

UNIT-1

CANADIAN POETRY

Structure

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1.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to an understanding of the phases of Canadian poetic culture;
- To familiarize them with the representative poets of the different periods;
- To help them understand Canadian response towards nature.
- To enable the students to gain a knowledge of Canadian spirit in poetry.

1.1 Introduction

Canadian poetry over the last two centuries divides roughly in four main periods : the pre-Confederation period, the Confederation period, the modernist period and the postmodernist period. Each period has the same integrity, the same skilful moderation that is aware of the continuity of its heritage and a recalcitrance of personality. This division of Canadian poetry does not mean the water-tight compartmentalization, rather, it is a continuous growth of Canadian poetry contributing to the cumulative identity that is Canadian. Canadian poetic culture is a growth having its first stirrings of poetics culture, emergence of a national poetic culture, transitional poetic culture, modernist poetic culture and post modernist or contemporary poetic culture.

1.2 Pre-Confederation Period

The pre-Confederation period had the first stirrings of a poetic culture before Canada became a nation. This was the beginning of Canadian poetry spanning from the later years of the eighteenth century to the Confederation of 1867. The poetry of this period was lively and loyal and dealt with the life of the early Canadian settlers. The early settlers had the culture of exiles. Sometimes they were angry at their fate and sometimes hopeful that they might return before they died to their American homes from where they had come after American Revolution (1775-83). Besides this, there was also the feelings of excitement to have discovered a new land. The pre-Confederation poets expressed this sense of loss and displacement of an immigrant and the excitement of discovery of an explorer. They depicted the hardships and difficulties of the early settlers and hatched a graph of rise and progress of a new country. Besides these facts, they also focused on the prospects of the possessor of a new country.

1.2.1 The First Stirrings of the Poetic Culture

The first stirrings of the poetic culture took place in the farthest west. Though this phase includes poets such as Robert Hayman, Joseph Stansbury, Standish O'Grady, Oliver Gold-smith, Charles Heavyside, Charles Sangster and Charles Mair, the beginning of importance was made by three Charles. Called in his own time "Canada's national bard" and the "first important national poet", Charles Sangster (1822-1893) became, by virtue of two books published in his thirties, the unofficial poet laureate of his day. He was born at the Navy Yard in Kingston, Upper Canada, in 1822. His father died while he was still an infant. At fifteen he went to work full time at Fort Henry where he was employed to make cartridges. Of the loss of schooling, which might have given him better preparation for a career as a poet, he said that, like many leading Canadians, he was a 'self made man'. He had not the advantages of a classical education. All that he possessed mentally had been acquired by careful reading of the best authors (chiefly fiction).

Having begun to write poems for newspapers and magazines such as *The Literary Garland* and the *Anglo-American Review*, Sangster quit Fort Henry in 1849 to become the editor of the *Courier* at Amherstburg. Unfortunately, the paper collapsed when its publisher died and in 1850 he took more menial employment with the Kingston *British Whig*, remaining for the next fourteen years. Despite the arduousness of his tasks, he managed to write *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems*(1856) and *Hesperus and Other Poems*, and *Lyrics*(1860). The presence of love poetry in each collection reminds us of the association of two books with Sangster's two marriages: the first to Mary Kilborne, who died eighteen months later and the second to Henrietta Meagher. Thereafter he wrote two volumes of poetry which he had hoped to send for publication but it did not happen so.

A. Sangster

Sangster was the first Canadian poet to achieve recognition in Canada in his life time. Adward Hartley Dewar, in his introduction to *Selections from Canadian Poets* (1864) stated that Sangster occupied 'first place' among the peers. In 1882 Sangster became a charter member of the Royal Society of Canada and in 1890 an honorary member of the Society of Canadian Literature. Having chosen to work in the tradition of the English Romantic poets, Sangster responded to his immediate landscape

more directly than his predecessors. In his poems, particularly *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay*, Sangster depicted his native environment yet he did not use a native form or idiom. *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay* is derived from Wordsworth, however, Sangster took for his model one of Wordsworth's late and less powerful poems, *The River Duddon*, a sequence of static and picturesque sonnets about a river journey. In a word, it can be said that Sangster wrote for his fellow Canadians and about them and with a Canadian range of attitude. Sangster is really a national poet. Writing among and for people whose reserve is stern, he has audience in view and records his experiences and aspirations with caution.

B. Heavysege

The second poet of pre-Confederation period is Heavysege, a Montreal poet who wrote for the world and for himself. He wrote of subjects entirely connected with Canada or North America. His natural imagery is Canadian and his range of feeling recalls the Byronic after-glow that he received in England from which he emigrated. Heavysege was born in Liverpool and came to Canada in 1853 in the age of thirty seven. His preoccupation was with drama which was not intended for the stage. In fact, he was preoccupied with the cabinet drama of the romantics. *Saul* and *Jephthah's Daughter* are his two dramas besides poetry. *Saul* is a cabinet drama which is closer to *Paradise Lost* than to stage plays. He prepared a text of *Saul* for a New York actress. He had considerable powers as a realist, even as a bitter humorist. It is remarkable to note the dialogues in the play, particularly the dialogues that he gives to the devils who play a large part in the tragedy. Like other nineteenth-century dramatists in the Elizabethan tradition, his approach to tragic character is unsufficiently realistic. Heavysege chose this subject symbolising the struggle, loneliness or sacrifice of the early settlers. Heavysege has put together certain essential ideas : the contrast of human and civilized value with nature disregard of them in a primitive country for God to disappear behind the mask of nature, and the symbolic significance, when that happens, of human sacrifice and the mutilation of the body.

C. Charles Mair

The third Charles, as we know, is Charles Mair, known for his verse drama, *Tecumesh* (1886) in which he skilfully handles the native Indian myth. His *Tecumesh* applies the same pattern to Canadian history. This drama has the same theme of sacrifice – the sacrifice of Tecumesh to which every thing else leads up. The various conflicts between his own fierce loyalties and the vacillations of his friends and enemies are merely the struggles of a doomed victim. It is remarkable to note that it is not only a struggle in his poetry that he pronounces but as a first political poet, he expresses also the claim of equality with the colonial masters.

Mair's drama is roughly the equivalent in the "Indian" sphere of Divine Mother's writings in Nature sphere. Here the Indian is seen as one of Nature's Children, living a jolly carefree life until the advent of the White man. It would be in the fitness of things to say that here Indian-as-victim- motif begins to surface, but the main emphasis is on the peacefulness and good behaviour of the Indian. In fact, Sangster, Heavysege and Mair, preferred native myth and carried the same object of sketching the Canadian events of history.

What is noticeable in the pre-Confederation poets is that they brought with them British traditions and endeavoured to draw a sketch of Canadian history and rural life in their poetry. In fact, they remained imitative in their treatment. They expressed an immigrant's sense of loss and displacement or

an explorer's excitement of discovery, pre-Confederation poets initiated the struggle to find suitable language and forms to describe new experiences in a new landscape.

1.3 Confederation Period

The second phase of Canadian literature marked the Confederation period which brought the emergence of a national literature. Near the Confederation, Canada gained poets who were national. Charles G.D. Roberts, his cousin Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman and D.C. Scott are often called the poets of the Confederation. Their prominence between 1867 and the Great war, their concern with nationalism and their inter-related lives make them truly members of a school of poetry. They, born near the Confederation of 1867, came to their maturity in the 1890s. They drew on the Romantic and Victorian heritage of Britain and America and that was why their work became of imitative nature.

1.3.1 Emergence of a National Literature

Despite the fact that they were influenced by both British and American models, they evolved styles and attitudes, which gave rise to more nationalist literature. They continued the themes of the pre-Confederation literature and endeavoured to investigate the experience the early settlers had. These experiences of the early settlers gave a consciousness of exile and isolation, a sense of inchoate identity and ambivalent feelings about nature that seemed hostile and indifferent.

It is customary, in calling the roll of Confederation poets, to commence with Roberts, as the oldest and as the author of *Orion and Other Poems* (1880) which is a landmark in this country's literary history. The other three members of the principal group were, however, all born within the next year or two and the importance of *Orion* is simply that poetry could be written in Canada. It is possible therefore to begin with Lampman and gain the advantage of encountering at the outset the best corpus of poetry and the most attractive of the four personalities.

A. Lampman

Lampman was born in 1861 at Morpeth, in Western Ontario and died in Ottawa in 1899. The writing of poetry dominated his life. Like his life, his poetry exhibits a consistent wholeness, which makes a chronological arrangement of his poems. The heart of Lampman's poetic achievement, which in turn is the dominant fact and central achievement of his life, consists of a small group of nature poems. These poems are the product of his excursions at all seasons of the year, into the Ontario woods and fields. His first collection, *Among the Millet* was published in Ottawa in 1888 and the second, *Lyrics of Earth*, in Boston in 1895. At the time of his death he had arranged to publish a third collection, *Alcyone* but his friend D.C. Scott cancelled publication of *Alcyone* and in the following year brought out *The Poems of Archibald Lampman*.

The striking note in Lampman is his loving indebtedness to Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Arnold and Tennyson. His poems exhibit that in a large overriding sense he is consistently Wordsworthian. Like Wordsworth, he finds his consolation, his sense of the divine, his sensuous delight, all in the countryside, the world of farm and forest, lake and rock and stream. Though Lampman seems to be a pale imitator of Wordsworth, he has many things of his own in his poetry. Lampman refuses to give specific content to his dream or to allow his dreaming to lead him towards philosophic or theological concepts. It is nature, and we may say with some confidence only nature, that induces in him the trance

of insight into the life of things.

The nature poems of Archibald Lampman have two juxtaposed worlds, which form the two halves of the poems. In the first half of the poems, he is seen gloomy and experiences a strange, fleeting emptiness in life. Sometimes this design is presented with partial harmony and peace. But the second half of the poems presents a world, endowed with joy and peace, where a new hope springs. In his poems Lampman draws a line of demarcation between two lives and exalts the moral quality felt in nature. Lampman's main need was "to escape from the garrison of a culture" that was oppressive, to escape from the boredom and sterility, "to embrace the wilderness of nature" "Lamp-man's verse", says Jones, is "a direct echo of Wordsworth." Like English poet, Lampman had "an excessively benevolent conception of nature and an excessively passive conception of man's relationship to her". But in order to overcome the morbidity and get a solace, it is not always nature that he alternates with society. Lampman desires the Emersonian unity with the universe but cannot allow himself to have it. "Conscious stress" plagues him; he wants to experience the "elemental joy and to be part of the "eternal movement of life, but he has a kind of complex, ambivalent feelings and sensitivity towards nature". However, throughout in nature, he experiences some mystical "Power" and this experience is expressive of the awakening of self. It is noteworthy that this experience is absent while the poet marches in the city. These two aspects- the evil power in city life and the "blessed power" in nature, thus constitute the poems of Lampman.

B. Sir Charles G.D.Roberts

Another important poet of this phase is Sir Charles G.D.Roberts (1860-1943). He became the first Canadian man of letters whom his own countrymen and the world at large could recognize. He accepted the editorship of *The Week* in 1880, was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1890 and of the Royal Society of Literature in 1892. Roberts's best poetry, which is combined and constructed out of his youth, combined many of the common elements of Confederation life : an English and Loyalist background, a rural boyhood in close contact with the wilderness, and a broad classical education given by his parents. While completing his degree, he began writing poetry. By the time he was twenty three, Roberts had published his three books of verse. The first of these *Orian*, received international praise and Matthew Arnold among others saw it as distinctively Canadian. Robert's *Orian*¹² is typical of early Confederation poetry in its predominantly Romantic form. In attempting to express a vision of human experience in mythological terms, it recalls *Endymion* and *Prometheus Unbound*. It is close in scale to the classical poems of Tennyson and Arnold but lacks focus on moral issues. As a whole this collection has a sequence of five mythological narratives — *Orian*, *Ariadne*, *Launcelot and the Four Queens*, *Memnon* and *Sapho*. They represent Roberts's participation in an enormously popular nineteenth century fashion which stems primarily from Shelley and Keats.

Roberts's sense of identity with the whole group of Canadian writers meant that all were heartened by the recognition he received. He was an indisputable Man of Letters. Everything that it lay within his powers to do for literature in Canada, either by intention or by happy accident, he accomplished. The affectionate encouragement he gave to his friends was an extension of the pride and pleasure he took in the literary efforts of his own family. Roberts combined tradition and innovation. His history of Canada, his excursions into travel guides, his translations of French-Canadian fiction and verse, his regional tales of adventure, his animal stories, all these amount to demonstrate Canadian history and landscape and the Canadian sensibility. Roberts's patriotic endeavour is also evident in his

participation in making Confederation a spiritual as well as a political act. Regarding the literary future of Nova Scotia, he holds "We must forget to ask of a work whether it is Nova Scotian or British Columbian, of Ontario or of New Brunswick, until we have inquired if it be broadly and truly Canadian". It was he who perceived that the terrain of Canada which conditions Canadian life, would be the primary subject-matter for Canadian poetry.

As a poet of recognition in Canada and outside Roberts, demonstrated that Canadian literature was a growing concern. Being a prolific writer of voluminous work he became worthy of respect for all Canadian writers. His true role can now be appreciated and a genuine admiration can be achieved for the spirit in which he conceived and carried it out. He was quite literally Canada's first man of letters and the knighthood he received in 1935 was not an inappropriate honour. He had done something for the concept of the Dominion. The best of Roberts is to be found in his descriptions of Canadian landscape. In these he is capable of recording impressions with the fidelity of a genuine devotion, of evoking the *genius loci* of the Fundy shore, of catching the turn of a Canadian season. In a small handful of such descriptive pieces he achieves memorableness. Among them are a group of sonnets like "The Sower", "An Old Barn", "Salt Flats", "Pea-Fields", "The Potato Harvest", "The Mowing". The titles of these sonnets are self evident to unfold Roberts's attitude towards nature.

C. Bliss Carman

The next important poet of Confederation period is Roberts's cousin, Bliss Carman (1861-1929). He passed through the same high school and the same university, a couple of years after Roberts. He too read widely in ancient literature and to the English poets of the nineteenth century. His most effective poetry is that which reflects his emotional flux in harmony with the kind of romanticism he encountered in his youth and the Transcendentalism of his distant kinsman, Emerson. It is noteworthy that Carman wrote of feelings not thoughts unlike Lampman and Roberts. In his poetry, he gives impressions, not descriptions. He began to write as a poet of senses in love with music and imagery. He was also in love with the nature immediately about him. However, even the earliest poetry of Carman is easily distinguishable from *Orion* and the following poems. Carman sought to maintain the note of *Low Tide on Grand Pre*, throughout the entire volume. The note which is a prominent feature of his poetry excels not only Canadian poetry but the poetry in general.

Carman's beauty of music is the most remarkable merit in his first collection *Low Tide On Grand Pre*. Undoubtedly, it is one of the most musical volumes of verse. The reader feels fascinated and excited by such magical phrases as "Golden Rowan of Menalowan" or "The Trail Among the Ardise Hills". Sometimes, more often in the work of his youth, entire poems have a musical perfection. He has a variety of poetry and appears as a poet of very extraordinary range due to the many kinds of poetry he has written. Here it is also important to clarify that Carman is not versatile in his choice of subjects. In fact, he turns from one of his nature lyrics to one of his elegies and then to one of his dreamy meditations. What strikes one is not the change in subject but the sameness in manner. He always tries to cast almost exactly the same spell. It is this spell that makes the readers become uneasy and consequently the spell ceases to take effect.

