Work: Ontario 1880-1930*, the newly published magazine *Atlantis* and the founding of Canadian’s Committee on Women’s History (CCWH) in 1975.³⁴ The foundation of the CCWH was mainly connected to the “overt challenges to the barriers women faced in a profession that was not only male-dominated but also shaped by class and ethnocentric biases.”³⁵ The committee then concentrated on revealing themes and practices in the society that were previously hidden. As was mentioned above, these practises were from both the private and the public spheres, such as the patriarchal relations of family life, the class relations of a workplace, or the intermingling of the two.³⁶ Canadians then underwent similar stages of embracing feminism as the rest of the civilised world. It is needless to say that the Quebecois had the added theme of their own subordination in Canada in general and their works show that much.³⁷ In Canada, including Quebec, a new tendency rose in feminist studies, and that was that of finding and describing

³³ Green, 3.

³⁴ Joan Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women’s History*, (Edmonton: AU Press, 2011): 5.

³⁵ Sangster, 5.

³⁶ Sangster, 5.

³⁷ Sangster, 5.

women's history in the country. Female historians tried to find evidence of women during critical historical events, such as the "story of white settlement, industrialisation or movements for social reform and equal citizenship", and even though many historians were enraged by this, the overall effort was fruitful and helped the movement immensely.³⁸ Canadian women became a crucial part of shared history and were, therefore, no longer subordinate and unimportant, but a part of the building of Canada, although their contribution might have been different from that of men. "Women's contribution to history [...] was not necessarily interpreted in the vein of public, political history but took in previously neglected areas, such as the history of motherhood, contraception, and so on."³⁹ This 'adding' of women to the established history had the effect of more thorough thinking about Canadian history in general. Instead of focusing on the well-known general themes, such as economy, race, and such like, the women's historical movement imposed questions on informal and domestic economy of families and mainly concentrated on women's organisation based on their ethnic, racial, linguistic, and cultural identities, rather than associating 'race' with solely the colour of someone's skin.⁴⁰ All this helped not only Canadian women, but Canada as a country to take the women more seriously and to understand that though their view might be unconventional, it is Canadian nevertheless.

2.2.2. Canadian Nationalism and Women

Canadian female historians were also intrigued by the 'national question'. Although there still were some historians who wanted to concentrate only on the specific 'nation' in Canada (either English or French), most of the female historians tried to find a way for representatives

³⁸ Sangster, 6.

³⁹ Sangster, 7.

⁴⁰ Sangster, 11.

of both ‘mother-countries’.⁴¹ For most women, though, the term ‘nation’ itself was problematic.

[Nation] had not only been problematic because it was originally equated with a masculine story of political evolution, thereby marginalising aspects of women’s history deemed less central to this ‘public’ realm, but also because the notion of a homogenous nation has been so contentious for many groups.⁴²

Moreover, Canadian female historians were the first to argue that it was essential to “redefine the meaning of the political and interrogate a national history that excluded workers, women and Aboriginals.”⁴³ It is thus evident that Canadian nationalism and feminism are terms closely related in Canadian history; their combination is what we now consider Canada in modern terms. Canadian nationalism was then a way for women to be recognised in the patriarchal society, but also a way for them to connect with their own history. Some scholars even believe that it was because of the nationalism that some authors found their feminine authorial voice. “This voice seemed to participate in the traditional ideological discourse. [...] [It] was endowed with a unique identitary power, that can only be compared, among modern writers, with that held in the African-American community by Nobel laureate Toni Morrison.”⁴⁴

Nationalism, as such, is difficult to describe as Western and Eastern world have different ideas about what nation stands for while at the same time, each country created a different set of standards of what should be considered nationalism⁴⁵ and Canada is no different. The greatest ‘threat’ to nationalism as such in Canada is the age-old difference between the English and the French part of the country. Both Englishmen and Frenchmen in Canada based their nationalism on the ‘mother-land nationalism’ but what they had in common was love for the country they resided in and everything connected to it. Many historians even started to

⁴¹ Sangster, 16.

⁴² Sangster, 16.

⁴³ Sangster, 17.

⁴⁴ Green, 4.

⁴⁵ Martin Procházka, *In Search of National Identity: Romanticism and Literatures of Central Europe, a Coursebook*, 2.

question the existence of both English and French Canada, as they believed these terms lacked any meaning, and they were only showing the limited identities.⁴⁶ Moreover, these tendencies of abandoning their previous artificial nationalism came abruptly in the 1960s.⁴⁷ Beside the rift of two different nationalities in one nation, it is the country's wideness, both in geographical and ethnical terms that causes certain problems when trying to identify what Canadian nationalism consists of. Even though these differences are evident, there always have been nation-building moments which determined the possibility of the existence of nationalism in Canada. One of these moments during the specific era were the celebrations of the first centennial of Canada and the Universal and World Exhibition, Expo 67, held in Montreal.

They were nation-building moments; events devised not only to entertain Canadian and the world but also to instil in Canadian minds an understanding of their country and of themselves. [...]. [They] also revealed in their public symbols, rituals, celebrations, and exhibitions just what they thought of themselves, their country and their future.⁴⁸

It was thanks to events like these and the aforementioned Quiet Revolution that the Canadians relished their nationality and were proud of their own country, even though this pride is rarely pronounced, and very often focused solely on a particular part of the society.⁴⁹ So despite the pride not being as distinct as it was in, for example, America, Canadians wanted to share this pride with the world, and their authors did justice to it. It was precisely these events which started the outburst of new writers in Canada (both French and English), and this resulted in the public taking an interest in their own writers, and from 1965 to 1972, Canada had its

⁴⁶ José E. Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-1971*, (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2006): 1.

⁴⁷ Igartua, 5.

⁴⁸ Gary Miedema, *For Canada's Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Re-making of Canada in the 1960s*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005): XVI.

⁴⁹ Gregory Millard, Sarah Riegel, and John Wright, "Here's Where We Get Canadian: English-Canadian Nationalism and Popular Culture," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 32.1 (2002): 11, DOI<<https://doi.org/10.1080/02722010209481654>> 28 Apr 2019.

steady audience.⁵⁰ Authors tried to define themselves and other fellow Canadians in contrast to their American neighbours and the connotations ascribed to them by the Americans, such as “boring” or “dull”.⁵¹ The notion of nationalism, therefore, helped many writers, both male and female, find their own voice in the great country of Canada but it also enabled Canadians to find the beauty of women’s writing in their own country.

2.2.3. Canadian Literature and Canadianism

As was foreshadowed in the introduction of this bachelor thesis, Canadian literature as such is a notion challenging to define. However, there seem to be authors, such as Margaret Atwood, who took notice of it and tried to offer, at least, some definitions that would help to describe features typical for the country’s writing. In her book *Strange Things*, Atwood suggests a useful approach to national identities and its features. “On first sight, a collection of clichéd images - that is, images that have been repeated so often and absorbed so fully that they are instantly recognised.”⁵² She also added that these images are then played with by the authors, who can do as they like with them- either change them slightly or turn them around completely.⁵³ Atwood, in her book *Survival*, pronounced her belief, that there is an image or a notion typical for each country. While America has its ‘Frontier’, England has ‘The Island,’ Canada also has one. That one typical symbol is the Survival- both external, such as surviving natural disasters, or internal in the form of retaining one’s culture, or surpassing the other gender.⁵⁴ Everything connected to this survival is then considered solely Canadian. However, all these notions can be considered merely subjective, because not all of the Canadian authors use these features in their literature, and also, these features can be used by authors of other

⁵⁰ Margaret Atwood, “Survival Then and Now,” from *The Canadian Distinctiveness into the XXIst Century - La distinction canadienne au tournant du XXIe siècle*, ed. Chad Gaffield, Karen L. Gould, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2003): 49.

⁵¹ Atwood, *Survival*, 17.

⁵² Margaret Atwood, *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 8. All future references will be to this edition of the book.

⁵³ Atwood, *Strange Things*, 2.

⁵⁴ Atwood, *Survival*, 32.

than Canadian origin. It is to say, that these features are orientational and are used by most of the Canadian writers, especially by the authors discussed in this thesis, but can also be found in other literatures, even if not to this extent.

Canada, unlike other great countries, does not have one unified anthology of its literature. Instead, there are multiple anthologies arranged according to the creator's taste and liking. There are canons created according to the historical era and the author's importance in it, according to the overall fame of the author, and many others.⁵⁵ According to Hammill, there are multiple features that seem to be repeating throughout the history of Canadian literature and could be considered typically Canadian- a Canadianism. He divides them into four groups: *ethnicity* (which includes race and colonisation), *wilderness* (including cities and regions), *desire*, and *histories and stories*. The perspective of ethnicity and race "is difficult to establish, and its use of metaphor complicates, rather than clarifies, the relationship between Canada's different ethnic and racial groups."⁵⁶ Among other themes, many Canadian authors (such as Margaret Laurence) concentrate on their aboriginal heritage and try to explain multiculturalism in practice.

The wilderness aspect is the one most talked about in this thesis, and also it seems to be the most distinctive feature of Canadian literature in general. It seems to be a long Canadian tradition to take an interest in wilderness and its creatures, both Indians and animals, and civilisation's attitude towards them.⁵⁷ Presupposing that Canada and its writing is nothing more than nature is, of course, problematic as it narrows the scope to only one feature. On the other hand, it is the feature that seems to be ever-present in CanLit, and the books revolving around this theme have become Canadian classics over time.⁵⁸ It was 'the second wave' of feminism, precisely, that saw the revival of natural themes in Canadian literature. "In its

⁵⁵ Faye Hammill, *Canadian Literature*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007): 13.

⁵⁶ Hammill, 26.

⁵⁷ Coral Ann Howells, "Marian Engel's 'Bear': Pastoral, Porn, and Myth," *Ariel* 17.4 (1986): 106, The John Hopkins University Press <<https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/view/32982>> 20 Jul 2019.

⁵⁸ Hammill, 62.

association with the irrational or Other, on the one hand, and with healing and nurture, on the other hand, the forest can also become a gendered space in Canadian texts, though contemporary authors often write against these metaphors.”⁵⁹ In this revival and new gendered space are included all of the authors and their works analysed in this thesis, with Atwood and Engel being its leading personas. All notions connected to Canadian nature, the survival in it, regional differences, and such like will be themes widely discussed in this thesis. More importantly, the focus is not on nature in general, but is solely on Canadian nature, from the vast forests and lakes to the prairies and its towns. Moreover, the reason why women of the 60s and 70s were preoccupied with nature as such, could be, as Atwood says, that “nature is a woman or rather, a woman is a nature.”⁶⁰ This metaphor has been seemingly overused in Canadian literature for decades, which means that the writers accepted it, and used it in their own fiction. That could also be the reason why the Canadian feminist writers were fascinated by nature and created a symbiosis between their protagonists and nature in general.

In Canadian writing as a whole, the ambiguity of the animal and our relation to it, its passivity in suffering, its inability to speak, balanced by the occasional power to make itself felt in destruction, make it embody the imaginative essence of life in this [Canadian] setting.⁶¹

The aspect of desire is closely connected to nature and wilderness in Canadian literature. “A long tradition of art and literature has figured the Canadian natural environment erotically; the colonial metaphor of ‘virgin land’ suggests a landscape which is untouched, ownerless and available for exploration, penetration and exploitation.”⁶² This sexualised nature is not restricted only to the wild forests but also appears when describing Canadian prairies and the Arctic. The last typical Canadian notion is the history and the stories. This theme is recurrent and concentrates on Canada’s ‘fascination’ with its history. “The sheer number of plays,

⁵⁹ Hammill, 64.

⁶⁰ Atwood, *Survival*, 200.

⁶¹ Jay Macpherson, *The Spirit of Solitude*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 255.

⁶² Hammill, 98.

poems and novels which are set in, or preoccupied with, the past is often considered symptomatic of Canada's need to consolidate its sense of national identity through reference to a shared history."⁶³ Canadian literature combines all of these features, and by this, creates unique literature with distinct features evident in all of its writing.

This thesis, as mentioned above, concentrates mainly on the wilderness and history aspect of Canadian literature, and these features are then discussed in depth in the individual chapters.

⁶³ Hammill, 134.

3. Marian Engel's *Bear*

The fifth novel by Marian Engel, *Bear*, is arguably the least famous of the four books analysed in this thesis. However, it represents the women's rebellion the strongest with multiple features as examples. At the same time, the Canadian notion, even though slightly mocked in some parts, is also very pronounced. The main protagonist, Lou, changes from an archivist with a simplified vision of relationships between men and women to a free woman, ready to conquer the world. "Engel was concerned with women's experience and women's expression of the world. She was interested in female identity and creativity and the constraints to their development."⁶⁴ This struggle and the change of mind of the protagonist is further analysed in this chapter. Her rebellion resides in her sexual awakening and her subversive language when talking with the dominant men in her life. The Canadianism, on the other hand, lays in her discovering the nature around her and surviving in it.

3.1. Sexual Awakening

The main awaking or 'rebirth' in Lou's case, and, at the same time, her rebellion against the society, is sexual and erotic. Her relationships had been about the one partner dominating the other, which is mainly shown on the cases of the Director and the no-name 'gentleman'. In Lou's case, it had always been the man dominating her. The account of her short-lived love-affair with a 'gentleman' is an excellent example of this.

She discovered that he loved her as long as the socks were folded and she was at his disposal on demand; when the food was exquisite, and she was not menstruating; when the wine had not loosened her tongue when the olive oil had not produced a crease in her belly. [...] (he had made Lou have an abortion).⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Christl Verduyn, *Lifelines: Marian Engel's Writing*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995): 3

⁶⁵ Marian Engel, *Bear*, (Jaffrey: David R. Godine, 2002): 101-102. All future page references to this book will be included in parentheses in the text.

In her own experience with men, Lou understood that she was no more than a tool, a sexual toy at their disposal, a cook, and a cleaning lady. All she was to supposed do was to look pretty, be quiet and be ready for the man at any given hour. Moreover, she was to suppress her own body, was not supposed to menstruate and was not supposed to be with a child, if the man did not wish her to. The man wanted to dominate her whole life and did not leave a thing untouched. Lou's outburst and stalking of his next woman, even after he mentally abused her, could be an epitome of all females, to an extent. In the novel, Lou called him "petty and demanding" (*Bear*, 102) which seems to be a mild description of such man. Even though she had known that what he had done to her was wrong, she never truly seemed to blame him, rather she used to apologise him. Lou embodies the stereotypes about her gender in a way that women should only be great housewives and should not have their own opinion. Moreover, when things go astray, it is the fault of the woman, as Friedan suggested.⁶⁶

Her relationship with the Director was then less oppressive, but it again was not a relationship between two equals. She only needed him to fulfil her needs, and for him, she served the same purpose of relief from sexual tension. At the same time, she was his employee, his subordinate. What she called love in the book was probably just a natural bodily desire. Her last encounter with a man, Homer, could be read in two ways. Either as two equals who only used each other without any shame or guilt in doing so or as another oppressive event in Lou's life. Although she was, in fact, his superior, she blatantly subordinates herself by accepting his speech and making it her own. "By drinking with him, swearing and taking his orders, she has demonstrated to him that she is even more his inferior than his belief in the natural inferiority of women would have indicated."⁶⁷ His misogyny is most pronounced in the chapter 17, where he not only explains why it is that a man can have sexual encounters outside his marital bed and a woman cannot, but he also patronises Lou, by

⁶⁶ Friedan, 15-16.

⁶⁷ Margery Fee, "Articulating the Female Subject: The Example of Marian Engel's *Bear*," *Atlantis* 14.1 (1988): 23, Open Library UBC <<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/11252>> 14 Jul 2019.

degrading her and calling her a 'good girl' (*Bear*, 91) as if she was a dog- an obvious inferior of his. These three relationships with men, however short-lived they were, shaped her opinion on love and sex. However, it was the bear and Lou's 'relationship' with it that helped her understand just how oppressive men and the society are.

The evolution of the relationship with the bear is, in a way, inevitable, as from the beginning, Lou personalises the animal and sees human features in it. At first, she only saw him as a wild, even though sad, creature, describing him only as an animal having a "thin, ant-eater's tongue" (*Bear*, 23). As the story progresses, Lou starts to ascribe more human features than those of an animal to him, and she is "excited by his bigness, or rather his ability to change the impression he gave of his size" (*Bear*, 35) and even to loving him in the erotic sense of the word. More and more in the book, she sees him as a reliable listener, a companion in her loneliness, and by ascribing emotions to specific facial expressions of his, she might feel less lonely in the cabin. Lou is a woman of paradoxes. On the one hand, she loves to be alone, thus the choice of her job as an archivist. On the other hand, she physically cannot stand the loneliness. In her work, it is the sexual relationship with the Director that keeps her busy, in the cabin, it is his substitute, the bear, that keeps her company.