D. Duncan Campbell Scott

The fourth important Confederation poet is Duncan Campbell Scott (1862-1947). It is noteworthy that when Canadian count Confederation poet they say in one breath Lampman, Carman

and Roberts and only after a marked pause, Duncan Campbell Scott. E.K. Brown explains that it is so because Roberts gave the lead to the group and that his mellow classical pieces mingling myth and landscape and his homely local pictures fixed for the time what the range of Canadian poetry was to be. The next two names were accepted by Scott himself "When I was beginning to write," he remarked in a recent letter, "I was not aware of any such thing as Canadian literature, but I did dream of starting a Canadian literature and I joyously hailed the efforts of Lampman and Carman as the beginnings of it." It is a kind of tribute to Roberts, Lampman and Carman. In fact, it is exceedingly revealing. Roberts set the course and warmly welcomed those who rivalled him recognizing especially the values in Lampman and Carman. The three of them, whatever their differences in temperament, were drawn to many of the same kinds of subjects and to forms if not the same at least closely akin. Where one was known and approved, the others needed only to be known to be approved also. D.C. Scott was never to be wholly at home in their world, no matter how he might try to write in their fashion, no matter how well he might come to know them - and he was to become one of Lampman's closest intimates. In a word, it is Scott's originality which explains why the readers took long time to appreciate and consider him that he was one of the chief masters of Canadian literature. In 1893, just after he had passed his thirtieth year, he brought out his first collection, *The Magic House and Other Poems*. In his work, including his first collection, there is a mixture of restraint and intensity. If we go through these poems we would find it is to be struck by the predominance of the dark and the powerful - night, storm, the wilderness, the angry sea.

1.4 Modernist Period

1.4.1 First Phase

Canadians were impelled to write description either of landscape round about them or of the peculiar circumstances in which they lived. Preoccupation with landscape and with local history has been strong upto the present time. The mark of regionalism is upon almost all the Canadian writing. Canadian poetry has been above all poetry of landscape in which the most successful performances have usually been those that presented an exact picture. In this description of Canadian nature, the poets have failed to be original and if there has been originality at all, it has been narrowly limited. In the early generations with whom imaginative writing began, there was a tendency, to depend on English and American authors whether in prose or verse in short for the presentation of all general problems of human experience.

Beginning around 1880, a movement to write about Canadian nature had been developing with a notable measure of success. The result of this movement was of mixed nature as the Canadian poetry was partly appreciated and partly ignored. There was a general agreement that Canadian poetry was charming and graceful, but most readers felt that it was something that could rightly be ignored in favour of other writing, English or American, that had greater interest, intensity and significance. The critics were of the opinion that Canadian poetry was not a self-contained development. Canadian poetry bears strong marks of romanticism and transcendentalism, milder aspects of symbolism before 1900 and later a superficial contact with imagism. The main forces that were stirring in English and American poetry after 1900 had, however, but little effect in Canada : nothing of the sharpness and firmness of Robinson and Frost had crossed the border; nothing of the sophisticated simplicity of the Georgians had come over from England; Pound was someone to sneer at, Sandburg someone to laugh

about.

A. E.J.Pratt

Pratt was one of the first moderns to be recognized by the audience. He, being influenced by the Group of Seven as he had met them frequently at Toronto Arts and Letters Club, gave voice to Canadian landscape. He knew MacDonald, Lismer, Jackson, Harris and Johnston. By 1922, he had met Fredrick Varley at the club and the two became close friends. Pratt's attempt of giving voice to Canadian landscape was also influenced by Carl Sandburg's Chicago poems, which made imagism return to Canada. This influence is clearly discernible in Pratt's *Newfoundland verse* in which he gave a new bold, vigorous and direct vision of Canada. In order to understand Pratt's poetry, we would have to keep in our mind Pratt's intention of describing the landscape of North Pole. His *Newfoundland Verse* records his child encounters with the tragedies of Newfoundland seafaring life. As he later wrote, he was puzzled by "the ironic enigma of nature in relation to the Christian view of the world"

The Darwinism that dominated the intellectual climate of Pratt's formative years seemed to offer more comprehensible explanations of the natural world and man's place in it than those Pratt found in religion. Although Christianity continued to provide him a rich store of images, his poetry came to express, what Sandra Djwa called, an "evolutionary vision". The key point of Pratt's poetry is his interest in all forms of strength and power. His major poems consist of subjects like : dinosaurs, whales, the luxury liner *Titanic*, a transcontinental railroad. This interest is articulated in Pratt's poetry in a central metaphor of evolution, wherein human intelligence gradually replaces brute nature as the most powerful force in the world and where a moral order is projected to supplant a natural one. He views the bedrock of existence to be in the natural forces of wind and rock. There water nurtures life, but must also kill in order to feed "the primal hungers of a reef". The poet is spellbound by primordial forms of life, by nature "red in tooth and claw," which from a human vantage point appears wantly cruel and destructive. In the early poem "The Shark", Pratt creates a symbol of something terrifying and malignant in nature, a creature "tubular, tapered, smoke-blue." more frightening than a vulture or wolf because its blood is cold. Pratt repeatedly makes the reader shudder as he or she is forced to consider the origin of life in elements and forces remote from human intelligence and emotion. But at the same time, the poet marvels at the evolutionary process that produced human beings with their capacity for wonder, joy, and compassion.

To Pratt, nature is a part of cosmic process – amoral and without intelligence. Humankind has evolved out of nature but does not conform to its laws, for it has intelligence and will and a capacity to choose the way to live. Pratt's most rousing affirmation of humanity in the face of an amoral, mechanistic cosmos is found in "The Truant." a long poem published in his last collection of lyrics, *Still Life and Other Verse*(1943). In this poem the god of the universe is called the great Panjandrum (a pretender to power), and his world is the mechanical order of the cosmos. Man, the truant, is brought protesting to the throne of the Almighty by the Master of the Revels and made to give an account of himself and his irregular ways. The Master of the Revels assures the Panjandrum that tests have been done and that man consists of the fundamentals, "calcium, carbon, phosphorous, vapur." However, man has a will and concepts "not amenable to fire" and will not obey the laws of the cosmic dance.

Most of the poetry of E.J.Pratt has been a kind of summing up of the first phase of Canadian poetic imagination. In that phase Canada appeared in a flat Mercator projection with a nightmarish

Green land, as a country of isolation and terror, and of the overwhelming of human values by an indifferent and wasteful nature. Pratt wrote ten long poems which deal with different phases of the evolutionary process – in *Titans* with the evolution of superior forms of animal life, in *Brébeuf and His Brethren* with civilization, in *The Titanic* with human technology, and in *Towards the Last Spike* with the development of Canada as a nation. The conflict in these poems is man versus nature, or, perhaps more precisely, the conflict between highly evolved, sophisticated forms of life and primitive, less-developed forms. Pratt grew up beside the North Atlantic, and the struggle with a harsh environment blind to human purposes was printed indelibly on his spirit. Accordingly, his imagination is most fully engaged when he is writing about those stark, primordial forms of nature which threaten to destroy civilization – the shark, the iceberg, the pitiless savages of the forest, the granite cliffs of a rocky coastline on which human beings continue to endure. As Northrop Frye has observed, there is a kind of innocence to the epic conflicts that Pratt describes because there is enmity without hatred. The enemy is outside the human community; the conflict is part of the evolutionary process.

B. Earle Birney

Earle Birney (1904-95), the first major poet from Western Canada, is closely related to E.J. Pratt and some of his early verse particularly “Atlantic Door” and “Pacific Door” are quite imitative of Pratt. Luis Dudek and Gnarowski in their book, *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* hold that Birney is an individualist and his real father is E.J. Pratt as one may gather from the method of “Pacific Door” and from the ideas in “Vancouver Lights”. However, he develops his own vein of profound travel poetry as well as a form of satiric poetry which bears relationship to F.R. Scott’s early satires. He is the most profoundly experimental in his use of poetic forms. Birney moves from the pre-modern through modern to postmodern. Birney is an eclectic poet who employs a variety of forms – the narrative poem, the nature lyric, the meditation, satire and ode. Birney had a serious commitment to his poetry. His first book *David and Other Poems* was published in 1942, and his second, *Now Is Time* in 1945. His first book catapulted Birney into the Canadian literary scene and earned him the Governor General’s Award for poetry. In 1962 and 1964 his two volumes of poetry — *Ice and Bell or Stone : A Collection of New Poems* and *Near False Creek Mouth : New Poems* were published respectively. These collections demonstrate a more relaxed colloquial tone, and provide a glimpses into his personal life as well. Besides these collections Birney produced some thirteen collections of verse and two novels *Turvey* (1949) and *Down the Long Table* (1949). With poems like “David”, “Bushed”, “Vancouver Lights”, “The Bear on the Delhi Road” and “November Walk Near False Creek Mouth”, Birney creates some important landmarks in Canadian poetry. Specially these are the works of the poet as mountain man, and they bring their unique voice and vision to the national literature. Birney’s most famous poem, “David”, published in *David and Other Poems* (1942), The dark side of mountain life (the harshness of winter, madness, death) is dramatized in “Bushed” also, where a man living alone in the woods loses his sanity. He is convinced that the wilderness has intelligently chosen to destroy him. One of Birney’s best known pieces is “November Walk near False Creek Mouth,” a long meditative poem on the human condition. In Birney’s canon this is a summary poem bringing together his perennial preoccupation with Nature’s indifference to humanity, the instinct in people for violence, and the inadequacy of human cultures structured solely on material gain. Here he also gives expression to his cosmic vision of life’s cycles and man’s inconsequence in terms of geological time.

The poetry of both E.J. Pratt and Earle Birney (Earle Birney was a pre-modernist, modernist and postmodernist in his approach and advanced respectively in the course of time) establish the fact

that it is not nation but an environment that makes an impact on poets, and poetry can deal only with the imaginative aspects of that environment. A country with almost no Atlantic seaboard, which for most of its history has existed in particular one dimension; a country divided by two languages and great stretches of wilderness so that its frontier is a circumference rather than a boundary; a country with huge rivers and islands that most of its natives have never seen; a country that has made out of stops on two of the world's longest railway lines: this is the environment that Canadian poets have to grapple with. In older countries the works of man and nature, the city and garden of civilization, have usually reached some kind of imaginative harmony. But the land of Rockies and pre-Cambrian Shield impresses painter and poets alike by its raw colours and angular rhythms, its profoundly unhumanised isolation. With a sense of national consciousness, the Canadian painters and poets got inspiration from the environment of their country. This kind of approach became a movement in the history of Canadian literature and the leaders of this movement – F.R.Scott and A.J.M.Smith – not only advocated but demonstrated in his poetry. Later a flock of poets and writers joined this literary venture and treated Canada as a landscape of their poetry. It is still “The Lonely Road” to A.J.M.Smith, and “A Country Without a Mythology” to Douglas Le Pan. This aspect of modernist poetry would be dealt with in the next chapter which records the modernist sensibility in F.R.Scott's and A.J.M.Smith's poetry.

1.4.2 Second Phase

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, after the confirmation of Canada's status as a separate nation state, a new sense of national consciousness was reinforced. This spirit was a kind of desire for a truly Canadian art and literature which would confirm the Canadian identity. *The Canadian Bookman* in 1919, *The Canadian Forum* in 1920 and The Canadian Authors Association in 1921 gave a genuine expression to this desire as their aim was “to trace and value these development of art and letters which are distinctively Canadian.” In a limited sense, the same expression was applicable to the modern Canadian poetry which was to be written. The artists and poets made conscious efforts lest the poetry in Canada should be an echo of poetry in England and America, lest it should be merely a development of the parent trunk. Rather it should be unique and original in itself. For that matter, the artists like Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson, Frank Arthur Lismer, J.E.H.MacDonald and Varley, who made the Group of Seven and the poets like E.J.Pratt, F.R.Scott, A.J.M.Smith and W.W.E.Ross, concluding that art is international, accommodated the developing modern movements in England and the United States “to the desire to find subjects and technique that were genuinely Canadian.” They found answer in the fusion of a distinctively Canadian landscape and imported modernist technique.

There were two factors that shaped the artists' response to the landscape : the post-Darwinian evolutionary sense of the land as the source of life and the “northern fact” of Canadian geography. The former, the evolutionary concern, so much a part of the poetry of the Confederation Group was still an important intellectual issue in Canada in the 1920s to judge from the debates in *The Canadian Forum*. The latter, as Carl Berger has indicated, was a reflection of the dominant political myth of the 1880s that attributed Canada's distinctive political identity to her northern geography. In the words of Robert Grant Haliburton, Canadians were “The Northmen of the New World,” characterized by their love of liberty, strength and moral rectitude. This new world, was “the true north, strong and free.” In poetic terms, as late as 1916 in Duncan Campbell Scott's transitional poem “The Height Land” it was “The lonely north Glimmering all night / In the cold arctic night.” Just as the poets influenced by the

Canada First movement has viewed Canada's "northness" as an indication of a distinctive national character, so the artists of 1914, encouraged by the possibilities of a national Canadian art based on landscape fell heir to the same concept.

For many Canadians returning from the Great War, including W.A. Irwin who was to become editor of *Maclean's Magazine* and for some of the returning artists, Lawren Harris, Frederick Varley, and A.Y. Jackson, the hope for the future centered in the Canadian land which distinguished Canada from Europe. Besides the above mentioned artists, there were four more artists, Franklin Charmichael, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer and J.E.H. MacDonald. All these seven artists formed a group which was known as the 'Group of Seven'. They were pondering over the question of subject of poetry which could be distinctively Canadian. For these artists, there was a sense of leaving behind the wasted lands of the battlefields of Europe for the fresh, clear northland of Canada. To them it was the northern environment that shaped the vision of Canadians and especially the vision of the artist. The Group was a romantic and nationalist movement. In 1919, MacDonald believed that "the Canadian spirit in art is just entering on possession of its heritage." But as Harris was to point out, in Canada as distinct from Europe, the inspiration for art was to be found in the wilderness.

The new vision of the Canadian landscape generated by the Group of Seven – vast, strong, lonely, northern – was centered in the Pre-Cambrian Shield. Primarily a response to the wilderness of northern Ontario and Quebec, it also reflected the rugged coastlines of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and later, by 1930, the arctic shores of Baffin Island. This vision gave an outgrowth of an older social Darwinism now. In Canada, this strain was particularly associated with the north by the popular verse of Robert Service. "This is the Law of the Yukon, that only the Strong shall thrive : / That surely the Weak shall perish, and only the Fit survive." Perhaps this Darwinian inheritance accelerated the emergent nationalist sense of a youthful "new" Canada. Although immeasurably old in geologic time, because the land was unpeopled it was seen as "young" and "virile". Canada was a country whose face was yet to be painted, whose voice was yet to be found, whose history was yet to be written. The typical Group of Seven landscape of the rock, trees, and rivers of the pre-Cambrian Shield displays the characteristics of this essentially northern land. MacDonald had described some of these characteristics in 1919 when he wrote that the Canadian spirit in art was opening a new world, "not often so softly beautiful as ruggedly strong, large, homely, free, and frankly simple in colour."