In the relationship with the bear, she is the one obviously in power, being able to do as she likes with the bear and him being utterly dependent on her feeding and walking him. By her actions, she establishes her dominance, and for the first time, she happens to be in the dominant role in her relationship, and she feels uncertain of it and even guilty. "Wisps of guilt trailed around the edges of her consciousness. She felt as if she had neglected something. [...] She felt loved. [...] Then, for her sins, went to the garden and worked for an hour" (*Bear*, 80). She is freed from her dominant role only after the bear slashes her back. However, what she decided to do with her gained power was, in a sense, freeing the bear and experiencing a

heterosexual relationship without the power-battle.⁶⁸ This role had a freeing effect on her. “Her relationship with the bear is what frees her to make these decisions [of finding her own identity intellectually and sexually], decisions which free her to some extent from male domination.”⁶⁹ By experiencing, to some extent, equality in her relationship, Lou realises that her previous encounters with men are insufficient and that she needs more than being a housewife, or a sexual object. “Erotic love without sex may be frustrating, but equating sexual desire with erotic love [as she has done in the past with several men] is far more dangerous and self-destructive.”⁷⁰ Her social guilt in taking the ‘male’ role in the relationship alongside the power was then washed away by the bear clawing at her back, supposedly representing “male violence on women”⁷¹. Lou even looked lovingly at the mark the bear left on her saying, “it is not the Mark of Cain” (*Bear*, 115), it was a mark of her braveness in reversing the ‘natural’ roles in the society, although she has done so with an animal.

Lou’s rebellion is overall unsatisfactory, as she could not find a way from the sexual situation she found herself in. She understood she could not engage in an ordinary sexual relationship anymore, where the woman is naturally subordinate to man, but being lesbian is not an option for her either, as “women left her hungry for men.”(*Bear*, 102) It shows the reader that no matter how an individual changes through their own experience, they cannot fit into society unless the whole society changes with them.

3.2. Language

Language is an essential feature of women’s literature for what seems to be most feminist writers, as they believe that language is a notion constructed by men and, therefore,

⁶⁸ Fee, 24.

⁶⁹ Fee, 24.

⁷⁰ Fee, 24.

⁷¹ Fee, 25.

subversive in its very nature.⁷² That is why language is one of the features analysed by most feminists, trying to differentiate where the male-dominated language ends, and the female one begins. In Engel's book, these differences are clearly delineated. Engel's play with language is palpable throughout the whole story. Lou being an archivist is demonstrated frequently by her over-descriptive language, of both outer reality and her own emotions.

Her basement room at the Institute was close to the steam pipes and protectively lined with books, wooden filing cabinets and very old, brown, framed photographs of unlikely people: General Booth and somebody's Grandma, Town, France from the air in 1915, groups of athletes and sappers. (*Bear*, 1)

Her over-descriptiveness never ceases to exist signifying a manner in which this woman's brain works, describing the women's perspective of things. Engel herself once said she thought writing for female characters opens an entirely new space of ideas.

I think there is a point in recording female experience, which is different from the male experience. I think there's more new material for women. We're able to say the things we've so often thought, but which weren't considered acceptable or decent. We're describing experiences that haven't been described before.⁷³

Alongside the descriptive nature of her language, Lou tends to perceive the world around through her senses once she finds herself in Carry's cabin. Her new engagement of the senses could suggest that once outside of the dominant society, the city, she can utilise her senses and her body in a way she had never known. "She got a large whiff of shit and musk. It was indubitably male." (*Bear*, 24) She stood outside, listening. Small birds cheeped. The river sucked at reeds and stones. Branches cracked, rubbed against each other. Bird-feet rustled in dry leaves." (*Bear*, 33) Even though the language seems to be only suitable for men, women, and especially Lou in *Bear* tried to appropriate it by one of the most creative ways. Imitation.

Language is, therefore, a tool to help the writer establish their characters and the point of view they are representing. Lou, in *Bear*, is a perfect example of a woman adapting herself

⁷² Carol Thomas Neely, "Alternative Women's Discourse," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 4.2 (1985): 315, JSTOR<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/463710>> 14 Mar 2018.

⁷³ Verduyn, 9.

and her language to her surroundings. “Identity in *Bear* is closely connected with language, and seen as male, violent, powerful, irreconcilable with domesticity and actively misogynist.”⁷⁴ As the language acts as a window to the male-dominated world, Lou tries to imitate it when talking to the men around her. The first example of this in the book is the language she uses when writing to her lover/boss. Although she is entitled to write at least somehow informal letters to him, she always strictly obliges to the form installed by him. “‘Dear Dr Dickson’ would do it. I have been utterly absorbed in the Carry collection. It is, on the whole, better than we could have hoped, though rather orthodox as a nineteenth-century collection goes.”(*Bear*, 81) Although she then, multiple times, believes he misses her (or her body) she always writes her letter in the formal tone, not allowing their relationship to be anything more than an agreement beneficial for both parties. Furthermore, the Director, even though supposedly writing her more than she writes to him, agrees with this arrangement. “This formality, of course, is partly necessitated because he is her superior, and could demand that she return to the city. However, her formality also closes the option that he writes back, asserting his power as her lover; the power, it seems, she really fears.”⁷⁵ She turns his formal language against him and by doing so, retains a piece of her own power, while still seemingly succumbing to the patriarchal society.

Moreover, she does the same thing with Homer and other men she meets throughout the story. With the men of nature, she uses their short sentences with slight vulgarisms and slang words. By the end of the book, she replies to him the same way he speaks to her, in a wage, unsatisfactory way, unless she is drunk. “I guess I should”, “I guess I do”, or “guess so” are among the answers she gives Homer, when asking about anything personal, or revolving around the bear.⁷⁶ On the other hand, when she encounters the only other woman present in the story, her language seems to be unvarying from that of her ‘mind’s language.’ She does

⁷⁴ Fee, 22.

⁷⁵ Fee, 23.

⁷⁶ Fee, 23.

not speak much with Lucy, the indigenous woman, but when she does, she is not imitating her short, barely English (or French in the original) sentences. Lou resumes being her own in front of Lucy, as she does not see Lucy as a threat. “Unlike the men, Lucy is trying to help Lou, not to dominate her. Lou recognises her as Self, not Other, and does not shift her speech.”⁷⁷ Some scholars even believe that there is a deeper connection between Lucy and Lou than just the fact that they are both women. Fee insists that the similarity between their names is not coincidental and that it connects these women. “Lou feel a sense of identity with Lucy.”⁷⁸ These two are also inevitably linked by their love for the bear. Language, then, does not serve only as the medium for transferring ideas from a producer to the listener. It also serves as a social construct helping woman navigate their way through the patriarchal society.

Lou's adaptation of her speech to a male listener reveals more than mere passive powerlessness; however, it provides a kind of protective colouring, is a kind of defensive retreat, and helps her to get her way without risking a confrontation where she might lose. She is insisting on equality, but not on superiority. She will not dominate, but neither will she give in.⁷⁹

In her own way, then, Lou is rebelling against the society and its dominant gender, by imitating the language of the stronger, while retaining a certain power herself.

3.3. Rebirth

Searching for the protagonist's own identity in the male-dominated world seems to be the focus of the book in its better part and also it is its primary feminist notion.⁸⁰ In Lou's case, it can be said that she went through a rebirth in the story while searching for her own feminine identity.⁸¹ Because of the bear and what he signified, mainly for her sexual and erotic awakening, as discussed above, she also started to evolve in other aspects of her life. The story began with Lou being almost a stereotypical woman of the twentieth century. She

⁷⁷ Fee, 23.

⁷⁸ Fee, 23

⁷⁹ Fee, 23.

⁸⁰ Carla Kaplan, “Women's Writing and Feminist Strategy,” *American Literary History* 2.2 (1990): 340, JSTOR<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/490034>> 16 Jul 2019.

⁸¹ Fee, 20.

always listened to what people thought and did what she was supposed to do, for example when people thought she should not throw out anything out of the Institute, even though she did not see any value in those things (*Bear*, 1). Alternatively, her job, in general, could be viewed as stereotypical, because “while the Director wangled legal assistance at the Provincial Government’s expense [...], Lou dug and devilled in library and files” (*Bear*, 3). She had an inferior job to her lover, who had power at the Institute, while she was sitting in a basement between books, no life outside her job.

However, when she met the bear and unconsciously understood what he stood for, she began her own transformation into someone more rebellious and, inevitably, more powerful. “He strained and went forward, then changed his mind and came back to her. To her, this first small rebellion was a return of life, and she rejoiced it.” (*Bear*, 38-39) Through the bear’s minor rebellion came her own initiative of rebelling too, even though only in small portions. Conquering the society by taking care of herself in the woods, unravelling the secrets of an old family by herself and finally, being friends with the bear gave her new insight into what life is supposed to be, or how she is supposed to live it. This new vision is completed when she admits to wanting to change her job (*Bear*, 121); the only thing that seemed to define her in the first place. She was willing to abandon the only real thing she had in her city life for the freedom, stability, and strength Lou gained while living on the island and by doing so, she achieved the ultimate individual power over the patriarchal society.