A. F.R. Scott

F.R. Scott (1899-1985), a distinguished Professor of Constitutional Law at McGill University, was one of the poets who brought the forces of modernism to bear on Canadian writing. He was one of the most important catalyst of modernist Canadian poetry. Scott's poetry has always reflected his social consciousness. As early as 1928 F.R. Scott joined other writers in helping to found the *Canadian Mercury*, a literary magazine that gave voice to three members of the 'Montreal Group', Leo Kennedy, A.M. Klein and Scott himself. Each member of this group wrote distinctly different poetry and as a group they all wrote about the present in new ways that freed them from traditional forms. With Smith, Scott edited an anthology of this 'new' poetry, *New Provinces* (1936, reissued 1976), which served as a public manifesto that Canadian poetry was indeed changing. Over the years Scott continued to be interested in helping to provide a public outlet for new voices, often by his support of literary magazines. He helped to found *Preview* in 1942 which, like the *Canadian Mercury* and the *McGill Fortnightly Review* before it, gave a new generation of writers a public forum.

Scott's poems have been collected in *Overture*(1945), *Events and Signals*(1954), *The Eye of the Needle : Satires, Sorties, Sundries* (1957), *Signature* (1964), and *The Dance is One* (1973). His *Selected Poems* appeared in 1966, and his *Collected Poems* in 1981. He also got published a volume of found poems, *Trouvailles: Poems from Prose* (1967), and translations of French-Canadian poetry. In another collaboration with A.J.M.Smith, Scott compiled a popular anthology, *The Blasted Pine : An Anthology of Satire, Invective and Disrespectful Verse : Chiefly by Canadian Writers* (1957: rev. 1967). Scott's reputation as a modernist rests mainly on his use of Imagist techniques in the landscape nature poems in which he rejuvenated poetic language – these can be accurately be described as “modernist”. Scott's poetry has evidently a development. His own career exemplified the tradition from Victorian romanticism to the modern. In the late 1920s he wrote northern landscape poetry influenced by Imagists, by Eliot's “Fertility Myth”. In 1930s, in response to the depression, he wrote basically socialist often satiric program poetry. Later in the 1940s and 1950s both strains were fused into a more philosophical structure as it is obvious in his poem “A Grain of Rice” in which his humanist reflections move from cell to man, to the larger movements of physical universe. F.R.Scott is one of the main promoters of modernist techniques. As a modernist poet, he employed imagist technique in his poetry, particularly in landscape poetry. It is worthwhile to make a statement here that it was not only Scott who started concentrating on landscape but before him there were poets like Lampman, Roberts, Carman and D.C.Scott who had already written landscape poetry. Their ideals were Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and, to some extent, the Victorian poets like Arnold and Tennyson. It is interesting to note that the subject he turned to is the same Canadian landscape of the Confederation poets but the style he chose is the imagist style used by Pound and H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) in their poems.

This view of a strong, rugged nature, that demands equally strong inhabitants, was being developed as an artistic program by the Group of Seven. F.R.Scott and many others right from the beginning were associated with this program. F.R.Scott himself said in an interview in 1975 that he was introduced to the new art by 1925. He had an encounter with the Group of Seven which he, in turn, discussed with A.J.M.Smith. Besides this artistic encounter, Scott had also tasted *The New Poetry* (1917), an influential modernist anthology through which imagism was to return to Canada. Thus he, having been exposed to the main stream, was responding variously to the Canadian landscape. Besides this treatment to Canadian landscape, his poetry also reflects social consciousness. Scott's poetry can be divided into ‘public’ and private’ poems, or grouped into the predominating modes and subjects of nature, satire, social and humanitarian idealism, and love. However, even a poem as personal as “Overture” is not without its larger context, nor is the public satire in “The Canadian Authors Meet” without a personal voice. In his poetry we find the best aspects of modernism : a penetrating vision expressed in a spare and precise style. To this Scott adds his own special qualities of grace and wit, so that his treatment of such subjects as social injustice or the artifacts of popular culture are given force and memorability by means of elegant diction and sharp satire. His is a comprehensive poetry that unites the mythic nature of the land with the reality of personal experience, that scrutinizes the trivialities of a cellophane- wrapped society while also seeing a lake shore with the eye of a visionary. He writes of man's mediocrity as well as of his ultimate promise.

B. A.J.M.Smith

A.J.M.Smith(1902-80) is another leader of the modernist movement in Canada who too, like Scott, contributed to this movement and affected twentieth century Canadian poetry, introducing modernism into Canada through the influence of the “little magazines” movement and by adapting

modernism to Canadian context. Poet, teacher, critic and anthologizer, A.J.M. Smith was the leader of the young Montreal poets in the late twenties who challenged literary nationalism and argued for the cosmopolitan values of the modernist movement. In the 'Preface' to *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, Smith made controversial distinction between cosmopolitan and native verse. For him the cosmopolitan poet responded to what Canadian life had in common with life everywhere while the native poet concentrated on what is individual and unique in Canadian life. Historically, Smith saw the native poet as trying to come to terms with an environment that is only now ceasing to be colonial. As far as a cosmopolitan writer is concerned, he from the very beginning has made a heroic effort to transcend colonialism by entering into the universal, civilizing culture of ideas. For him, colonialism was a threat to Canadian writing .

Smith was a catalyst for introducing modernist poetry in Canada along with F.R. Scott, A.M. Klein and Leo Kennedy. Their combined affiliation to many literary journals and their companionship resulted in new styles and attitudes in Canadian poetry. Smith's encounter with modernist poetry took place in 1917 when as a teenager he came across Harriet Munroe and Henderson's *New Poetry : An Anthology* (1917). It is about London where he continued to immerse himself in the work of British modernists. His poetry bears the influence of the symbolist poetry of Yeats and Wallace Stevens, the Imagist verse of Pound, Eliot and H.D., and the Metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century. In the thirties, Smith and Scott compiled *New Province*, an anthology of 'new' Canadian poets. This anthology, which contained poems by four members of the new dispersed 'Montreal group' (Scott, Smith, Klein and Kennedy) and by E.J. Pratt and Robert Finch of Toronto, can be now seen as the volume that announced the existence of Canadian modernism. Although Smith published his own verse steadily—most of it in periodicals such as the *Canadian Forum*—he refrained for many years from collecting it in book form. His first volume of poems, *News of the Phoenix* which won a Governor General's Award did not appear until 1943. These followed *A Sort of Ecstasy* (1954), *Collected Poems* (1963), *Poems : New and Collected* (1967) , and *The Classic Shade : Selected Poems* (1978).

Smith makes his clearest distinction between the popular poetry he rejected and the difficult poetry he valued. The first kind is "social and communal" and relies on the emotional stock response. The second type is what Smith took to be characteristically modernist. Most of Smith's poems are imitative in one way or the other of the style of other modernist poets. They sometimes sound like Eliot, sometimes like Yeats, sometimes like Sitwell or Donne. They have various shades like metaphysical, imagist, romantic and social. "The Lonely Road", the most famous poem, is the meeting point for the imagist, the metaphysical and the romantic sides of this multifaced poet. Smith has also written poems of social concern but his social poems unlike those of Scott are not of social engagement. While Scott's focus is on specific events, individual or institutional criticism, Smith exposes the impact of the modern world on an individual, a persona who may or may not be identified with the poet himself. Smith's "News of the Phoenix," is one of his best poems of social concern. It satirizes the propensity of modern bureaucracies to suppress unpleasant news : Smith's poems of social concern also include his poems on the subject of death which were published in the '50s and '60s. These poems are "Metamorphosis", "The Dead", "Speaking about Death: Blues for Mentor Williams", "The Wisdom of Old Jelly Roll", "On Knowing Nothing", "My Death", and "Watching the Old Man Die". Smith's love of paradox emerges in his view of death as both thing and nothing or negation. In "On Knowing Nothing", he speaks of "... the wound within – / As deep, as nothing, as the grave", while in "My Death" abstract nothingness is replaced by solid inevitability; death is a seed nurtured by life, and finally

“a felt want within”: Smith’s confrontation with death in his later poetry replaces the pessimism of the ’30s and ’40s with an optimism not prompted by religious faith, but by a mature belief in the rightness of the natural order of things.

1.4.3 Third Phase

Like the *Fortnightly* group years before, the poets associated with *Preview* and *First Statement* offered Klein an opportunity to engage more closely than he might have otherwise done with contemporary poetry. However, Klein’s response to this opportunity in the mid-forties was very different from what it had been in the late twenties and early thirties. This introductory account shows that Klein’s poetry passed through two stages. The first comprises poems published between 1929 and 1944 – most of which were collected in *Hath Not a Jew* (1940) and *Poems* (1944). These draw heavily on his Jewish background and are written in a style that owes something to Biblical rhetorical on the one hand and to such varied English influences as the Renaissance poets and T.S.Eliot on the other. In 1944 he also published, the *Hitleriad*, a satire on Nazism written in form and style derived from Alexander Pope. The second stage of Klein’s poetry coincided with the emergence in the forties of a new and vigorous poetry in Montreal, centring on the Journals *Preview* and *First Statement*. The influence of the poets of these groups – which included F.R.Scott, P.K.Page, Patrick Anderson, Layton and Louis Dudek – and his appointment as Visiting Lecturer in English at McGill University, encouraged Klein to experiment with a more broadly based poetry and a somewhat simpler style. A collection of this new poetry, *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems* was published in 1948 which won a Governor General’s Award in 1974. Two years after his death, *The Collected Poems of A.M.Klein* was published. Klein’s work, as a whole is characterised with the voice of an alien. It is also to note here that in his poetry he is the voice of three separate cultural traditions : Jewish, English and French Canadian.

A. A.M.Klein

Klein’s *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems* is his final collection of poetry which belongs to his modernist phase. Here he has moved away completely from his Jewish themes. Now two changes took place in his poetry - the concrete realities of the immediate world of Montreal and the language and words forms. It is aptly observed by the poet Miriam Waddington that in *The Rocking Chair* Klein gives up archaic language and Elizabethan rhetoric in favour of a rich use of metaphor. Waddington further says that Klein was no longer so interested in evoking the past as he was eager to discover new realities and meanings through the metaphorical possibilities of language. David Stouck states that Klein has turned away from the influence of the Elizabethans and T.S. Eliot and turned to poets like Hopkins and Auden for models. This phase of modernism found expression when in 1945, Klein began a series of poems which mark the return to community. The representative poems of this phase are, “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape”, “Indian reservation : Caughnawaga”, “*The Rocking Chair*”, “*Political Meeting*” and “*For the Sisters of the Hotel Dieu*” . In these poems the subject is not the Jewish community but the French-Canadian community of Quebec. There are obvious parallels between Klein’s portrayal of community in the Quebec poems of the late forties and in the Jewish poems of the late twenties and early thirties, but there is a radical difference between them as well. The Jewish community as Klein had portrayed it was essentially unchanging, unified by a continuous tradition but here Quebec community is seen as a community embroiled in change.

Though the modernist leader - poets imported a truly modern image to Canadian verse and a distinct national style and imagery to it, yet the growth and development of Canadian poetry has not been in a simple and direct manner. C.J. Vincet has identified two main lines on which Canadian poetry has developed. Writing in *The Encyclopedia of Literature*, he says :

Contemporary Verse has developed along two main lines. There is the verse of social consciousness in which the poet is trying to make some adjustment to difficult political and economic conditions. To this group belong Dorothy Livesay, A.M. Klein and Anne Marriott Then there is the verse that seems to derive its inspiration partly from the 17th century metaphysical and partly from Pound, Eliot and later Yeats. Generally speaking, this verse is cryptic and difficult in its rebellion against the subject matter and form of the immediate past. But it has variety, with its subjects drawn not only from the contemporary social world but also from the mental and emotional life of the individual.

Rebellion against the style and the subject matters of the past has not been an exercise in egoistic aggrandizement. It has actually been compelled, subconsciously and imperceptibly perhaps by the irresistible pressures of the spirit of the age. Such rejections and quests were being undertaken everywhere, especially by the European and American writers. The loss of faith, the failure of the conventional ideas and the bleakness of future that haunted the writer after First World War and ever for the three following decades in the following way :

Despair is universal over the question who everyone is. It is necessary to know. We have got ourselves into a position where perhaps this is possible. Disillusion is irreducible; the inherited past is totally questioned. Now something is happening. So radically have protest been lodged that the negotiations are proving no longer sufficient. We are in the midst, or as at the beginning of the recreation. The dialogue of the new Canadian poets is of the greatest interest. The burden is testamentary By those who want disillusioned affirmation, these fresh sensibilities are not to be ignored.

B. Al Purdy

Al Purdy has instilled the true Canadian spirit into his poetry. He, born in Wooler, Ontario, is known as the poet of rural Ontario. David Stouck holds that "as Ontario is central to any conception of Canada as a nation, so Purdy's work has assumed a central position of importance in the growing body of Canadian poetry since the Second World War". Purdy has been one of Canada's most prolific poets. His first volume of verse *The Enchanted Echo* was published in 1944 where he appeared as a traditional and derivative poet influenced largely by Canadian late romantics like Roberts and Carman. Purdy began to find a sure and distinctive voice, publishing *Poems for All the Annettes* (1962) and *The Cariboo Horses* (1965) . In 1968 *Poems for All the Annettes* was reissued in an expanded edition, in which Purdy collected and revised all the poetry upto 1965 that he wished to preserve. He has published some twenty more collections since then, including three more retrospective volumes: *Selected poems* (1972) *Being Alive : Poems 1958-1978* (1978) and *Bursting into Song : An Al Purdy Omnibus* (1982). His recent book of new poems *The Stone Bird* (1981), published when he was sixty three, was felt by many readers to contain some of his best work.

One strange and yet quite real characteristic of the typical Canadian psyche is an overpowering tendency to examining the two opposite sides of an issue and conclude this examination directly or indirectly. W.H. New holds that this feature is prominent in Eastern and Western attitude in Canada. But this feature is not a geographical concept rather it is a persistent feature that explains viable literature

in both form and content in Canadian literature. Purdy's poems articulate the various components of this quest and show how Al Purdy seems to reach a destination in continuous search for stable values. Purdy's quest is to find a "basis for man's transcendence of his own earthly life, without ceasing to embrace it." He does it by putting together various oppositions and concentrates on the reality of the past and the present, or the historical, mythical roots and the present experiences of an individual. In "Cariboo Horses" the present or the physical time is a gray morning at 100 mile house, a town in the interior of British Columbia, where "the Cowboys ride in rolling" into town to pick up supplies at the grocers. Their horses "are waiting in stables" "standing at down/pastured outside the time with/jeeps and fords and chevys..." As has already been referred to, the scene is in present but for the poet it evokes a panorama of history wherein horses played a vital role in human affairs.