3.4. Wilderness and Other Canadian Features in *Bear*

Engel is considered to be one of the female writers, who were interested in the Canadian features of literature to the extent they used it in all of their writings.⁸² Her main focus was on the wilderness notion of Canadian literature, and she explored it freely. According to Coral Ann Howells, *Bear* is “quintessentially Canadian, [as it is] a Canadian pastoral about

⁸² Hammill, 64.

landscape and wilderness, about a quest, about a bear, about the relation between civilisation and savage nature.”⁸³

Engel was able to achieve the balance between slight mockery of the problematic feature of nature and its perfect symbiosis with the overall emotion of the story.⁸⁴ The feature of mockery should be understood in the character of the bear, who poses as both the lover of the protagonist and the ‘mirror into her soul’.⁸⁵ The main feature connected to the idea of wilderness in Canada is the survival in the said nature. This survival can be both realistic and metaphorical,⁸⁶ and both these notions can be found in Marian Engel’s *Bear*. Lou’s summer on the island represents the literal survival. She has to find a way to grow the plants in order to have at least some fresh food. She laments her lack of knowledge about fishing, for she says that would be a tremendous help on the island (*Bear*, 81). In the 20th century, civilised people were able to survive without being in sync with nature, but on the lonely island, Lou realises that canned food is not everything and that she must take care of what surrounds her to thrive. Her survival in the patriarchal society then embodies the metaphorical survival. Before she came to the island, she was barely existing, but by finding herself, her own voice and identity in Carry’s cabin, she found a better way to survive in the city- a way to live.

On the whole, Lou’s encounter with the bear fuses all of the features of Canadian literature, and that is why it is the primary focus of the book. When she meets it, her thoughts and the thoughts of everyone around her are only about her survival. The people try to argue that the bear is still a wild creature, and she should not “grow soft on it” (*Bear*, 28). However, she finds out that the bear does not impose a threat to her life and, therefore, becomes friends with it, which, in her case, grows into a mainly sexual desire. With the bear, she learns about the nature surrounding her, the lake and the forest. It is thanks to him that she starts to

⁸³ Howells, “Marian Engel’s ‘Bear’: Pastoral, Porn, and Myth,” 105.

⁸⁴ Fee, 20.

⁸⁵ Fee, 20.

⁸⁶ Atwood, *Survival*, 32.

understand the beauties around her and appreciate them. She learns about the bear and its kind from the diaries and history books she finds laying around the house, thus concluding the Canadianism of the bear and its significance. As Howells says, the bear does not only signify a creature of the wilderness, but “the brownness of the bear is of a different quality from the whiteness of the whale in *Moby Dick*, for even if the bear is a blank to human beings, his colour makes him a part of the Canadian landscape with its dark forests and curiously dark clear lakes.”⁸⁷

Animals in Canadian literature and literary criticism has always been double-edged: both an exploration of the radical otherness of the animal and an intensely human, and human-centred, endeavour.⁸⁸

Overall, as the novel’s main storyline is set on an inhabited island, nature and its features are in the forefront. The reader, then, learns about the cabin’s surroundings in great detail as the main character describes in every chapter, nature plays the leading role in the story, as it connects Lou with her own identity. It is thanks to nature and its gifts that she found herself and was able to detach herself from the male-dominated society and learn more about her own mind and body.

⁸⁷ Howells, 107.

⁸⁸ Janice Anne Fiamengo, *Other Selves: Animals in the Canadian Literary Imagination*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007): 2.

4. Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*

Margaret Laurence is probably one of the most influential writers not only of this thesis but of the whole of Canada. “[She] has been iconised as the quintessential Canadian writer.”⁸⁹ It was mainly thanks to her first book of the so-called Manawaka cycle, *The Stone Angel* published in 1964, that she became so popular, and later even called “the founding mother of Canadian literature.”⁹⁰ Her literature is appraised for many achievements, but mainly for Laurence’s writing about nature, culture, gender, as well as life-writing and creative fiction.⁹¹ This chapter will analyse how the first-person narration, connected with the present tense, helped Laurence in creating a novel as subversive and unusual as *The Stone Angel*. Most importantly, Hagar Shipley’s almost non-existent feminine side will be a significant part of the discussion in this chapter, as it represents her silent rebellion against society. It is arguably the least prominent rebellion of all four books analysed in this thesis, nonetheless crucial to draw the whole picture of Canadian feminist literature of the 60s and the 70s. Other than that the region constructed around Manawaka will be analysed as it shows the most Canadian aspect of the novel.

4.1. First-Person Narration

Although it is not a part of the writings usually associated with feminism, or, rather, it is not considered to be a protest against the norm, first-person narration is an essential feature of *The Stone Angel*. Laurence seemed to be using the first-person narrator profoundly, as only her last two books are written in the third person point of view, but still with multiple sections in the ich-form.⁹² Although Laurence is not the only female writer using this type of narrator

⁸⁹ Nora Foster Stovel, *Divining Margaret Laurence: A Study of Her Complete Writings*, (Montreal: MQUP, 2008): 3.

⁹⁰ Stovel, 4-5.

⁹¹ Stovel, 5-6.

⁹² Leona M. Gom, “Margret Laurence and the First Person,” *Dalhousie Review* 55.2 (1975) : 236, Dalhousie University <<http://hdl.handle.net/10222/59859>> 20 Jul 2019.

(Atwood also used first-person narration, often in the present tense, in her novel *Surfacing*), out of the authors analysed in this thesis, she was the first one to do so. In the middle of the last century, this approach towards storytelling was so unusual, that people thought it impossible to use the first-person narration with the present tense in their books.

A narrative in the first person and written throughout in the present tense would, if it were possible at all, appear so artificial as to make any identification impossible. It would obviously be limited to sensations and thoughts and exclude all action. It would also obtrude the act of writing itself.⁹³

Scholars and authors, even Laurence herself, believed, that even though this kind of narration has its limitations, in some books and their protagonists, this was the only way to tell the story. “I recognise the limitations of a novel told in the first person and the present tense, from one viewpoint only, but it couldn’t have been done differently.”⁹⁴ Unlike Laurence’s other works, *The Stone Angel* is well appraised for its use of the first-person narration, mainly because it is not written solely in the present tense, but it is intertwined with the past tense.⁹⁵ What the first person narration also does is that it provides the readers with a choice. They can choose whether to believe the narrator or not, and whether to consider him/her reliable or not and very often, in the first-person narration, the narrator tends not to be very reliable. One cannot distinguish between mere subjectivity and the pure imagination of the narrator, and that is what makes these novels different.

Laurence used the first-person narration as a kind of a mirror image, between the protagonist/narrator and the reader. “Laurence also frequently has her characters look out at the reader, themselves, from mirrors, and her use of these mirror-images is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the unreliable subjective view.”⁹⁶ Often, her characters are reporting the view in the so-called mirror, literal or figurative, and it becomes harder to distinguish between

⁹³ Peter Mendilow, *Time and the Novel*, (London: Peter Nevill Ltd., 1952): 107.

⁹⁴ Margaret Laurence, “Ten Year Sentences,” *Canadian Literature* 41 (Summer, 1969): 14.

⁹⁵ Gom, 238.

⁹⁶ Gom, 241.

an objective and subjective point of view.⁹⁷ Laurence adopted these possibilities of writing in times, when it was unconventional and critically not as appraised. However, she was able to use it for her characters to seem more realistic, even if it meant that by doing so, they became less likeable, just as Hagar Shipley in *The Stone Angel*. It could be said that Laurence went against the established system of writers by starting to use the first-person narration when it was considered illogical and stiff, or too subjective for male writers. It was her own little rebellion, which then inspired many other writers to follow her steps.⁹⁸

4.2. Femininity

The protagonist and narrator in one person, Hagar Shipley, gives the impression, she is a person not needing any help. Moreover, she is a very critical woman not only towards people around her but also to herself. Mostly, though, she does not believe any women and is bitter, when she is talking about one or to one, ascribing only negative connotations to them. “She was a flimsy, gutless creature, bland as egg custard, caring with martyred devotion for an ungrateful fox-voiced mother.”⁹⁹ From the very beginning of the book then, Hagar took a stance of not trusting women in general and only seeing them as weak and disposable creatures. Raised mostly by her father, Hagar never had the chance to understand femininity and its beauties and benefits. She only saw everything wrong that was on women, and this can be partially ascribed to her father, whom she imitated till the very end of her life. “Lacking any firm respected female figure in her early life, she adopts a persona that is very much a reflection of her father’s patriarchal and materialistic values.”¹⁰⁰ However, Hagar never truly admits that her father had such influence on her, and she even tries to rebel against this authoritative figure in her life.

⁹⁷ Gom, 241.

⁹⁸ Stovel, 5.

⁹⁹ Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel*, (London: Apollo, 2016): 2. All future page references to this book will be included in parentheses in the text.

¹⁰⁰ Helen M. Buss, *Mother and Daughter Relationships in the Manawaka Works of Margaret Laurence*, (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba, 1981): 8.

Hagar tries to rebel against him by marrying a source of earth energy, the disreputable but attractive farmer Bram. But she has soaked up too many of her father's principles, and she stifles Bram with her disapproval of him; instead of achieving liberation, she has turned into [her father] herself.¹⁰¹

Moreover, she uses her father's principles against her sons, with the effect of her younger son dying in an accident. To some extent, this behaviour could be understood as her subjecting to the patriarchal society and becoming one with it. However, one could also argue that because she became her own authority, she freed herself from society and became a new woman. She became the exact opposite of what she thought stereotypical women.

Her attitude towards women has only started to change, once she accepted herself and her flaws. With that came the realisation that the other women around her are also allowed to have their imperfections, without Hagar judging them. "We may measure Hagar's growth in her last days by her changing attitudes towards women, her increasing ability to receive mothering love and to offer love in return."¹⁰² The change of her accepting her own femininity without feeling helpless or useless was ignited by her acceptance of her own granddaughter and reciprocating love she never showed anyone.

'Send her this, Doris, will you? It was my mother's sapphire, I'd like Tina to have it.' Doris gasps. 'Are you - are you sure you really want to, Mother?' [...] 'Of course I'm sure. What use is it to me? I should've given it to you, I suppose, years ago. Too bad you never had it.' (*The Stone Angel*, 273)

By giving up the relic left behind by her mother, Hagar supposedly gave away the last memory on weak women, and because of it became free from her own judgements and prejudices. By the end of the book then, Hagar forgave not only herself for never truly showing her nurturing and caring nature but also forgave all of the women around her, for being different from her. Her life-long rebellion was abandoned and replaced by reconciliation with herself, her children and society in general. Although her demeanour seems to have changed only slightly, she learned how to understand love, accept it and

¹⁰¹ Atwood, *Survival*, 136.

¹⁰² Buss, 8.

reciprocate it, which for Hagar was crucial and life-changing, even if only for the shortest time.

4.3. Manawaka and the City

As was foreshadowed in chapter 2, one of the typical features defining Canadian literature is wilderness and to that connected region and the city. Even though the notion of wilderness is not as strong in *The Stone Angel* as it is in, for example, Marian Engel's *Bear*, Laurence was preoccupied with a different part of the natural symbolism. It was her interest in the imagined town of Manawaka set in the Manitoba province, that took a central role in many of her books. Regionalism is one of the most prominent features of Canadian literature, even though the spotlight is now more on nature as such than on a specific region. "In recent Canadian literary criticism, there is a growing emphasis on regionalism and the value of the local."¹⁰³ Laurence is one of the many authors, who changed her hometown in the prairies into an imagined city. "Laurence has turned the town of her youth into a metaphor of universal human experience."¹⁰⁴ At the same time, Laurence herself said that Manawaka is not only made of her hometown, Neepawa but is a collection of many prairie towns.

Manawaka is not my hometown of Neepawa- it has elements of Neepawa, especially in some of the description of places. [...] In almost every way, however, Manawaka is not so much any one prairie town as an amalgam of many prairie towns. Most of all, I like to think, it is simply itself, a town of the mind, my private world, which one hopes will ultimately relate to the outer world which we all share.¹⁰⁵

By doing this, Laurence created a universal image of Manawaka, which combines all of the positive and negative things about prairie towns, from the lack of profitable jobs to the beauties of nature. "The mountains are so clear, the near ones sharp and blue as eyes or jay feathers, the further ones fading to cloudy purple, the ghosts of a mountain." (*The Stone*

¹⁰³ Hammill, 65.

¹⁰⁴ Patricia Morley, *Margaret Laurence: The Long Journey Home*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991): 18.

¹⁰⁵ Margaret Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976): 7.

Angel, 89) It was especially women who lacked the money, as most of it went to the household or the farm, so they had to find a way to get some money on the side. “I had no money of my own, but I discovered a way to get some. [...] If a farm women are going to hinch a little on their husbands, it will be from the cash on eggs, and everyone knew this except myself.” (*The Stone Angel*, 121) This type of notion in Canadian literature seem to divide Canada into regions with different issues and traditions and does not unite them under a nationalist theme¹⁰⁶; however, one can argue that it is precisely these differences between all of the provinces that make Canada unique.

Moreover, Laurence was able to combine two of the local themes of Canadian literature, and that was contrasting the village and the city, even though most critics were only focused on her portrayal of small towns and villages of her fictional landscape.¹⁰⁷ Unlike with Manawaka, Laurence never really felt in ease when writing about cities, even though they are present in almost all of her works and *The Stone Angel* is not an exception.¹⁰⁸ The city portrays multiple notions in Laurence’s work.

As far as Laurence’s work is concerned, [the cities] are various signs of power, signs of social alternatives, external confirmation of the difference between physical desire and spiritual grace, and embodiments of energy and imperfection, aspiration and decay.¹⁰⁹

All of these are portrayed in *The Stone Angel*, where Hagar feels dominated in the city, as opposed to her being relatively free in the village. So because of this ultimate domination, she tries to flee to the woods, and by doing so, freeing herself. This attempt is, however, unsuccessful and Hagar inevitably has to come to terms with life in the city. The theme of the city is most visible in Hagar’s present life, where she lives in Vancouver with her son and his wife in a suburban house and, just like Laurence, Hagar never truly feels at ease while at the

¹⁰⁶ Hammill, 66.

¹⁰⁷ W.H.New, “Margaret Laurence and the City”: 59, chapter from a book *Margaret Laurence: Critical Reflections* edited by David Staines (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁸ Michel Fabre, “Margaret Laurence on *The Stone Angel*” [interview], *Études canadiennes* 11 (1981): 22.

¹⁰⁹ New, 60.

city. For Hagar, the ultimate “test of her ability to accept life and deal with change”¹¹⁰ is portrayed by the hospital Hagar stays in on the peak of her life. “The hospital is one of the most resonant signs of city life or city necessity- it is perceived as a force external, institutional authority and also as the suspect hand of an interfering technology.”¹¹¹ Although she seems to be accepting her fate in the hospital and the city around her, Hagar’s thoughts, till the last minute, go back to Manawaka, as it is there that her heart lays. These contradictions between the village and the town seem to be one of the most significant themes of Canadian literature, and Margaret Laurence used them in her literature to show her own opinion on both. Exactly like Hagar, Laurence never seemed truly happy in the large cities,¹¹² and would instead take shelter in her own, even if imagined, prairie village.

¹¹⁰ New, 66.

¹¹¹ New, 66.

¹¹² Stovel, 155.

5. Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*

Lives of Girls and Women, published in 1971, is one of the few novels written by Alice Munro, who is famous mainly for her short stories.¹¹³ The difference of this novel, compared to the other three analysed in this thesis, is that even though it is called a novel, it is still structured as a series of interconnected short stories “arranged not in chronological, but in topographical order.”¹¹⁴ Compared to the typical novel, then, the difference is vast, but the structure and style of the book are typical of Munro's writing in general, and, therefore, unsurprising.

Moreover, the whole novel is written in the first-person narrative, from the point of view of a girl, Del Jordan. However, unlike Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, and other of her works, the first-person narration in *Lives of Girl and Women* is neither groundbreaking nor subversive, mainly because it is not narrated in the present tense and because it was all already done before. That is why this chapter will not take an interest in it, besides this brief mention. This novel is also frequently compared to the type of novel invented in the Romanticism, the Bildungsroman,¹¹⁵ for its treatment of the protagonist, whose life from the early childhood to the adulthood is pictured with all the inevitable change of character Del Jordan underwent.

This chapter will focus on three main features of the novel and that the difficulties of being a female writer, having to defy the patriarchal society by not subjecting oneself to the men in their lives, but rather finding a way to be successful and happy, despite the judgement of the surroundings. Moreover, the discovery of one's sexuality is a theme widely discussed by Munro, despite it being one fo the taboos of the time. Additionally, the notion recognised already in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, the regionality of the work will be further

¹¹³ W.R. Martin, *Alice Munro: Paradox and Parallel*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1987): XI.

¹¹⁴ Janet Beer, “Short Fiction with Attitude: The Lives of Boys and Men in the ‘Lives of Girls and Women’,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 31 (2001): 125.

¹¹⁵ Coral Ann Howells, ed. *Alice Munro*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1998): 33.

explored in this chapter. This Canadian notion will be completed with the Canadian preoccupation with the shared history, in the case of *Lives of Girls and Women* the history is both regional and familial.