Purdy combines a strong sense of place with deep awareness of the past pressing upon the present to produce a kind of geographical poetry which marvellously projects the nature of Canada and of other places. In his poem, "*The Country North of Belleville*" expresses this tension of the past and pre-sent. Here the heroic but futile labour of his ancestors who tried to turn a poor stony land into rich farm country is expressive of the past and the poet's response to his own attitude underlines the present. The poet is uneasy to note that he has abandoned the struggle of his ancestors. He is perturbed by this sense of denying the significance of the ancestors' lives although he still feels their claim of loyalty and kinship on him. Here the tension or the opposition between the past and the present is expressed and is sought to be resolved through a juxtaposition and telescoping of chronological time. He says:

Apart from these contrasts and opposites that are such persistent characteristics of his poetry, Purdy has also written realistic yet poetically beautiful descriptions of the charms of the vast Canadian land especially of the Northern parts of his country. In "North of Summer" he presents a charming literary portrait of the stern, uncompromising and cold landscape. Here the North stands for a new frontier and also becomes the symbol of another polarity in his poetry because most of the settlements and hubs of modern civilization are located along the Southern border of Canada.

The most striking feature of the poetry of Purdy is his interest in the past and present which seem to explain his dynamics of discord. The juxtaposed worlds which take place in his poems, tend to move from present to past and back again, seeking to restore lost continuities. He struggles to understand the vanished era and finds vestiges of a more primitive era, prehistoric past in the present. For him past is a living thing, carried within us all, and a source of strength. Because we often lose sight of our past, he attempts to recover and respond to it by bringing together the contrary worlds. In a word it can be said that in his poetry it is the past and the present which are embossed with various contrary and opposite patterns instilling true Canadian spirit.

1.5 Postmodernist /Contemporary Period

Canadian poetry of the eighties has been given considerable space by Margaret Atwood in the anthology *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* (1982). Her description of Canadian poetry as "spiky, though, flexible, various and vital" in the Introduction to the anthology is very appropriately applicable to the recent verses by the young contemporary poets of Canada. The poets who are born after 1940, continuously experiment with the form of poetry to achieve an original medium of expression, and thus offer a verbal rendering of the Canadian expression which, by the virtue of its contexts is unique and engrossing. Atwood insinuates that it is only in recent times that

Canadian poetry has come of age, and has become abundantly productive. She accords the Canadian poetry of today a place among the great: "Canadian poetry like Canadian statesmanship or something of the sort, was finally becoming 'International' and taking its rightful place among the great."

The first recurring feature of much of the contemporary Canadian poetry is its attempt to be simple, lyrical and at the same time, magical both in its music and imagery. However, the Canadian poets of today do not aim at the prismatic images of colourful romanticism. They aim at a clarity of expression and a vividness of vocalization that produces, through its consistent refusal to wallow in any verbal mess, a magic of silent evocation.

The constant effort of the poet to achieve a sparseness in diction and lucidity of lyric exposition of the idea does not, however, debar him or her from exploring the underworld of the subconscious stream of thoughts. The Canadian poet arranges images and metaphors in a harmonious structure that bodies forth the depth of the poet's dreams and subconscious desires. Much of the Canadian poetry of today is transfused with the light reflected from the subconscious, the credit goes to the Canadian poet for his success in exposing the subconscious through an arabesque of translucent images and verbal felicities that stir the imagination and intellect of the reader with an immediacy that speaks of the level of achievement of the contemporary Canadian poets. For example:

This land like a mirror turns you inward.
And you become a forest in a furtive lake;
The dark pines of your mind each downward,
You dream in the green of your time.
Your memory is a row of sinking pines.

("Dark Pines Under", Gwendolyn MacEwen)

Contemporary Canadian poets aim at achieving a language of lyricism and a language of the subconscious: in the process they endow the language with metaphorical suggestiveness that satisfies the imagination of the reader as it widens its range through a paradoxical use of consciousness and terseness in the graphic evocation of the suggestive image. Thus the language of the contemporary Canadian poetry acquires a fecundity in style and expression.

While, on the one hand, the language in contemporary Canadian poetry is acquiring a lyric fluidity, a suffusion of the strange light reflected from the underworld of the subconscious and a metaphoric suggestiveness of wide ranging effects on the other hand, it gains in vitality and in an inescapable sense of sensuous physicality through the frequent use of sexual imagery chosen with fresh, feeling and uninhibited and emancipated perception of the relationship between man and man and man and woman. Canadian poetry acquires a vitality, a freshness, an immediacy and an all-pervading touch of the intimate and the everyday by drawing freely upon the liberated attitude towards sex in life. Sexual motifs and imagery are placed very naturally in the body of contemporary Canadian poetry about human family; thus the poets remove from their references to sex the roughness and crudity generally associated with it under the influence of its categorization as a social taboo. Here, the credit goes to the Canadian poet for his sensitive and imaginative manipulation of language for

expression of emotional and imaginative attachment to the essential things of life without any social inhibition.

The language of psychological tension and psychological strife also marks contemporary Canadian poetry. Hence, the language of contemporary Canadian poetry becomes tense and alive with the perception of the dualities and antagonisms in the young poets' psychological reactions to the facts and events of life.

However, contemporary Canadian poetry cannot claim to be free from the puzzling frame of obscurity. Many a poem by the Canadian contemporaries will sound bewitching and even, rhythmically and photographically, enticing, but will bedevil the reader's head as to what may be the meaning of its content. The obscurity is, however, not the last word in contemporary Canadian poetry. There is definitely a wide range of linguistic experiments going on in contemporary Canadian poetry. Experiments – both formal and verbal – predominate, but these experiments lead to fresh arrangement of words which result in fresh evocations. The contemporary Canadian poets are performing their functions dutifully by creating new sets of words and images for poetic effects.

The experiment in language also provides room for witty exposure of the modern situation. In an interesting poem entitled, "*Wayman in Love*," Tom Wayman very interestingly portrays a dramatic situation where two lovers cannot go into bed and make love peacefully as Freud and Marx haunt their conscience and will not let them caress each other like spontaneous lovers.

Ultimately, of course, the impression left by contemporary Canadian poetry is that of intense passionate humanism. The intense humanity of the young Canadian poets permeates the poetry created by them: and that is the final hall mark of great poetry. And in that respect, the contemporary poetry of Canada transcends the barrier of the local, and attains a universality of appeal.

Canadian poetry has come a long way from its early stage of imitation and directionless search for new paths; it has achieved a unique style, which the young Canadian poets can call their own, that marks it out from the English poetry written in the other countries of the world. Still the ultimate hall-mark of humanity gives contemporary Canadian poetry a universality in appeal that removes from it the stigma of the local. It can be and will be enjoyed and appreciated by any poetry – lover anywhere in the world.

1.6 Let Us Sum Up

Thus Canadian poetic culture is a continuous growth from its first stirrings of poetics culture to contemporary poetic culture, going through the emergence of a national poetic culture, transitional poetic culture and modernist poetic culture. The pre-Confederation period had the first stirrings of a poetic culture before Canada became a nation. The first stirrings of the poetic culture took place in the farthest west. Though this phase includes poets such as Robert Hayman, Joseph Stansbury, Standish O'Grady, Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Heavysege, Charles Sangster and Charles Mair, the beginning of importance was made by the three Charleses. The second phase of Canadian literature which marked the Confederation period brought the emergence of a national literature. Near the Confederation, Canada gained poets who were national. Charles G.D. Roberts, his cousin Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman and D.C. Scott are often called the poets of the Confederation. Despite the fact that they were influenced by both British and American models, they evolved styles and attitudes, which gave

rise to more nationalist literature. These continued the themes of the pre-Confederation literature and endeavoured to investigate the experience the early settlers had. These experiences of the early settlers gave a consciousness of exile and isolation, a sense of inchoate identity and ambivalent feelings about nature that seemed hostile and indifferent. The third phase started in the first quarter of the twentieth century, after the confirmation of Canada's status as a separate nation state, when a new sense of national consciousness was reinforced. This spirit was a kind of desire for a truly Canadian art and literature which would confirm the Canadian identity. *The Canadian Bookman* in 1919, *The Canadian Forum* in 1920 and *The Canadian Authors Association* in 1921 gave a genuine expression to this desire as their aim was "to trace and value these development of art and letters which are distinctively Canadian." In the contemporary phase the poets experiment with the form of poetry to achieve an original medium of expression, and thus offer a verbal rendering of the Canadian expression which, by the virtue of its contexts is unique and engrossing. The recurring feature of much of the contemporary Canadian poetry is its attempt to be simple, lyrical and at the same time, magical both in its music and imagery. They aim at clarity of expression and a vividness of vocalization that produces, through its consistent refusal to wallow in any verbal mess, a magic of silent evocation.

1.7 Review Questions

- 1 What did the poetry of the pre-confederation period deal with? Give examples of poets and their works to justify.
- 2 What were the characteristics of Canadian literature?
- 3 Write a short note on confederation period and the famous poets of the time
- 4 Write a short note on the Darwinism that dominated the intellectual climate of Pratt's formative years.
- 5 How does Purdy combine a strong sense of place with deep awareness of the past?
- 6 With reference to Canadian poets, comment on their attitude towards nature.
- 7 "The intense humanity of the young Canadian poets permeates the poetry created by them." Justify.
- 8 Give an estimate of the Canadian poets of modernist period.
- 9 Write a note on Contemporary Canadian poets

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UNIT-2

CANADIAN FICTION

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction to Fiction
- 2.2 Fiction in English: Four Basic Periods
 - 2.2.1 To Confederation
 - 2.2.2 The Late Nineteenth Century.
 - 2.2.3 The Twentieth Century: First Part
 - 2.2.4 The Twentieth Century: Second Part
 - 2.2.5 1960 and Beyond
- 2.3 Historical Novels
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Review Questions
- 2.6 Bibliography

2.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to an outline of Canadian fiction.
- To familiarize them with the different phases of development of Canadian fiction
- To understand the different forms of Canadian fiction.

2.1 Introduction to Fiction

Poetry has been the cutting edge of new developments in Canadian literature for the past century a national fiction following on the heels of a national poetry, and poets themselves often becoming the most strikingly experimental of novelists. No less than three poets – Robert Kroetsch, Leonard Cohen, and Margaret Atwood – are among the most important Canadian fiction writers while others, like Earle Birney, P.K. Page and George Bowering have interesting individual novels.

The accidents of publication – it was often easier for a book of substantial length to appear in Boston or New York than in Toronto or Montreal – had created in the nineteenth century a tendency for Canadian fiction writers to look southward over the border, and even when Canada began to produce novelists and storytellers of some stature and individuality, like Sara Jeannette Duncan and Stephen Leacock, they seemed to fit as much into a continental as into a Canadian pattern. Duncan's great masters were William Dean Howells and Henry James. Leacock was in many respects an heir to the American humorist represented by Mark Twain; yet they wrote best, as Duncan did in *The Impenitent* and Leacock in *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, when they wrote

drawing deeply on their Canadian experience. This inclination was carried on into the 1920s, especially by Morley Callaghan, who in his earlier days tended to seek and find an audience in the United States and who learnt much about the writing of fiction from his association with Ernest Hemingway- which did not prevent him from writing some of the best novels of Canadian urban life.

Indeed, it is among the fiction writers – more than among the poets – that the pattern of departure and return, the tradition of the Canadian writer has been most evident. Mavis Gallant, for example, spent virtually all her writing life in Paris and has contributed most stories before publication in volume form, to the *New Yorker*. Moidle Richler wrote most of his novels in England where Margaret Leack also lived for a long period, having already spent years in Mrich. But this did not make these writers less Canadian. They did not become successfully transplanted into the new environment, like Canadian actors in Hollywood. Rather, they added their new experiences to their old ones, which they had acquired during those first twenty years of life that as Richler once remarked, provide a novelist with the ideas and impressions on which he or she works for the whole of his or her career. As their frequent homecomings in fiction demonstrate, it is impossible of Richler or Gallant without the Montreal childhoods they have so vividly re-created. Margaret Laurence's African experiences, once she had translated them into literature in books like *This Side Jordan* (1960) and *The Prophet's Camel Bell* (1963), turned out to be merely the prelude to a deep immersion in her prairie background. This in turn led her to write that remarkable sequence of books, from *The Stone Angel* (1964) to *The Diviners* (1974), which may well constitute the greatest Canadian writing in fiction to date. It certainly represents the peak of the urge which the Canadian novelists in the years after World War II shared with the poets – to give the Canadian land and its inhabitants a shaping myth that would do justice to its splendid geography and also to its history as a unique community of peoples. Now the pattern of expatriate which was so characteristic of the transitional 1950's when writers were trying to establish their identities in a shifting world – is less evident, indeed, a reverse pattern is perceptible, for some of the best story writers in this anthology, like Leon Rooke and Audrey Thomas (American in origin) and John Metcalf (English in origin), began work in other settings before they brought their talents to enrich Canadian literature.

More than the poems, the stories act as pointers to larger works, for all but a few of the creators of short stories have written novels as well. To get the full flavour of Canadian fiction, the reader who admires Sinclair Ross's "The Painted Door" or Morley Callaghan's "Now that April's Here" or Ethel Wilson's "From Flores" should carry on to read Ross's *As For Me* and *My House*-one of the finest prairie novels – or *They Shall Inherit the Earth* and the other splendid moral fables in the form of novels that Callaghan produced during the 1930s-or Wilson's sensitive novels set in British Columbia, like *Hetty Dorval* and *Swamp Angel*, which so intriguingly combine an Edwardian sensibility with a modern intelligence.

But it would be wrong to regard the stories as merely introductions to their writers larger works, or in any way as specimens of a minor genre. Only in size is the short story less than the novel, in the hands of a fine writer it can produce a vision of life as intense – though necessarily not so complex – as that of a novel, and Canadian writers have long been attracted to this briefer form. Generally speaking, the story is one of the less profitable literary genres, and one of the less popular among publishers and editors of periodicals, and there were times particularly during the 1950s and 1960s, - when it was hard even to get stories published. But for reasons that critics have not

satisfactorily explained, Canadian writers continued to produce them. For a long time their principal patron was the CBC, where from the 1940s, Robert Weaver (later also the editor of the *Tamarack Review*) broadcast stories, paid their writers, and even arranged for their publication in anthologies. Some of the best story writers – such as Alice Munro and Hugh Hood – developed under his encouragement, and so the story continued as a living form until, from the late 1960s, onward, publishers began to take risks with short fiction again and new and vital story-tellers appeared. Some of them are excellent writers who have made the story their special genre and have not yet chosen to go beyond it, like Keath Fraser.

Poetry and short fiction, of course, are not all the constituents of a literary tradition. Behind the story looms the novel, and behind poetry stands drama, which was once its natural blank-verse extension, but which in more recent customary dialogue meet. But there is an inevitable colloquial diffusiveness about contemporary drama compared to more compact forms like the poem and the short story. There are also the other, non-fictional and non-poetic forms of writing that sometimes verge on imaginative literature, like history – whose need to make comprehensible patterns often edges it over into myth-and like biography and autobiography, which are often infused with the imaginative intensity of fiction, as the biographer seeks to enter the mind and the autobiographer seeks to find a pattern in his own collection. Over the last century, what was once a scattering of writers working largely in isolation across a vast country, has gradually been transformed into a literary community. The days when “Canadian literature” was a phrase used either with in difference or with mockery have come to an end. English-Canadian writers and writing can stand with pride, beside those of any other English – writing community.

2.2 Fiction in English: Four Basic Periods

In Canadian Fiction four basic periods have been established: (1) to confederation; (2) the late nineteenth century; (3) the twentieth century, first part (roughly to the Second World War); and (4) the twentieth century, second part. These periods are only rough chronological guides, and chronology is ignored in cases where the author is ahead of his time or has clung to outgrown attitudes. Each section is divided into three categories: (a) by Canadians, (b) by temporary residents, and (c) by expatriates. The first category includes both native Canadians and immigrants whose distinctive work was written in British North America (prior to 1867) or in Canada. Authors whose major books were written after they left Canada are listed among the expatriates. In the cases of temporary residents and expatriates, only books relating to Canada are considered. The writing of short stories is surveyed in a concluding sub-section.

2.2.1 To Confederation

(a) By Canadians

In New Brunswick, Walter Bates, sheriff of King’s Co., scored a popular success among readers of the true-life confessions of criminals when his short book, *The Mysterious Stranger*, was published in the United States in 1817 and reprinted in England in the same year under the title *A Companion For Cariboo*. Under the pseudonym ‘A Bluenose’, George E. Fenety of Saint John wrote *The Lady And The Dressmaker; Or, A Peep At Fashionable Folly* (Halifax, 1842), a warning against pride in those whose social prestige rested on the precarious foundation of commercial success.

In Nova Scotia the Rev. Thomas McCulloch of Pictou satirized the follies of pioneer society in his 'Letters Of Mephibosheth Stepsure' which ran in the Acadian recorder in 1821-2 and were reprinted as a book in 1862. Another Nova Scotian, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, won an international reputation with his satire *The Clockmaker; or, The Sayings And Doings Of Samuel Slick, Of Slickville* (Halifax, 1836) in which a Yankee pedlar airs his views on the people and life of the colony. He followed up his success with many other satirical books in which Sam Slick or a recognizable counterpart appeared, but these deal chiefly with imperial policy and relations with the United States as seen through Tory eyes. Haliburton also wrote *The Old Judge* (2 vols, Halifax 1849) in which he gave some amusing sketches of Nova Scotia life and preserved some of the folklore of the province. Two authors of didactic fiction are Mary Herbert, who wrote *Belinda Dalton; or, Scenes In The Life Of A Halifax Belle* (Halifax, 1859) and her sister Sarah Herbert whose Agnes Mailard (Halifax, n.d.) is a temperance tale.

In Upper Canada Julia (Beckwith) Hart's romance *St Ursula's Convent; or, The Nun Of Canada* was published at Kingston by public subscription in 1824. It is a juvenile work, but Mrs. Hart is also the author of *Tonnewont; or, The Adopted Son Of America* (Watertown, New York, 1825), a more mature novel in which the democratic virtues of North America are contrasted with the shallow life of French aristocrats and the *nouveau riche* created by the French Revolution. John Richardson's *Ecarte; or, The Salons Of Paris* (London, 1829) an indictment of French society, was a failure, but Richardson won international acclaim with his historical romance *Wacousta; or, The Prophecy: A Tale Of The Canadas* (3 vols, London, 1832) in which the Indian uprising of 1763 (see Pontiac) is used as background. A sequel to this book, *The Canadian Brothers; Or, The Prophecy Fulfilled* (Montreal, 1840), is set during the War of 1812 and was reprinted in New York under the title *Matilda Montgomerie...*(1851). Abraham S. Holmes of Chatham, the author of *Belinda; or, The Rivals: A Tale Of Real Life* (Detroit, 1843), fictionalized a local scandal without making much of an attempt to disguise the prototypes who have been identified by Fred Hamil in 'A pioneer novelist of Kent Co.' in *Ontario History* (1947), vol. 39. Charles E. Beardsley wrote *The Victims Of Tyranny* (2 vols, Buffalo, 1847), an attack on the family compact he imagined it in the years between 1807 and 1812. *Two And Twenty Years Ago: A Tale Of The Canadian Rebellion* (Toronto, 1859), an amateurish story of the Rebellion of 1837, has been attributed to William Dunlop.

In Lower Canada the writing of light fiction was stimulated in 1838 by the appearance of the *Literary Garland*: a monthly magazine devoted to the advancement of general literature which was edited in Montreal by John Gibson. Contributions from Upper Canada were welcomed even before 1841 when the two provinces were united as the Province of Canada. *The Literary Garland* continued until 1851 when competition from American magazines overwhelmed it.

Types of Popular Fiction

No survey of Canadian fiction would be complete without reference to it, for all types of popular fiction appeared in its columns. Novels of manners laid stress on simple virtues. Melodramas full of intrigue, of lost and oppressed child heirs and heiresses, gave titillating pictures of vice among the aristocracy and rich upper classes that ended in family reunions with the lost heir in possession of his birthright, preferably in the form of a landed estate, and frequently saved from incest by a timely revelation. Stories about cruel and faithless lovers usually ended with forgiveness and a deathbed repentance, though some authors had their doubts about the credibility of such an end and a few even

permitted the sinner to die unrepentant. Some historical romances involving Indians were also published in the magazine. Contributors from Upper Canada included Susanna Moodie and her sister Catharine Parr Traill. Leading contributors from Lower Canada were 'R.E.M.' and 'The Monk Of G- Abbey', The Rev. Joseph Abbott). During its last years the *Literary Garland* was edited by two sisters, Mrs. Harriet Cheney and Mrs. E. L. Cushing, who had come to Montreal from the United States where they and their mother, Hannah Webster Foster, were all known as novelists. Mrs. Cheney's contributions to the *Literary Garland* included '*The Fort Of St Johns, A Tale Of The New World*' (1849) and a short story, '*Jacques Cartier And The Little Indian*', a legendary tale. Mrs. Cushing dealt with English history in the serial '*Arabella Stuart*' (1839).

After the demise of the *Literary Garland*, three well-constructed novels of manners set in Montreal and the surrounding district were written which were translated into French. Mrs. Traill's story for children *The Canadian Crusoes* (London, 1852) was reprinted in 1882 as *Lost In The Backwoods*; and another children's story, *Lady Mary And Her Nurse: A Peep Into The Canadian Forest* (London, 1856), went through many editions, with some changes in the title. Mrs. John Vavasour's *The Abbey Of Rathmore And Other Tales* (1859) was read widely. About 1860 temperance novels and tales began to flood the colonies. A typical example of them is found in *Ned Fenton's Portfolio* (Quebec, 1863) by Morphy, a clerk in the crown lands department.

(b) By Temporary Residents

Frances Brooke, who lived at Quebec from 1764s to 1768, used her experience there for the well-written epistolary romance *The History Of Emile Montague* (4 vols, London, 1769) which gives good picture of the social life of the colony. Galt, superintendent of Canada company from 1826 to 1829, wrote *The Settlers In The Woods* (London), set in the western United States, and *The Emigrants* (London, 1831) set partly in Upper Canada. Both novels stress the qualities essential for success in North America and warn the prospective emigrant of the type of difficulty he will have to meet. Capt. Frederick Marryat, who visited Canada in 1818, adopted a common attitude towards emigration when, in *The Settlers In Canada*, he showed that a family that had emigrated and settled near Kingston, Upper Canada, was delighted when the opportunity came to return to England to claim an inheritance. One son of this family, who enjoyed the free Canadian life, remained in the province. R.M. Ballantyne, who served the Hudsons Bay Company from 1841 to 1847, used Canadian settings for two of his adventure stories for boys, *Snowflakes And Sunbeams*; or *The Young Fur Traders: A Tale Of The Far North* (London, 1956), and *Ungave: A Tale Of Esquimaux Land* (London 1957).

The Rev. George Bourne, an American who lived in Quebec between 1825 and 1828 developed a hatred for nuns and priests that found expression in his scurrilous work *Lorette; The History Of Louise*, daughter of a Canadian nun, exhibiting the interior of a female convent (New York, 1834) and in the 'literary assistance' he gave to the notorious impostor Maria Monk. Bourne's attitude represented the most aggressive elements of the American nativist movement which was particularly hostile to Irish Roman Catholics. Mrs Mary Anne Sadlier, who lived for some years in Montreal, attempted to counteract nativist propaganda by writing a number of romances of Irish life which were published in the United States. One of them, *Elinor Preston, or Scenes From Home And Abroad* (New York, 1851) is set in Canada., (Mrs. Sadlier also edited the poetry of Thomas D'Arcy Mc. Gee).

(c) By Expatriates

Sir Edward Belcher, who was born in Halifax and had a distinguished career in the British navy, wrote a dull book, *Hetalia Howard Brention: A Novel Of Naval Life*. May Agnes Fleming, who used the pseudonym 'Cousin May Carleton', was born in New Brunswick. Her first book, *Erminie; or The Gypsy's Vow; A Tale Of Love And Vengeance*, was published in New York in 1863. Two years later she went to live there and became an extremely popular writer of sensational romances. One of her books, *Kate Danton; or Captain Danton's Daughters*, a comparatively restrained novel, is set in Canada.

2.2.2 The Late Nineteenth Century

Fiction in this period shows the first stirrings of national consciousness expressed in historical and political novels and stories about contemporary events of political significance. Strong evangelical novels shared popularity with books written by authors who were in revolt against creed and denominationalism or who were influenced by pseudo-scientific 'ologies' and 'isms'. Animal stories made their appearance. Historical and contemporary romances with regional settings became popular in the 1880's, and some of them were overly sentimental. The opening of the northwest and the Klondike Gold Rush provided material for adventure stories.

(a) By Canadians

Most authors adopted an ultra-serious attitude towards fiction, but James De Mille made fun of Americans broad in *The Dodge Club*, or *Italy In MDCCLVIII* (New York 1869) and then turned his satirical talent onto the Quebec scene in *Lady Of The Ice* (New York 1870). He used the Gaspereau countryside as a setting for his boy's adventure stories. John Cambell used the pseudonym 'J. Cawdor Bell' for *Two Knapsacks: A Novel Of Canadian Summer Life* (Toronto, 1892), a fictionalized account of a summer walking tour in the Barrie-Collingwood district, in which the absurd plot is merely a peg on which to hang good conversation on a wide range of subjects and to make keen observation on manners and dialects without emphasis of a satiric nature. In 1906 John Frances Wilson looked for a publisher for *The Migration Of Skivens*, a comic presentation of his experiences on arrival in Manitoba in 1888, but no publisher would accept this amusingly written and illustrated book and it was not published until 1962.

An impetus towards the writing of fiction about Canada came in 1864 with the publications of *Canadians Of Old*, the first translation of *Les anciens canadiens* (1863), Philippe-Joseph Aubert De Gaspe's historical romance of the seven year's war in Quebec. William Kirby corresponded with some of the members of the Canada first movement while he was writing the historical romance *The Golden Dog (Le chien d'or)* (New York, 1877), in which he dealt with the corruption of Francois Bigot and his associates as a prelude to the fall of New France. The Bastonnais' : *Tale Of The American Invasion Of Canada 1775-1776* (Toronto, 1877) by John Lesperance lacks Kirby's scholarship and technical skill but its sympathetic presentation of French Canadian was appreciated in Quebec, and a French edition appeared in 1897. Contemporary subjects inspired *Ridgeway* by James Mc. Carroll, but the author had gone to live in Buffalo before this pro-Fenian novel was published there in 1868. In *Dot It Down : A Story Of Life In The North-West* (Toronto, 1871) Alexandar Begg satirized the part played by Charles Mair in the Red River Rebellions of 1869-70, and Joseph Edmund Collins gave unrestrained play to his imagination in *Annette, The Mittis Spy: A*

Heroine Of The N. W. Rebellion (Toronto, 1886).

In a number of historical romances of this period the author's desire to instruct or to depict a background is greater than his interest in or ability to depict character; typical examples of such books are William Mc Lennan's *Spaish John* (New York, 1898). Based on the life of a fur-trader, and *The Span O' Life: A Tale Of Louisbourg And Quebec* .(New York, 1899

In Barbara Ladd (1902) Charles G.D. Roberts showed a grasp of the varying shades of opinion in New England during the American Revolution and a greater sense of history than is apparent in his melodramas about the Acadians.

The first attempts at the political novel did not rise above the fictional treatise such as *Professor Conant: A Story Of English And American Social And Political Life* (Toronto, 1884) by Lucius Seth Huntingdon or *The Young Seigneur or Nation Making* (Montreal, 1888) in which William Douw Lighthall expounded his political and ethical philosophies. A more lively work is *The Canadian Senator; or A Romance Of Love And Politics* (Toronto, 1890) by Christopher Oakes about whom nothing is known. This book expresses the views of a strong conservative, delighted with the success of his party's policy as shown in railway development, and satirizes the liberals in the person of senator who meets disaster when he makes a charge on the word of a rogue who masquerades as a missionary from the northwest.

Evangelical doctrine and ideas, a dominant motif in Canadian life, found their most complete expression in the novels of 'Ralph Connor' (the Rev. Charles William Gordon) whose books were read widely both at home and abroad. Of his many books, his first novels, *Black Rock: A Tale Of The Selkirks* (Toronto, 1898) and *The Sky Pilot: A Tale Of The Foothills* (Chicago, 1899) deal with the mining and lumbering camps in the Rocky Mountains and the lonely settler of the prairies respectively, but Gordon also wrote novels based on his urban experiences and his travels as moderator of the Presbyterian Church. Other clergymen who wrote fiction stressed the tradition of service. The Rev. Frank Baird used a historical setting for *Roger Davis: Loyalist* (1907) in which the hero's election of the legislature of Nova Scotia is a symbol of Public service.

A revolt against creed and denominationalism is reflected in the attitude of William Mc Donnell, author of *Exeter Hal: A Theological Romance* (New York, 1869) and other 'theological romances'. James Algie floundered among the pseudo-scientific theories of his age, but in *Houses Of Glass: A Psychological Romance* (Toronto, 1899) he drew upon his medical experience in suggesting the connection between material incompatibility and psychological illness. Other authors dealt with the decline of the older type of religious zeal. In *St. Cuthbert's* (1903) the Rev. Robert Knowles gave a somber but sympathetic picture of the older generation of stern Calvinists who were shocked by the levity of the younger generation and who bitterly opposed even to mild a change as the introduction of music into the church service. In 1894 Marshall Saunders won international recognition for *Beautiful Joe*, the autobiography of a dog and an appeal for humane treatment of animals. William Alexander Fraser and Charles G.D. Roberts both wrote excellent animal stories. Fraser's best-known collection is *Mooswa And Others Of The Boundaries* (1900) and Roberts' greatest success in this field is *Earth's Enigmas* (Boston, 1896).