5.1. Female Writer

As foreshadowed in chapter 2, female writers had a steep road towards being appreciated and famous, while differing from their male counterparts, especially in style and language.¹¹⁶ This struggle is very present in Canadian literature, and mainly in the works of Alice Munro, Marian Engel and Margaret Atwood.¹¹⁷ It is precisely Del Jordan, who represents this struggle in Munro's work. "The appearance of women as writers or artists in these and other works signals the possible expression of female imagination and creativity, and challenges to it."¹¹⁸

Del was influenced by her mother, the seller of dictionaries, to always read and remember the vital information she acquired. Her love for books is portrayed in the whole story, contrasted with the other girls, for whom the acquired information was not crucial. "I was happy in the library. Walls of printed pages, evidence of so many created worlds- this was comfort to me. It was the opposite with Naomi; so many books weighed on her, making her feel oppressed and suspicious."¹¹⁹ Such proclamations establish the difference between the world and the protagonist very early on; the reader understands that the imagination and creativity of the young girl are very different from all the girls her age portrayed in the book, and, therefore, that Del is exceptional. She absorbs the information she is given not only by her own family but also by her friends and their families and tries to make sense of them on her own. Del never fully accepts the opinions of the patriarchal society imposed on her, and instead, she makes an opinion on things on her own. At the same time, she is never the one to

¹¹⁶ Kaplan, 339.

¹¹⁷ Verduyn, 4.

¹¹⁸ Verduyn, 4.

¹¹⁹ Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women*, (London: Vintage, 2015): 149. All future page references to this book will be included in parentheses, with the abbreviation *Lives*, in the text.

jump to conclusions about people around her, which only proves her imagination to be much more elaborate than, for example, her mother's. "[The first chapter], which is about Del, and especially about the growth of her mind and imagination up to the point when she begins to practise as a conscious literary artist."¹²⁰ Unlike other girls in Jubilee, Del never really thought of being a good housewife, like her friend Naomi; she rather spent her time studying and getting As in high school, while the other girls were putting away pottery and silver for when they get married, described in the chapter "Baptising" in the novel. By having a different attitude towards the world than the rest of the people around her, she was able to achieve a university degree, keep her standards and opinions and become a writer. She did so despite knowing about the judgement this profession would get in that era. Overall, Del was the happiest of the people of Jubilee, because she did not conform and found her own way to live her life and to rebel against the patriarchal society.

5.2. Women's Femininity and Sexuality

Del Jordan's life is not only about her evolution from an imaginative child to a female writer, but it is also about Del finding her sexuality and not being afraid of it. The novel has multiple references to sexuality, just like all of Munro's work. "[Munro's] stories present endless celebrations and revisions of female romantic fantasies with all their urgent eroticism, their bewildering contradictions and disappointments, and defiance of age and experience."¹²¹ Her approach toward her literature can also be applied on *Lives of Girls and Women*, with the addition of not only the romantic notion and eroticism present but also Del's realisation of what it entails to be a woman. "She was a woman [...] like to suffer from varicose veins, haemorrhoids, a dipped womb, cyst ovaries, inflammations, [...] cautiously moving wrecked survivors of the female life." (*Lives*, 50) Throughout the book she discovers, in most cases,

¹²⁰ Martin, 4.

¹²¹ Howells, 6.

what it means to be a woman by reading a book, or hearing a story and these stories vary from a medieval labour to the abuse of her cousin Mary Agnes, even though as a young girl she did not understand the subject of a rape and could only feel ashamed for Mary Agnes for being naked in front of other people (*Lives*, 53-54). She started to understand the difference between boys and girls, and later, what difference it makes to be a woman in the male-dominated society.

Del also learned to understand, although never fully accepted it, that in this society, women were powerless, but at the same time, when things went astray, it was their fault.

‘My mother says it’s the girl’s fault,’ said Naomi, ignoring me. ‘It’s the girl who is responsible because our sex organs are on the inside and theirs are on the outside and we can control our urges better than they can. A boy can’t help himself,’ she instructed me. (*Lives*, 169)

Del knew and persisted that it cannot be the girl’s fault; however, the society thought different. She openly wanted to pronounce her own opinion in times, where women’s opinions were not accepted, and everything was to be done according to the norms. The experimentation with eroticism, as mentioned, was firstly contributed by the books, not only fiction but also encyclopaedias, such as the one found in Naomi’s mother’s library, about intercourse on page 186. Her sexuality is mostly described in the chapter called “Lives of Girls and Women”, incidentally, and it is not only constituted of factual interpretations of intercourse and eroticism, but it also presents Del’s daydreaming about being used in Italy of that time or being used by her mother’s friend, Mr Chamberlain. The same Mr Chamberlain later in the chapter masturbated in front of Del, and even though she imagined what it would be like if he touched her, she, to an extent, felt violated by this act (*Lives*, 213-214). Even though there are many references to rape in the book, this violation seems to be the most important, as it happened to the protagonist herself, and it signifies the violation done by men on women in general; Del was just a helpless onlooker at her own life at that moment, as many women are their whole lives. She realised she no longer wanted to be the powerless

creature of the society and decided to go against the norm and take the reins over her life in her own hands.

Also I felt that it was not so different from all the other advice handed out to women, to girls, advice that assumed being female made you damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection were called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same. (*Lives*, 223)

5.3. Region and History

Just like Margaret Laurence, who embedded her own hometown in her fiction in the form of the fictitious prairie town Manawaka, Alice Munro was vastly influenced by her hometown. “Munro is now seen ever and always in relation to the place she came from, as almost all of her stories are set there and most of her characters come from and live there.”¹²² Unlike Laurence, however, Munro did not create an imagined town assembled from different pieces of different towns. She used the part of Canada she grew up in and set her plots in the places very familiar to her. “Munro writes about the places she knows best, the area where she grew up in the 1930s and 1940s and where she still lives.”¹²³ This entails mainly the rural part of Ontario for most of her stories. As was analysed in chapter 2, interest in regions and small towns is something most of the Canadian literature share.¹²⁴ In the novel, a constant comparison between *The Flats Road* and *Jubilee* is made, and with that, the comparison between people in the ‘countryside’ and the city also arises. The most prominent comparison in this aspect is the one between Del’s mother and father. While her mother feels comfortable in the city and never truly belonged on *The Flats Road* (“My mother was not popular on *The Flats Road*. She spoke to people here in a voice not so friendly as she used in town, with severe courtesy and a somehow noticeable use of good grammar.” *Lives*, 10), her father is her exact opposite.

¹²² Robert Thacker, “Alice Munro Country,” *The Dalhousie Review* 98.3 (2018): 412. Literary Resource Centre.

¹²³ Howells, 2.

¹²⁴ Howells, 2.

He felt comfortable [on the Flats Road], while with men from town, with any man who wore a shirt and tie to work, he could not help being wary, a little proud and apprehensive of insult, with that delicate, special readiness to scent pretension that is some country people's talent. (*Lives*, 10-11)

It is the second instance of the regional feature, that this novel shares with *The Stone Angel*: the constant comparison between the village and the city.

There is another unmistakable notion in the text, and it is a notion of maps in Munro's stories. In the Canadian context, it can be closely connected to the region and the city. "Munro uses cartography as a device which allows her stories of the multiples lives in small-town to be told."¹²⁵ Not only is this notion evident by the constant mention and description of places in the novel (such as a precise map of The Flats Road and the houses on it, or, later in the book, Jubilee through Del's eyes), but there is also a direct reference to the map in the novel. "I could see that the cow's hide was a map. The brown could be the ocean, the white the floating continents. With my stick I traced their strange shapes, their curving coasts." (*Lives*, 55) This passage shows not only the cartography aspect, which can be found anywhere around Del but also the way Del's brain works. She would rather spend her day with a dead cow, imagining the far off possibilities than doing what was expected: waiting at home with the other family members and mourning her uncle's death. This notion could be considered both feminist and Canadian.

The last feature of the book that is purely Canadian is the storytelling and remembering the shared history. As mentioned in chapter 2, storytelling has been a typical feature of Canadian literature for centuries, starting with the aboriginal people.¹²⁶ In the novel, it is shown in two ways. The first is that the narrative is constructed as a first-person narration in the past tense; therefore, the whole plot is constructed as a telling a story or someone's

¹²⁵ Howells, 4.

¹²⁶ Drew Hayden Taylor, "Storytelling to Stage: The Growth of Native Theatre in Canada," *TDR* 41.3 (1997): 140, JSTOR<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146613>> 19 Jun 2018.

personal history. The history, as a Canadian feature is also vastly pronounced throughout the book by the multiple mentions of the history of The Flats Road, or the history of the family.

When not working on the township's business he was engaged in two projects- a history of Wawanash County and a family tree, going back to 1670, in Ireland. Nobody in our family had done anything remarkable. They had married other Irish Protestants and had large families. (*Lives*, 38)

By doing this, Munro introduced not only the history of her character, but she created a history for the whole family reaching centuries back. She established a storytelling level within her own telling of a story, which is tremendously Canadian.

6. Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

The second novel of Margaret Atwood published in 1972 called *Surfacing*¹²⁷ combines both the features of feminism and features of Canadian nationalism the most out of all of her novels.¹²⁸ Atwood was invested in Canadian literature in general, which can be seen mainly by her publishing of non-fiction books about CanLit, such as *Survival* or *Strange Things*. At the same time, she promoted the liberty of women's choice when it came to their own lives. She understood the difficulty she would have to endure in order to become a writer in the 60s.¹²⁹ This understanding is then projected into her fiction.