The best writing in regional fiction is found in Duncan Campbell Scott's short stories about Quebec, *In The Village Of Viger* (Boston, 1896) and *The Witching Of Elspie* (1923). In *La Chasse-*

Galerie And Other Canadian Stories (1900) Honore Beaugrand gave an English version of authentic legends of Quebec, some of them brought to Canada by the early settlers and adapted to North American conditions. In *The Silver Maple: A Tale Of Upper Canada* (1906) 'Marian Keith' left a record of the insularity of the first Scottish Irish, and English immigrants who children had to be taught to mix in school. Susie Frances Harrison's *Crowded Out And Other Sketches* (Ottawa, 1886) is set in the Muskoka district of Ontario, and she turned to the Quebec scene for her novels. L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), a fresh approach to the story of a little girls, is set in the beautiful Prince Edward Island countryside. Nellie Mc Clung drew a picture of western life in *Sowing Seeds In Danny* (1908) and other novels, some of which reflect her struggle for women's rights. There is much local colour in Theodore Goodridge Roberts' romantic adventure stories some of which, such as *The House Of Isstens* (1900), are set in Newfoundland. A .J. Mc Leod's *The Notary Of Grand Pre: A Tale Of Acadia* (1901) has good local colour. Mary Boucheir Sanford's *The Romance Of A Jesuit Mission* (Toronto, 19897) gives a good account of the forts and way of life in the Huron Missions of the seventeenth century.

The stock western villain-cum-hero of American fiction-trapper, trader and prospector-dominated novels and stories of the gold rushes in British Columbia and the Yukon such as the stories of Sir Clive Phillips-Wolley, the author of *Snap: A Legend Of Lone Mountain* (London, 1890) and *Gold, gold In The Cariboo: A Story Of Adventure In British Columbia* (London, 1894). The best known novel of the Klondike is *The Trail Of '98* (1911) by Robert Service. Frank Packard's first book was *On The Iron: A Big Cloud* (1911), and his successful series of crime thrillers began with *The Adventures Of Jimmy Dale* (1917).

(b)By temporary residents.

Sir William Butler, who served in Manitoba during and immediately after the Red River Rebellion of 1869-79, fictionalized his experiences in the *Red Cloud; The Solitary Sioux* (London, 1882). John Mackie, a widely traveled British writer of adventure romances, served in the North West Mounted Police from 1888 to 1893. His books include *The Devil's Playground: A Story Of The Wild Northwest* (London, 1894) which has vivid descriptions of a prairie fire and a blizzard, *Sinners Twain: A Romance Of The Great Lone Land* (London, 1895), *A Story Of Mounted Police Life, And The Rising Of The Red Sun: A Romance Of The Louis Riel Rebellion* in which he treats Riel as a villain. Jack London's *God Of Their Father's; Tales Of The Klondike And The Yukon* (1902) and *Smoke Bellew* (1912) are based on his experiences in the gold rush, and his novel *The Seawolf* (1904) is a story of Alexander Maclean of Cape Breton, a pirate who operated in the Pacific Ocean and whom London met in San Francisco. Roger Pocock, an adventurer, wrote *The Blackguard* (London, 1897), a popular adventure story that was reprinted several times under various titles.

(c). By Expatriates.

Sara Jeannette Duncan, who spent most of her life in India, was the most gifted Canadian novelist of this period. Much of her fiction is concerned with Anglo Indian life, but she was also interested in the nuances of the aspirations and manners of the Anglo-Canadians and Americans. This interest runs through two novels on Canadian themes: *The Imperialist* (1904) and *Cousin Cinderella: A Canadian Girl In London* (1908). Robert Barr, who had acquired some American journalistic experience between settling in England, used Canadian material in two slight works. Lily Dougall spent most of her adult life in England where she was the centre of a philosophical group, and she used Canadian settings

to heighten the mood of romances. Gilbert Parker, who traveled extensively before settling in England where he became a Member Of Parliament in 1900, frequently drew on his Canadian background for his romances.

Canadians who went to the United States frequently used Canadian settings for fiction. Thompson Setton wrote a number of adventure and woodcraft stories for children. Wilfred Grenfell, wrote a collection of short stories and romances about Newfoundland and the Labrador coast. James Edward Rossignol, who became a professor of economics at the University of Nebraska, wrote several collections of tales of Quebec, his native province. In 1900 William Benjamin Basil King, a retired Anglican minister, published *Griselda*, the first of long succession of popular romances with religious themes.

2.2.3 The Twentieth Century: First Part

By the beginning of the twentieth century Canada was becoming increasingly industrialized and in the east the drift of the population was shifting from the farm to the city. Even in the west where immigrants from the United States and Europe were rapidly opening up new lands, towns were growing up and the sons of pioneer farmers were being attracted to them. The resulting shift of emphasis from the pioneer and rural community was reflected in the fiction of the day. A few authors showed an awareness of national problems and the growing influence of the United States on Canadian thought. In other books the emphasis was on psychology or the occult. A growing social consciousness is seen in some of this historical and regional novels and romances.

By 1900 novels of local colour were beginning to overshadow historical romances. Lucy Maud Montgomery's beloved children's book *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and its sequels were set in Prince Edward Island. Ontario towns and their "garrison mentality" provided the setting for Sara Jeannette Duncan's portrayal of political life in *The Imperialist* (1904), Ralph Connor's *The Man from Glengarry* (1901), Stephen Leacock's satiric stories *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), and Mazo de la Roche's best-selling Jalna series (1927–60). Out of the Prairies emerged the novel of social realism, which documented the small, often narrow-minded farming communities pitted against an implacable nature. Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925), a tale of a strong young girl in thrall to her cruel father, and Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) and *Fruits of the Earth* (1933), depicting man's struggle for mastery of himself and his land, are moving testaments to the courage of farmers. Painter Emily Carr wrote stories about her childhood and her visits to First Nations sites in British Columbia (*Klee Wyck*, 1941).

(a) By Canadians.

An urban viewpoint appears in the humorous books of Stephen Leacock. 'My financial career', the first sketch in his *Literary Lapses* (1910), portrays a little anonymous man because by city ways and institutions, and more than small-town sophistication is shown in *Sunshine Sketches Of A Little Town* (1912) and in the biting comments of *Arcadian Adventures With The Idle Rich* (1914). The rich city-dweller is a target for the prankish humor of W.A. Hickman whose short stories, *Canadian Nights* (1914) are primarily concerned with the Nova Scotia coast. Harry Mac Donald Walters, the author of *Wesblock: The Autobiography Of A Automaton* (1914), gave a light-hearted account of a little man who failed at everything until he found a niche in the civil service just before the abolition of patronage.

The change from small-town conditions to urban life had its dark side. In *The House Of Windows* (1912) Isabel Celestin Mackay was critical of long hours and the bad conditions under which sales clerks earned their living. Before emigrating to the United States, John Preston Buschlen revealed injustices in the treatment of bank clerks in the novel *A Canadian Bank Clerk* (1913) and the short stories in *Behind The Wicket*. Buschlen also wrote melodramas about the unethical expedients to which the commercial traveler resorted; he pictured the traveler as sinking into moral degradation from lack of home influences. The realistic novel *Our Little Life* (1921) by Jessie Sime exposed the economic uncertainty and dreary surroundings of the poor living in a Montreal slum. Douglas Durkin portrayed the plight of veterans of the First World War, the evils of speculation, and labour agitation in Winnipeg, but he allowed his hero to give way to despondency and return to the farm on which he had been brought up.

The focus and pretensions of a changing society were satisfied by Fred Jacob and by Francis Pollock. The small-town literal circle and the low level of people provided material for William Arthur Deacon's. A few novelists looked at the national and international scene. W.H. Moore wrote *Polly Masson* (1919) in protest against those Canadian who still clung to the dream of Imperial federation. In her work, Augustus Bridle's gradual Canadianization of an immigrant parallels the political, economic, and social development of Canada from 1887. Mazo De La Roche introduced figures from the United States, treating them first as intruders and then in later books as part of the family circle. In this respect her saga reflects the growing influence of the United States on Canadian life and thought. Canadians also began to look abroad for themes.

Realistic Regional Novel

The realistic regional novel made its appearance in the 1920s. In *The Viking Heart* (1923) Laura Goodman Salverson pictured the arrival of the first Icelandic colony and the Canadianization of the younger people. Another type of regional novel is found in the work of Margaret Duley who treated the themes of the spiritual isolation of the individual, the sea, and Celtic survivals among the people of the Newfoundland outports.

Nature And Animal Stories

The most interesting of the nature and animal stories of this period is *Reindeer Trek* (1935) by Allan Roy Evans who based his novel on his experiences from 1929 to 1933 when he took part in the drive of three thousand Russian reindeer from Alaska to the Mackenzie delta. In stories such as *Gaff Linkum* (1907) Mc Kishnie combined nature, animal life, and melodrama.

Psychological Themes

Raymond Knister linked description of Ontario farm life with psychological themes in *White Narcissus* (1929) in which a deep estrangement of an elderly couple who have not spoken to each other for years is shown to have had its effects on the life of their daughter. In *The New Front Line* (1927). Hubert Evens, treating the problem of the man who is incapable of making a decision, resolves it through a chance invitation. A well-meaning but sweetly domineering wife is at the root of the marital difficulties that supply the tension in *Late Spring*. In Ethel Crayson's *Apples Of The Moon* (1933) the embittered wife of a university professor commits suicide. Bertram Brooker won the Governor General's Award for *Think Of The Earth* (1936) in which suspense and transcendental hallucinations are combined with a vivid description of a small Manitoba town. Brooker gave fuller treatment to the

religious aspects of Psychic phenomena in *The Robber*. Reincarnation, supernatural, soul seeking were some other themes on which novels were written.

(b) By Temporary Residents

Two Americans who wrote novels about Canada are *Willa Cather*, who spent two summers in Canada while gathering material for her novel and Robert Flaherty who wrote adventure novels. Two British novelist, Ridgwell Cullum and Harold Bindloss, and an American, James Oliver Curwood, visited Canada and wrote western adventure stories.

(c) By Expatriates.

Arthur Stringer's Western trilogy – *The Prairie Wife* (1915), *The Prairie Mother* (1920), and *The Prairie Child* (1922) – is a story of attrition as the conducting parties face the impossible situation in which they have placed themselves by marrying under the influence of an attraction based on fundamental differences in character and look. Alice Jones had settled in Mentone, since, when she wrote *Marcus Holbeach's Daughter* (1912), a story of sturdy Canadianism in Gaspé fishing villages. In it the venturousness of prospects in northern is contrasted with the shallowness of English upper – class life. Canada becomes a refuge for victims, of the ruthless American business system, and a young American who wishes to work as an individual and not as a unit in his family's economic empire finds an opportunity to do so. Hulbert Footner was born in Hamilton, Ont., and had some journalistic experience in Calgary, Alta, before immigrating to the United States where he became a popular novelist. Three of his western tales of romance and adventure have a Canadian setting – *Two On A Trail: A Story Of The Far North* (1911), *The Sealed Valley* (1914), and *The Shanty Sled* (1926). Under the pseudonym 'Fan-Fan', Victoria Grace Blackburn, an Ottawa woman who had gone to live in England, wrote *The Man Child* which was published posthumously in 1930. It is the story of a widow whose harsh struggle to bring up her son was made futile by his death while serving in the First World War.

2.2.4 Twentieth Century: Second Part

The de-humanization of society, man's helplessness in it, and his sense of alienation from it are themes that have occupied the attention of novelists and short-story writers in this period. An awareness of man's relationship to society is also implicit in most fiction whether the author works out his theme in a historical, regional, or war setting. A tentativeness in form and subject matter pervades the novels published during the 1940s and '50s and is reflected in their protagonists, most of whom are sensitive, restless children or artists. In this category fall the Prairie novels *As for Me and My House* (1941) by Sinclair Ross, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947) by W.O. Mitchell, and *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) by Ernest Buckler, set in Nova Scotia's Annapolis valley. These novels strain the bonds of conventional narrative structures as they shift from social realism toward lyricism. In the panoramic *Two Solitudes* (1945) and *The Watch That Ends the Night* (1959), framed against the backdrop of the two world wars, Hugh MacLennan attempted to capture moral, social, and religious conflicts that rent individuals, families, and the French and English communities in Quebec. Sheila Watson's enigmatic and mythic *The Double Hook* (1959) and Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel* (1954), about a Vancouver housewife's bid for personal freedom, present quest journeys against the striking backdrop of British Columbia's interior. Elizabeth Smart's incantatory novel *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945) is a frank and poetic account of obsessive love.

(a)By Canadians.

Some of the effects of the mechanization of society during the Philip Child in *God's Sparrows* (1937), a novel of the First World War in which Daniel Thatcher's search for the meaning of life culminates in the symbol of a mechanical brain that continues to function while the operator is out for lunch. The stages by which this dehumanization came about are traced by Frederick Philip Grove in *The Master Of He Mill* (1944). G. Herbert Sallans's *Little Man* (1942) is the story of a bewildered individual who fights in the First World War, exists through the depression of the Thirties, and loses his son in the Second World War. In *Chipmunk* (1949) Len Petersen used exaggeration to drive home the pathos of his story of a Toronto bakery worker whose fear of reality is typified by his attitude to the labour movement and to his wife, and whose ultimate acts of futile rebellion are foreshadowed by his admiration of a second-rate prize fighter and a young delinquent. With the Second World War the idea that the individual in the modern world is allowed only a small area in which he can control his own destiny grew from a concept to a premise. It underlies novels of the fifties and sixties such as *Ten Years After* (1959), Herbert Steinhouse's novel about the French-Algerian conflict; Lubor J. Zink's *The Uprooted* (1962) which deals with the plight of the individual in the communist dominated country and in the marginal existence of the refugee camps to which so many escaped in search of freedom.

In this dehumanized society the problems of the dispossessed, the displaced person, the unassimilated immigrant and his descendants become a social rather than an individual responsibility. Writers also draw our attention to the psychological plight of the displaced and the refugee and to the frustrations of the residents of the Jewish community of Montreal who feels that his only alternative to dire poverty is to raise himself in the economic and social scale by unattractive expedients. A novel set in Winnipeg has dealt with the descendants of Hungarian immigrants and an insidious form of anti-Semitism is studied in another novel. In *One Man Alone* (1963) Herman Buller includes commentary on the degree to which the immigrant's desire to preserve his 'superior' gods has been responsible for his isolation and the hostility of neighbours that has borne heavily on his children. The danger implicit in self-imposed isolation in which the immigrant broods on prejudices and taboos imported from the old land is well treated. The individual caught in social upheaval for which he is unprepared is also studied by novelists of this period. Morley Callaghan's later novels show the influence of the changed social patterns on the post-war world.

The two most significant novelists to make their names after 1940 are Malcolm Lowry, who was born in England and came to British Columbia in 1939, and Hugh Mac Lennan. Lowry's most important book is *Under The Volcano* (1947; Fr. trans. 1949), a revealing analysis of the mind of a writer who is also a dipsomaniac, portraying the victim's uneasiness in the presence of others and his withdrawal from society. Mac Lennan, whose *Barometer Rising* was published in 1941, has searched for a distinctive Canadian identity. MacLennan, is far from conceding that the individual is powerless to control his own destiny. In his novels the problems of the individual are set in rather than dominated by place and time. Some other novelists have dealt with the themes of baneful effects of the prairie landscape and urban life.

Some recent novelists have written about the individual's sense of guilt and resulting feeling of alienation. Most of the attacks on society have been through the medium of satire. Earle Birney's *Down The Long Table* (1955) reviews the conditions that led young people in the thirties to consider communist philosophies, and he satirizes the dogmatists, parlour pinks, and hangers-on that made up

the corps of the communist group of that era. Proletarian standards in contemporary society are also mocked at. Commercialism and modern taste are held up to ridicule and the world of mass communications is satirized

A sense of history is shown in a number of and romances dealing with past and contemporary events in various parts of Canadian. Margaret Hutchison has drawn a realistic picture of a mining community in British Columbia during the depression. There is also sometimes thoughtful presentation of the plight of the Indians of British Columbia who are caught between the life of the reservation and the uncertainties of seasonal employment.