Despite the protagonist of *Surfacing* being an unreliable narrator, the feminist, social, and national themes are delineated throughout the whole novel. The unreliability of the narrator lays in the constant remaking of her own memories so that they are not as traumatic, but also in the fact she remains nameless until the end of the story.¹³⁰ Her rebellion against the society will be analysed from the point of view of reality and of her imagination. These two aspects have an undeniable connection between each other, but also between them, the society and its rules. This chapter will concentrate primarily on the constructed language of the novel, which seems to differ from the regular male-created language. Other than that, this chapter will take a closer look at the quest the narrator undertook in order to become a new woman. The Canadianism of the novel will also be analysed, as it lays in her survival skills in nature and her own life, but also in the history evident throughout the novel.

6.1. Language

Language is known to be a social construct created by men, and Atwood pursued different routes with the language than Marian Engel. "Atwood displays a profound distrust of

¹²⁷ Coral Ann Howells, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): XIV

¹²⁸ Fiona Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007): 36.

¹²⁹ Linda Sandler, "Interview with Margaret Atwood," *The Malahat Review* 41 (Jan, 1977): 10.

¹³⁰ Howells, 178.

language as a means of communication between people, proposing, instead, a non-verbal or metalanguage as infinitely superior.”¹³¹ This superiority of nonverbal language is evident mainly because of the first-person narration applied to the story. It also allowed Atwood to create a narrator who does not speak much but thinks profoundly, and through her thoughts, the readers can understand her intentions. The narrator’s nonverbal nature is projected into two main aspects. The first one is her interaction with other people, mostly her three friends travelling with her. She is not only afraid to show her emotions, she believes that she does no longer have any emotions to feel. “What impressed him that time, he even mentioned it later, cool he called it, was the way I took off my clothes and put them on again later very smoothly as if I were feeling no emotions. But I really wasn’t.”¹³² It is a feature of hers easily recognised, while at the same time it is something she fears to change. Not only would it make her more vulnerable, but it would also make her different from the rest. At the same time, she is afraid of the constructed language, as she did not understand it as well as the others. “It was the language again, I couldn’t use it because it wasn’t mine. He must have known what he meant but it was an imprecise word.” (*Surfacing*, 135) Unlike the others, the narrator is not satisfied with the man-made language, and throughout the novel, she tries to find her own way of interpreting her inner thoughts to the outside world, for she feels the fragmented language is not enough for her. “Language divides us into fragments, I wanted to be whole.” (*Surfacing*, 187)

Unlike Lou in *Bear*, who imitates the male-made language around her, especially when talking to the men, the narrator in *Surfacing* surpassed Lou in her imitations. She not only imitates the people she is in contact with, but she also imitates what she was taught during her childhood. Not only does she copy her parents’ language and way of thinking, but she also uses survival manuals, full of sole descriptions, to create her own emotionless language. By

¹³¹ Meera T. Clark, “Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*: Language, Logic, and the Art of Fiction,” *Modern Language Studies* 13.3. (1983): 3, JSTOR< <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3194175>> 18 Jul 2019.

¹³² Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing*, (London: Virago Press, 2009): 31. All future page references to this book will be included in parentheses in the text.

doing this, she lost her own identity, which she tries to rediscover by creating tales about her life, such as her brother's death or her abandoning of a child. She rids her language of any emotion to be part of the crowd. "They all disowned their parents long ago, the way you are supposed to." (*Surfacing*, 16)

She manages to be one with this fashionable crowd by constructing a fiction—that her feelings are not involved, that she doesn't really care. She constructs this fiction by stripping away from her vocabulary all words that are expressive of emotion. She is careful merely to state empirical facts.¹³³

This construct helps her integrate into the city's society quickly, while at the same time connecting her to her own past. Her parents were both meticulously descriptive people, who were not able to show their emotions.¹³⁴ It is best seen with her mother writing a diary, which is nothing more than descriptions and dates, something the narrator cannot associate with emotionality, even if she wanted to do so. That would be the second imitation of the language, her own parents, her own past. Even if she wanted to forget about all she experienced on the island with her parents, she could never be truly free from the things she was taught, such as the language. While her friends talk about everything and nothing at the same time, she conquered the task by barely talking at all. She can have the power as long as the sentences and words were functional, and she did not have to express her inner thoughts. With emotions come chaos and pain, and she tries to avoid it altogether.

However, it does not mean she is unable to feel any emotion. She felt guilt and sorrow, to an extent, for aborting her baby, for example. "It was hiding in me as if in a burrow and instead of granting it sanctuary I let them catch it. I could have said no but I didn't; that made me one of them too, a killer." (*Surfacing*, 185) This shows the reader that the narrator is not a heartless, emotionless person. She is better guarded against the judgement of people around her, or the attachment to such people.¹³⁵ She found a way in the patriarchal society to retain

¹³³ Clark, 4.

¹³⁴ Clark, 4.

¹³⁵ Frank Davey, *Margaret Atwood: a Feminist Poetics*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1984): 60.

her own personality, to have her own language, even though she might look like everybody else at first.

6.2. Quest

Atwood once said that she was interested in change. “It has been a constant interest of mine: change from one state to another, change from one thing into another.”¹³⁶ This interest is then projected into her books and is discernible in *Surfacing*. The narrator has to undergo several changes throughout her whole life. Having to move to a lake district in French Canada in a young age, losing her mother, father and through the journey losing herself, she has to change every time in order to assimilate to her surroundings. She became so efficient in assimilating to her surroundings that, in the end, she herself is unable to distinguish between her past, her future and her imagination. This change can be understood as a quest or a journey of the main protagonist, searching for her own identity by rebelling against the man-made society. Most importantly, the journey of change can be seen in the main plot- the narrator’s personal journey. This change can be perceived as a journey from a slightly irrational woman to a person void of any reason perceptible by the other characters, or the reader. Without the ties to society, she seemingly became mad, destroying her old home and becoming a wild creature of sorts. At the same time, many feminist scholars see this change escalating not in the craziness of the narrator, but rather in her freedom from the patriarchal society and her recovering the inner power.¹³⁷ For the purposes of this bachelor thesis, the second possibility will be developed.

The narrator, as mentioned above, closed her own emotions off somewhere she could barely touch them, as it was the easier way. “The protagonist’s alienation from her feelings is

¹³⁶ Sandler, 16.

¹³⁷ Carol P. Christ, “Margaret Atwood: The Surfacing of Women’s Spiritual Quest and Vision,” *Signs* 2.2 (1976): 319, JSTOR<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173450>> 18 Jul 2019.

reflected in her dispassionate voice: everything is seen, nothing is felt.”¹³⁸ For her, she is a victim of not only her parent’s but also of the whole society. Her parents hurt her by abandoning her, which in their case means getting old and dying. “Hurt and angry that her parents die endowing her with their power, she accuses them of having hurt her.”¹³⁹ Society, on the other hand, hurt her by stripping her of her power, of her creativity and inevitably, of her emotions. As she sees herself only in the role of the powerless victim unable to regain her power by overcoming her fears, she starts to identify with Canada as such, for Canada and its literature are known for seeing themselves as “oppressed victims” or “exploited”, overall ultimate victims.¹⁴⁰ It stems from Canada being an exploited colony and the people never genuinely feeling free from their colonisers. This feeling of exploitation is called “the colonial mentality.”¹⁴¹

As a person unable to see their own faults, the narrator starts to see violation around her, mainly in the violation of Canadian nature. “The conflict between technology and nature, Americans in powerboats and Canadians in canoes, refracts the protagonist's own pain: she experiences herself as the wilderness innocent and virgin, violated by nameless and destructive men.”¹⁴² In order for her to recover from this violation, she must understand where her power lays, find it and use it. She begins to understand that her passivity throughout life is not innocence; that it is as unacceptable as actively participating in the society’s wrongdoings. “On the return trip, the heron mediates the knowledge the protagonist requires to escape her passive sense of victimisation, the delusion of her childhood innocence.”¹⁴³ By realising her own faults and disowning the victim in herself in the form of her artificially created memories, she seemingly loses her rationality, her mind. However, it is the exact opposite; she becomes one with nature as she realises she must destroy the wall she

¹³⁸ Christ, 319.

¹³⁹ Christ, 319.

¹⁴⁰ Atwood, *Survival*, 35.

¹⁴¹ Atwood, *Survival*, 35-36.

¹⁴² Christ, 320.

¹⁴³ Christ, 321.

built around herself, serving her as a protection from the painful reality. Even though she believes that the part of herself she let go was her rationality, “from any rational point of view I am absurd; but there are no longer any rational point of views,” (*Surfacing*, 219) instead, it was her own fear and passivity.¹⁴⁴ Her main quest and rebellion were then in realising her own faults, accepting them, and letting them go, just as she seemingly let go of all of the rules of the patriarchal society. As many other characters in Canadian literature, the narrator of *Surfacing* underwent a silent rebellion, freeing herself from prejudices of other fellow people for the time being. While Atwood did not take an interest in the future of the narrator in terms of social stability, both hers and her baby’s¹⁴⁵, she finished the book by freeing the narrator from her own mind and installing peace within her.

6.3. Nature and History

Alongside Marian Engel, Margaret Atwood is one of the female Canadian authors who tried to include Canadianism in their novels, and especially trying to demonstrate Canada through the eyes of a woman.¹⁴⁶ As analysed in chapter 2, nature as such plays a leading role in the narrator’s quest of her own freedom and power, which connects the feminism and Canadian features the most. The idea of wilderness is once again the most formidable in this novel and is intertwined with the concept of change. These notions are described in both her memories and her present self. The survival of hers, while she was a child, was closely connected with her parents and her brother, who seemed to have provided for her. “I kneel on the flat rock beside the lake, the knife and the plate for the fillets beside me. This was never my job; someone else did it, my brother or my father.” (*Surfacing*, 84) However, even as a young girl, she understood she needed at least some skills in order to survive. “I memorised survival manuals, *How to Stay Alive in the Bush*, *Animal Tracks and Signs*, *The Woods in*

¹⁴⁴ Christ, 320.

¹⁴⁵ Christ, 317.

¹⁴⁶ Hammill, 64.

Winter, at the age when the ones in the city were reading *True Romance* magazines.”(*Surfacing*, 57-58) When she came back to her old house, she had to regain this long-repressed knowledge in order for the whole group to survive. She utilised all of the skills she was taught, such as using a machete, being able to ride a canoe, or merely removing weeds from her little garden and planting vegetables she knew would grow there. The whole time the narrator and her companions spent on the island, she felt responsible for them as she was the only one with at least some survival skills.

As was analysed before, nature as such is central in the narrator’s quest for her own freedom and power. At the same time, the wilderness has other aspects in the book as pronounced as the feature of the survival. It is the constant engagement with the animals that Atwood used as another explicit Canadian element. The narrator not only ascribes positive connotations to the animals(as, for example, her mother feeding the jays in chapter 9), she also likened them to the darker side of herself and at the same time, of human nature. “Do you realise,’ David says, ‘that this country is founded on the bodies of dead animals? Dead fish, dead seals, and historically dead beavers, the beaver is to this country what the black man is to the United States.” (*Surfacing*, 46) This passage is significant for it shows that even the ultimate victims, as Canadians see themselves, are not innocent and that they also use the wilderness for their own profit. The narrator, realising she was wrong for assuming the position of a passive victim, is parallel to the whole of Canada.

Moreover, another typical Canadian feature is concentrating on a shared history. “The past is often considered symptomatic of Canada’s need to consolidate its sense of national identity through references to a shared history.”¹⁴⁷ For Atwood, this shared history carries two senses. The first is the sense of national or at least regional shared history, and the second is the history shared between the narrator and her family. Focus is on the history of the country and the region, and the relationships between the French Canadians of the district and the

¹⁴⁷ Hammill, 134.

English newcomers. One such example is David lecturing the group about the nationalism of the Canadian flag and the importance of beavers for the country (*Surfacing*, 46). However, the narrator's own history in the said region seemed to be much more crucial to her and her storyline. It was in the recalling of her childhood memories and the sights of her earlier years that she felt the closest to her missing father. The shared history between the four of them is what pushed the whole storyline forward. It shaped her as a person, for she learned her way with language because of her parents' nature, but she also understood where they were wrong, and how she could be better. She learned about herself the most through her parents' belongings. "There is a clue in the drawings from her childhood- hers of eggs and bunnies, everything peaceful, her brother's of airplanes and bombs."¹⁴⁸ It was only through her own history and memories that she could understand what has always been important to her and what she should be doing with her life next.

Canadian features, therefore, helped the narrator with her journey of self-knowledge and self-discovery. Nature and the history of mostly her own family helped her grasp the floating ideas about her, understand them properly and utilise them in her own life. Because of these embedded notions of Canadian literature, the narrator's quest provides the reader with a complete picture of rebirth from a fearful protagonist inventing her own history to a person defying her destiny and choosing her own path.

¹⁴⁸ Christ, 320.

7. Conclusion

Feminism and Canadian literature and its features have both many definitions and descriptions to choose from, which causes confusion when it comes to both terms. This thesis chose those definitions that seem to be most wide-spread and most used by mainly Canadian critics. These notions are then further described in the four selected novels, which seem to represent the era of the 1960s and 1970s the best. The selected novels were *Bear* by Marian Engel, *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence, *Lives of Girls and Women* by Alice Munro, and *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood. These four authors have achieved not only national but also worldwide fame with some of their works, even though ‘the cultural decade’ was still challenging for women writers to gain popularity. It can be said that it was their focus on traditional Canadian themes which helped each of them being recognised as the shaping personas of not only Canadian feminism but also Canadian writing in general. This thesis found subversive feminist features in each book and analysed, how exactly the protagonists rebelled against the patriarchal society. At the same time, typical features of Canadian literature were identified to prove the Canadianism of these novels.

The theoretical chapter summarised the primary notions, such as feminism in general, a brief history of Canadian feminism and to that connected Canadian nationalism, and, of course, Canadian literature and its main features. It is arguable if the notions mentioned in chapter 2 are complete, or if there are other, equally essential notions not mentioned by this thesis. This thesis was mainly based on Faye Hammill’s book *Canadian literature*, in which she states that there are four categories of features widely used in Canadian writing, and those are Wilderness (with the focus on Nature, regions of Canada and the cities), Shared History and Stories, Desire and Ethnicity, with the first two being the primary analysed notions. Margaret Atwood’s books on Canadian literature *Survival* and *Strange Things* were also used in order to understand the notion of nature and to that connected survival better. Because Canadian literature is so extensive in scale, these features do not have to be the only ones.

However, these four, and mainly the wilderness and the history are the ones used as starting points in the analysis of this thesis.

Chapter 3 focused on Marian Engel's *Bear*. The main topic of this chapter was the sexual awakening of the main character, Lou, who by letting herself loose the boundaries of typical heterosexual relationship and experiment with a bear, found her own strength and power in the male-dominated society. This power was also attained by her specific use of language, which she deliberately adjusted according to the person she was talking to and their speech. The Canadian nature of the book laid mostly in the wilderness and to that connected bear, which was one of the main characters of the book, however passive it was. *Bear* is the only book of this thesis combining three of the four typical features of CanLit, and that the wilderness, the history, and the desire.

Fourth chapter concentrated on *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence, with the most significant focus on Hagar's rebellion in the form of hiding her own femininity from the world, and nearly becoming a man just like her father, before the realisation dawns on her before her death, and she tries to give and feel motherly love towards other females in the book. The use of the first-person narration in the present tense is also analysed, for it was very atypical in that time, and by using it, Laurence was subverting the patriarchal system established in the writing community. The most pronounced of the Canadian features were the regionality of the book, set in the imagined city of Manawaka, and the difference between the small-town and the city and the protagonist's struggle of losing a part of herself, the part that she left in Manawaka.

Chapter 5 is then about *Lives of Girls and Women* by Alice Munro scrutinising the struggles of female writers. This notion could also be partially observed on the narrator of *Surfacing*, who is an illustrator, but this thesis does not concentrate on that. Del Jordan's sexual awakening is also studied, as women's sexuality, in general, was not a theme widely discussed in that era. Canadian features, similarly as in *The Stone Angel*, focused on the rural

Ontario and life between the village and the city, but also the shared history of the region and the family was explored.

Chapter 6 focused on Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. Just like Lou in *Bear*, the language of the narrator in *Surfacing* adapts according to her surroundings, but unlike Lou, the narrator here preferred emotionless and almost non-verbal language, because she imitated not only her friends who think it was the trendy way of speaking, but also her parents and the books she read as a young girl. Her rebellion is portrayed in her quest of a new woman in her, who rather than conforming to the society lost all she was taught to find her inner strength by herself. The aspect of nature is the strongest of the Canadianism embedded in this novel, but also the shared history has its importance.

Overall, this bachelor thesis proved its central thesis of rebellion and Canadianism by a thorough analysis of each book provided in the separate chapters. These books could also be looked at from many different points of view, most arguably the feature of victimisation of women and Canada in general, which is a theme briefly mentioned in chapter 6. Such analysis would take a thesis of the same scope as this thesis to focus on and describe. To an extent, each of the arguments provided in this thesis could be considered purely subjective. However, this thesis was based on opinions and arguments made by many achieved critics and scholars, who are quoted heavily in the paper. Many other approaches could be taken when discussing the selected novels, from different feminist subbranch to the victimisation, as mentioned above.

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