(b). By temporary residents.

John Buchan's *Lake Of Gold* (1941) is a collection of imaginative tales written to interest boys in Canadian history. Brian Moore lived in Montreal from 1948 to 1958. While there he wrote *Judith Hearne* (1955), the portrait of a lonely spinster who, living in a Belfast boarding house, goes insane; *The Feast Of Lupercal* (1957), the story of an unsuccessful attempt of a schoolmaster to seduce a pupil; and *The Luck Of Ginger Coffey* (1960), the story, written with a fine sense of comedy, of a feckless Irishman who emigrated to Montreal with his family. Wyndham Lewis, the British painter and author who lived in Toronto during the Second World War, wrote *Self-condemned* (1954), a bitter novel about a British university professor and his wife who live in 'Mamaco' – probably an amalgam of Toronto, Windsor, and Ottawa – during the war and were unable to make friends or adjust themselves to Canadian life.

(c). By expatriates.

Cyril Harris, a native of Nova Scotia who emigrated to the United States where he became a writer of historical romance of that province. Cyril Harris, a native of Nova Scotia, is a light historical romance of that province. Cyril Harris, a native of Nova Scotia who emigrated to the United States where he became a writer of historical romances, is the author of *One Braver Thing* (1942), a story of a Loyalist during the American Revolution who came with his family to Nova Scotia. Margaret Laurence, who has shown in her fiction a brilliant insight into human complexities, relates her characters closely to their background – Africa in *This Side Jordan* (1960) and *The Tomorrow – Tamer* (1963), a short-story collection, and the Canadian prairies in *The Stone Angel* (1964) and *A Jest Of God* (1966).

2.2.5 1960 And Beyond

After the 1950s this tentativeness in fiction either became itself the subject of the novel or was dissipated in more confident forms of writing. Robertson Davies' popular Deptford trilogy (*Fifth Business*, 1970; *The Manticore*, 1972; *World of Wonders*, 1975) examines the growth of its protagonists into maturity within a Jungian paradigm. Exploration of Canadian identity and of the world of art form much of the interest of Davies' Cornish trilogy (*The Rebel Angels*, 1981; *What's Bred in the Bone*, 1985; *The Lyre of Orpheus*, 1988) and *Murther & Walking Spirits* (1991). Alice Munro in *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), set in southwestern Ontario, and Margaret Laurence in her Manawaka novels (*The Stone Angel*, 1964; *A Jest of God*, 1966; *The Diviners*, 1974) explored their heroines' rebellion against a constricting small-town heritage. Munro's short stories—in collections ranging from *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) to *The View from Castle Rock* (2006)—depict

the domestic lives and relationships of women in Toronto, small-town Ontario, and British Columbia in an increasingly enigmatic style. Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) probes the relationship between sainthood, violence, eroticism, and artistic creativity. Mavis Gallant's stories depict isolated characters whose fragile worlds of illusion are shattered (*The Selected Stories of Mavis Gallant*, 1996). In her collection of stories *Across the Bridge* (1993), she probes the thin line between good and evil in the lives of ordinary people.

With trenchant irony, Margaret Atwood dissected contemporary urban life and sexual politics in *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Lady Oracle* (1976), and *The Robber Bride* (1993). *Bodily Harm* (1981), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and the speculative *Oryx and Crake* (2003) are cautionary tales of political violence and dystopia, while *Alias Grace* (1996) and *The Blind Assassin* (2000), winner of the Booker Prize, are situated in a meticulously researched historical Ontario and expose the secret worlds of women and the ambiguous nature of truth and justice. Set in Montreal, London, and Paris, Mordecai Richler's novels *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1971), *Joshua Then and Now* (1980), *Solomon Gursky Was Here* (1989), and *Barney's Version* (1997) satirize the condition and hypocrisy of modern society through black humour.

Many writers publishing in the 1960s and '70s subverted the traditional conventions of fiction, shifting from realist to surrealist, self-reflexive, feminist, or parodic modes. Although historical events and the investigation of place as an imaginative source remained the most common subject matters, the narrative forms were experimental and playful. During the 1980s and '90s, writers also renegotiated ideas of self and nation and of belonging and loss while breaking down traditional boundaries of both gender and genre. Robert Kroetsch's trilogy *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), *The Studhorse Man* (1969), and *Gone Indian* (1973) transformed the realism of Prairie fiction into postmodern parodies of the quest journey. In *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973), *The Scorched-Wood People* (1977), and *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994), Rudy Wiebe constructed fictional and spiritual epics based on historical events in the west and the precarious relations between First Nations and European explorers and settlers. In *The Wars* (1977), Timothy Findley's narrator, through letters, clippings, and photographs, re-creates the effects of World War I on his hero. *Famous Last Words* (1981) and *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), the latter a retelling of the voyage of Noah's ark, are also historical metafiction that point to dangerous fascistic tendencies in the modern state.

George Bowering's *Burning Water* (1980), which focuses on the 18th-century explorer George Vancouver, and Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), the story of the jazz musician Buddy Bolden, mingle history with autobiography in self-reflexive narratives that enact the process of writing. Ranging from 1920s Toronto (*In the Skin of a Lion*, 1987) to Italy during World War II (*The English Patient*, 1992; Booker Prize) and Sri Lanka wracked by civil war (*Anil's Ghost*, 2000), Ondaatje's lyrical, elliptical narratives spotlight a small coterie of people drawn together by a mystery that shapes the story and governs their lives.

Carol Shields's novels, stories, and plays present the lives of ordinary women and men in a luminous, often gently satiric style. *The Stone Diaries* (1993), which won a Pulitzer Prize, begins in early 20th-century Manitoba and follows the life of Daisy from birth to death in a variety of voices and textual strategies, while in *Unless* (2002) a middle-aged professional woman confronts the nature of goodness and the disintegration of a comfortable family life. Audrey Thomas reveals the dilemmas confronting women in innovative short stories (*Real Mothers* [1981]) and novels (*Intertidal Life*,

1984; *Graven Images*, 1993; *Isobel Gunn*, 1999). Jack Hodgins maps a surreal island world in *The Invention of the World* (1977) and *The Macken Charm* (1995), mock-epics that both feature larger-than-life, eccentric characters and tell a colourful history of Vancouver Island. Fascinated by the imprint of the past on present lives, Jane Urquhart uses the symbol of the whirlpool to weave together stories of Canadians in 19th-century Ontario in *The Whirlpool* (1986); *Away* (1993), a lyrical saga, recounts in retrospect the life of a woman who emigrated from Ireland to Canada in the 1840s, and *A Map of Glass* (2005) depicts a reclusive heroine seeking answers to her lover's disappearance. Traces of history also haunt Anne Michaels's lyrical novel *Fugitive Pieces* (1996), in which the story of an émigré Polish poet in Toronto, rescued as a boy from the Nazis, intersects with that of a young professor, a child of Holocaust survivors. Daphne Marlatt radically revises family and colonial history, narrative, and sexuality in *Ana Historic* (1988) and *Taken* (1996). Douglas Glover's Rabelaisian *Elle* (2003) chronicles the adventures of a young French woman marooned during Jacques Cartier's 1541–42 voyage to Canada. Douglas Coupland spawned a new vocabulary with *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (1991).

(a) Regional Fiction

Although the subject of history exerts a powerful influence on all forms of Canadian writing, the tradition of regional fiction has not lost its momentum. David Adams Richards's novels depict the bleakness of New Brunswick communities (*Lives of Short Duration*, 1981; *Nights Below Station Street*, 1988; *Mercy Among the Children*, 2000), while Guy Vanderhaeghe's fiction has its roots in the Prairies (*The Englishman's Boy*, 1996). In *Clara Callan* (2001), Richard B. Wright portrays quiet lives in small-town Ontario. Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996) and Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischiefs* (1999) recount family sagas set on Cape Breton Island. Wayne Johnston depicts Newfoundland's history in *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), a novel based on the life of Joey Smallwood, the province's dynamic first premier. In *River Thieves* (2001), Michael Crummey describes the extinction of the Beothuk, an indigenous people of Newfoundland, and Lisa Moore's *Alligator* (2005) dissects lives in contemporary St. John's, the capital of Newfoundland and Labrador province.

(b) Plurality and Diversity of Voices in Fiction

During the 1980s and '90s, increasing attention was also paid to the plurality and diversity of voices across the country. This period saw the emergence of numerous First Nations, Métis, and Inuit writers. Resisting the imposition of Western concepts of history, land, nation, society, and narrative, many of these writers explored their oral traditions, myths, and cultural practices. A recurring theme is the individual's painful trajectory as that individual negotiates between cultures, combats racial prejudice, and copes with shattered families and kinship groups; these concerns are also rendered in playful or parodic modes, as protest literature, or as alternatives to frenetic urban consumer cultures. Works that engage these concerns include novels and stories by Jeannette Armstrong (*Slash*, 1985, rev. ed. 1988; *Whispering in Shadows*, 2000), Beatrice Culleton (*In Search of April Raintree*, 1983), Tomson Highway (*Kiss of the Fur Queen*, 1998), Thomas King (*Medicine River*, 1990; *Green Grass, Running Water*, 1993), and Eden Robinson (*Monkey Beach*, 1999; *Blood Sports*, 2006). Autobiography and memoir—Maria Campbell's *Half-Breed* (1973) and Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel* (1975, rev. ed. 1990), for example—are key genres in First Nations witnessing and testimony. These genres are also a part of the life writing (which also includes biography, biofiction,

letters, and diaries) that dominates the field of Canadian literature and resonates with the tradition of documentary writing; examples include Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1982), John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (1970), Aritha van Herk's *Places Far from Ellesmere* (1990), Wayson Choy's *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood* (1999), Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), and Wiebe and Yvonne Johnson's *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman* (1998).

(c) Experiences Of Immigrants

Other perspectives tackle the experiences of immigrants—their interrogation of the meaning of home and belonging, their feelings of cultural assimilation and estrangement, and their intergenerational struggles. Nino Ricci, a Canadian of Italian descent, portrays the long journey from Italy to Canada in his trilogy *Lives of the Saints* (1990), *In a Glass House* (1993), and *Where She Has Gone* (1997). In her lyrical and meditative novels *Plainsong* (1993), *The Mark of the Angel* (1999), and *Prodigy* (2000), Nancy Huston, an expatriate in Paris, reflects on dislocation and exile. Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001), winner of the Booker Prize, depicts the fantastic voyage of 16-year-old Pi, who, en route to Canada from India, is shipwrecked and left adrift on the Pacific with several zoo animals.

(d) Asian Canadian Writing

Asian Canadian writing has emerged as a powerful and innovative force. Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) is a skillful “docufiction” describing the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II; in *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994), Hiromi Goto examines the relations between three generations of women in rural Alberta. Chinese Canadian perspectives are presented in Choy's *The Jade Peony* (1995), set in Vancouver's Chinatown; Larissa Lai's multilayered exploration of lesbian awakening, *When Fox Is a Thousand* (1995); and Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990). Rohinton Mistry's *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995), and *Family Matters* (2001) are set mostly in Bombay (now Mumbai) among the Parsi community, while Anita Rau Badami's novels *Tamarind Mem* (1996) and *The Hero's Walk* (2000) portray the cross-cultural effect on Indian families in India and Canada.

(e) History of Canadian Blacks

The poetry and fiction of George Elliott Clarke uncover the forgotten history of Canadian blacks, and Dionne Brand's *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999) and Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend* (2002) construct generational sagas of the African and Caribbean slave diaspora and immigrant life in Canada. Like Brand and Silvera, Shani Mootoo, whose *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) and *He Drown She in the Sea* (2005) unfold on a lush fictional Caribbean island, commemorates strong, disturbing matriarchal figures.

2.3 Historical Novels

Historical novels dealt with a sympathetic understanding of the economic development of the mining and ranching country of British Columbia, it also dealt with the spiritual aspirations of the period. Some novels showed how the human soul found peace and fulfillment through love and service to others. Some historical novels dealt with story of the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the War of 1812.

The regional romance as social history is reflected in *The Yellow Briar* (1933) by 'Patrick Slater' (John Mithell), the story of a young Irish immigrant who was orphaned when his mother died in the cholera epidemic of 1847 shortly after their arrival in Canada West. In many other regional books the balance between the sociological detail and the story is not maintained. There are books in which background is too obtrusive, others which give a convincing account of the difficulties of settlers who homesteaded in the arid belt of the prairies. Harold Baldwin's romances, *Pelicans In The Sky* (1934), when balanced with his autobiographical *A Form For Two Pounds* (1935) gives a good picture of the conditions under which many pioneers acquired and developed their homestead. There are numerous romances of the prairies, yielding interesting details to the patient reader, some other novels contain good back-ground material relating to boom and bust conditions in the west and the activities of implement and grain-elevator companies. Pioneer days in Ontario are depicted and picaresque novels about French-Canadian Lumber jacks, form a pleasant contrast to the sentimental popular romances of Quebec and Nova Scotia.

Romance and adventure at sea provide material for *Blue Water* (1907) and other stories by Frederick William Wallace. Robert Allison Hood wrote *The Chivalry Of Keith Leicester* (1915), a simple romance set in British Columbia, but most of his books are contributions to the spare of popular melodramas about the 'wild west' cattle rustlers, cruelty, and general lawlessness. The number of these books, their emphasis on violence, and the insinuation that strong-arm tactics had prevailed in the Canadian northwest led the Hudson's Bay company to threaten a libel suit, should authors continue to misrepresent the actions of the company and its agents.

2.4 Let Us Sum Up

The first Canadian novelist of note was John Richardson, whose *Wacousta* (1832) popularized the genre of the national historical novel. With *The Clockmaker* (1836) T. C. Haliburton began his humorous series on Sam Slick, the Yankee peddler. Historical novelists writing c.1900 included William Kirby, author of *The Golden Dog* (1877), and Sir Gilbert Parker, author of *The Seats of the Mighty* (1896). The novels of Sara Jeannette Duncan, such as *A Social Departure* (1890), were noted for their satire and humor. The Rev. C. W. Gordon (Ralph Connor) produced *Black Rock* (1898), a series of novels on pioneer life in W Canada. Animal stories became popular in the works of Ernest Thompson Seton, Sir C. G. D. Roberts, and Margaret Marshall Saunders.

Since 1900, Canadian novels have tended toward stricter realism, but have remained predominantly regional, and many writers have been women. Among the most prominent authors have been Lucy M. Montgomery, author of *Anne of Green Gables* (1908); Mazo de la Roche, well known for her series on the Whiteoaks family of Jalna; Frederick P. Grove, author of *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), a novel of farm life; and Laura Salverson and Nellie McClung, novelists of immigrant and rural life in W Canada.

Margaret Atwood is probably the best-known modern Canadian author. Other important novelists during and after World War II include Morley Callaghan, Gwethalyn Graham, John Buell, Hugh MacLennan, Mordecai Richler, Malcolm Lowry, Ethel Wilson, Robertson Davies, Brian Moore, Margaret Laurence, Timothy Findlay, Neil Bissoondath, and M. G. Vassanji. Many of their novels have focused attention on Canadian city life, social problems, and the large problem of Canadian cultural division.

2.5 Review Questions

1. Which are the four basic periods in Canadian Fiction?
2. What were the different types of popular fiction prevalent in Canada?
3. Name a few works by Canadians, expatriates and temporary residents of twentieth century.
4. Name a few works by expatriates and temporary residents of nineteenth century.
5. What are the features of Canadian fiction in English from 1960 and beyond?
6. Briefly enumerate the features of the novels of the first part of the twentieth century.

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UNIT-3

CANADIAN DRAMA

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction to Drama
 - 3.1.1 Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries.
 - 3.1.2 Twentieth century.
 - 3.1.3 Twenty first Century
- 3.2 History Plays
 - 3.2.1 Nineteenth Century History Play
 - 3.2.2 Twentieth Century History Plays
 - 3.2.3 Features Of History Plays
- 3.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.4 Review Questions
- 3.5 Bibliography

3.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to an outline of the Canadian drama.
- To familiarize them with the different phases of development of Canadian drama
- To understand the different genres of Canadian Drama
- To enable the students to gain a knowledge of the history plays, their features and importance.

3.1 Introduction

Is there a Canadian drama?, Brian Parker raises a question in the essay “Is There a Canadian Drama?”. Jerry Wasserman asserts, saying that there is identifiably a Canadian drama. In the support he refers to a body of works by Canadian playwrights written for performance in professional theaters dating from 1948 in francophone Quebec and 1967 in English Canada. Although the dates may be debatable, the existence of Canadian drama is now utterly self-evident. Canadian plays have been written and performed in Hindi, Italian and Cantonese, but at present the scope is limited to “Canadian play” written by a citizen or resident of Canada and at some point, produced in English, for an English-speaking –audience. Like English Canadian theatre there is French Canadian theatre but the latter has hardly any impact on the former.

Taking into account the ritual activities of the future nation’s aboriginal inhabitants, the long and fascinating theatrical history of Canada reaches back beyond the previous millennium. Even the Canadian

plays by European settlers date from as early as 1606 when Marc Lescarbot wrote *Theatre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France* and staged it in Indian War Canoes to honour the arrival of French dignitaries at Port Royal.

Playwriting in Canada in English goes back to the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century Canadian playhouses sprang up in substantial numbers though mainly to accommodate American and British touring Companies. The remarkable fact is that Canadian theatre is an indigenous professional institution dates back only as back as the end of the World War II. And English Canadian drama, in the sense of a body of dramatic work by Canadian playwrights written for performance in professional theaters, is not very old development .

Since the larger theatres were generally unsympathetic and unaccommodating to both these forces, an even newer Canadian theatre was invented, an alternate theatre. There were many steps in this regard, but it was PasseMuralle under Paul Thomson's stewardship that became the most important theatre in Canada in the early 1970s. The great wave of new alternate theatres in Toronto crested in 1972 with the founding of Toronto Free Theatre by Tom Hendry, Martin Kinch and John Palmer. By the mid 1980s near the end of its second decade, modern Canadian theatre clearly stood on firm footing.

Modern Canadian drama was born out of an amalgam of the new consciousness of the age—social, political and aesthetic—with the new Canadian self-consciousness. The most significant Canadian plays of sixties and seventies like *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, *Fortune and Men's Eyes* and *Les Belles-Soeurs* are the plays very much of their age, marked by strong social consciousness and critical, anti-establishment perspectives. The playwrights too, by virtue of their alienation from the main stream were in sync with the temper of the times. Herbert and Tremblay were gay men. Ryga and Herbert were outspoken and uncompromising in their social, artistic and political views.

3.1.1 Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Like the poets and novelists, Canadian dramatists in their quest for a myth of origins have often turned to historical incidents. In 1766 British North America was the subject of two verse plays: *Ponteach; or, The Savages Of America*, a tragedy by Robert Rogers and the melodramatic work, *The Conquest Of Canada, or, The Siege Of Quebec. An Historical Tragedy Of Five Acts*, by George Cockings. The first major verse drama was *Saul: A Drama In Three Parts* (Montreal, 1857) by Charles Heavysege who followed it with *Count Filippo; or, The Unequal Marriage. A Drama In Five Acts* (Montreal, 1860), a weaker work in an Italian setting. This type of closet drama was also written by John Hunter-Duvar, author of *The Enamorada* (Summerside, 1879); The earliest forms of dramatic writing, Charles Mair's *Tecumseh* (1886) and Sarah Anne Curzon's *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812* (1887), both based on the War of 1812, were in verse. *De Roberval* (Saint John, 1888); and an undated comedy, *Fin du siecle* (no copy located). *Tecumseh* (Toronto, 1886) by Charles Mair was an important poem in its own right. The verse tragedies of Wilfred Campbell, *Mordred* and *Hildebrand* (both Ottawa, 1895), were reprinted with two other verse plays, 'Daulac' and 'Morning', in his Poetical tragedies (1908).

3.1.2 Twentieth Century

The biblical dramas of Robert Norwood, *The Witch Of Endor* (1916) and *The Man Of*

Kerioth (1918), and Marjorie Pickthall's *The Woodcarver's Wife* (1922) are in the late nineteenth-century romantic tradition. More modern approaches have been made by Ralph Gustafson, whose *Alfred The Great* (1937) portrays the character and honours the achievements of this early English King; by Earle Birney whose *Trial Of A City* (1952) is an indictment of urban life as seen in Vancouver; by Robert Finch who wrote the masque *A Century Has Roots* (1953) for the centenary of University College, Toronto; and by James Reaney, author of the *Killdeer And Other Plays* (1962) in which the poetic ideas are developed more highly than are the dramatic points.

The writing and production of stage plays in Canada was encouraged by Earl Grey who, as governor general of Canada from 1907 to 1911, sponsored a music and drama competition, and by the spread of the little-theatre movement. Important work was done in a community theatre at Naramata, B.C., under the leadership of Carroll Aikins who, in 1919, became the first director of Hart House Theatre, Toronto. Aikins's play, *The God Of Gods* (1919), set among the Indians of British Columbia, deals with universal implications in showing how a society destroys those who break social and religious taboos. Merrill Denison, the first art director of the University of Toronto's Hart House, was the author of realistic plays, four of which were collected in the *Unheroic North* (1923). His *The Prize Winner* (1928) deals with backwoods, mores. He also wrote *Henry Hudson And Other Plays* (1931), radio plays on subjects from Canadian History. Fred Jacob's *One Third Of A Bill* (1925) contains light one-act comedies, any three of which could be combined to make a evening's performance. Nathaniel Benson's three plays for patriots (1930) give glimpses of Issac Brock, of William Lyon Mackenzie making his escape in 1837, and of the methods of promotion in the civil service. Mazo De Laroche's *Whiteoaks* was a popular dramatic success. Serious work was done by Gwen Pharis Ringwood who dealt with the darker side of the passion for possession of the land in the one-act play *Still Stands The House* (1938) and in the full-length drama *Dark Harvest* (1945). The lighter side of her work is seen in the comedy *The Courting Of Marie Jenvrin*. In *Plays From the Pacific Coast* Alexander Fairbairn departed from the stereotyped treatment of Indian-white elations when dealing with the effect upon a white man of a too-long residence among Indians. The depression and the constant crop failures in the west were treated by Eric Harris in *Twenty-Five Cents* (1936) and by Minnie Bicknell in *Relief* (1938). Three well-constructed comedies of this period are Jim Barber's *Spite Fence* (1935) by Lillian Beynon Thomas and *Sure Of A Fourth* (1936) and *They Meet Again* (1938) by Rica (Mary Fredericka) Farquharson.

The writing of plays declined during the Second World War, but John Coulter— whose plays with Irish settings, *The House In The Quiet Glen And The Family Portrait*, had appeared in 1937. He wrote librettos for radio operas. The first Robertson Davies's clever and witty plays to be published was the one-act comedy *Overlaid* (1948) was followed by *Fortune My Foe* (1949), *At My Heart's Core* (1950), and *A Jig For The Gypsy* (1954) set in Great Britain during the election of 1885. Davies has also written two plays for boys, *A masque of Aesop* (1952) and *A masque of Mr. Punch* (1963). There were a few other one-act plays and radio plays.

By the 1950s and '60s several professional theatres had been successfully established, producing a more sophisticated milieu for dramatists such as John Coulter, whose *Riel* (1962) creates a heroic figure of Louis Riel, the leader of the Métis rebellion in 1885. As regional and experimental theatres multiplied, increasingly innovative and daring productions were mounted, such as John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes* (1967), on homosexuality in prison; George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1971), about an indigenous woman who is a prostitute; and James Reaney's Donnelly trilogy

(1976–77), about the feuds and the massacre of an Irish immigrant family in southern Ontario.

During the 1970s, groups such as Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille experimented with collective productions in which actors participated in script writing and which were performed in nontraditional venues (e.g. barns). Collective creation resulted in *The Farm Show* (1976), *Paper Wheat* (1978), *1837* (1976), and *Les Canadiens* (1977); all exhibit a strong sense of locality, history, and issues of identity and nation. Stark realism shaped David Freeman's *Creeps* (1972), David French's *Leaving Home* (1977), David Fennario's *On the Job* (1976), and Michael Cook's *The Head, Guts, and Sound Bone Dance* (1974). Women's lives in the past are the focus of Carol Bolt's *Red Emma* (1974), the story of the anarchist Emma Goldman; Sharon Pollock's *Blood Relations* (1981), a powerful drama about the accused murderer Lizzie Borden; and Betty Lambert's *Jennie's Story* (1984). Joanna Glass's plays, ranging from *Artichoke* (1975) to *Trying* (2005), explore intergenerational conflicts and women's issues. The plays of Judith Thompson, which gain their shape from dreams and the effects of dreams, are visually exciting explorations of the evil force in the human subconscious (*The Crackwalker*, 1980; *Lion in the Streets*, 1990). In *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1981), John Gray created a very popular musical from the story of a well-known World War I fighter pilot. Green Thumb Theatre, founded in 1975, pioneered plays for young audiences on such issues as bullying, divorce, and immigrants.

Influenced by film and questioning conventional forms and their attendant ideologies, George Walker produced an impressive body of work, including *Nothing Sacred* (1988), an adaptation of Turgenev's *Father and Sons*; *Criminals in Love* (1985), set in Toronto's working-class east end; and *Suburban Motel* (1997), a cycle of six plays set in a motel room. Playwright and actor Morris Panych achieved renown for the nonverbal *The Overcoat* (1997), *7 Stories* (1990), and *Girl in the Goldfish Bowl* (2003). Michael Healey's critically acclaimed *The Drawer Boy* (1999), set in 1972, depicts the turbulent relationship between two farmers and a young actor researching rural life for the creation of *The Farm Show*. First Nations writers began to make a strong impact following the success of Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* (1988), which he later followed with *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1989) and *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout* (2005). Marie Clements (*The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, 2005), Margo Kane (*Confessions of an Indian Cowboy*, 2001), Monique Mojica (*Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, 1991), Daniel David Moses (*The Indian Medicine Shows*, 1995), and Drew Hayden Taylor (*Toronto at Dreamer's Rock*, 1990; *In a World Created by a Drunken God*, 2006) expose the stereotypes and dilemmas of different First Nations peoples and their troubled relation to the dominant culture, often making effective and comic use of indigenous languages and myths.

Joan MacLeod's *Amigo's Blue Guitar* (1990) explores the effect of a Salvadorean refugee on a Canadian family. Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1990), which juxtaposes a contemporary academic with Shakespeare's Othello, Romeo and Juliet, has been produced across Canada and worldwide. Brad Fraser's quirky *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love* (1990) presents seven disturbing characters communicating through an answering machine. Norm Foster, with more than 30 light comedies (e.g., *The Melville Boys*, 1986), has become the country's most successful dramatist. The voices of other Canadian communities were increasingly heard in the late 20th century: African (George Elliott Clarke, *Beatrice Chancy*, 1999), South Asian (Rahul Varma, *No Man's Land* [published in *Canadian Mosaic: 6 Plays*, 1995]), Japanese (R.A. Shiomi, *Yellow Fever*, 1984), and Chinese (Marty Chan, *Mom, Dad, I'm Living with a White*

Girl, first performed 1995).

3.1.3 Twenty first Century

At the beginning of the 21st century, several collective and multimedia companies emphasized physical and visual experimentation akin to the avant-garde traditions in contemporary Quebec productions, including One Yellow Rabbit in Calgary, Necessary Angel, da da kamera, Theatre Smith-Gilmour, and Theatre Columbus in Toronto, and Electric Company and Boca del Lupo in Vancouver.

3.2 History Plays

An interesting feature of the recent flowering of original drama in this country is the prominence of works based on Canadian history, for example, *Striker Schneiderman* or *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust* at the St. Lawrence Arts Centre; *The Ten Lost Years* or *From the Boyne to the Batoche* at Toronto Workshop Productions; *1837, The Farmers' Rebellion* at Theatre Passe Muraille; *Walsh* at the Stratford Festival; *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* in Vancouver; and the Donnelly Trilogy at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto. What distinguishes many of these Canadian history plays is not only the generally high standard, but also a mood of questioning and inconclusiveness. This mood suggests that Canadian playwrights are searching, sometimes unconsciously, for significance and form in our past. In an effort to find such form, they sometimes impose traditional fictional patterns inherited from the Old World on Canadian events. At other times, without new patterns, they seem incapable of giving shape to events that do not conform to traditional stereotypes. Part of the fascination of Canadian historical drama, therefore, is the evidence it provides of a continuing search on the part of our playwrights for a distinctively Canadian myth as is evident in five plays written over a period of almost a hundred years; Charles Mair's *Tecumseh* (1886). Robertson Davies' *At My Heart's Core* (1950), John Coulter's *Riel* (1962) and *The Trial of Louis Riel* (1967), and James Reaney's *Sticks and Stones* (1973).

3.2.1 Nineteenth Century History Play

(a) Charles Mair : *Tecumseh*

Charles Mair's sprawling closet drama, *Tecumseh*, in five acts and twenty-eight scenes, is the work of a poet who had no experience of the theatre and little expectation that his play would ever be staged. The play was undertaken quite deliberately to inculcate a sense of loyalty to Britain and a feelingly national identity.

As the title suggests; the play is primarily about the great Shewanee chief who fled to Canada after the defeat of his people by the American army at the battle of Tippecanoe. It deals with Tecumseh's participation with General Isaac Brock in the capture of Fort Detroit and with his death in the battle of Moravian Town. Mair was attracted to the story for two reasons. To begin with, the Indian epitomized those qualities of heroism and loyalty which the poet so highly regarded. But of equal importance was Tecumseh's race. For during his long association with the Indians in the Canadian North West, Mair had become convinced that the image of the native presented in so much American fiction was "villainously wrong."

The image of Canada as a bastion of "true" (that is, hierarchical and constitutional) liberty

against the forces of egalitarianism and anarchy threatening from the south is central to Mair's vision in the drama. Tecumseh seems at first to be the exact antithesis of Brock. He is uncivilized in the literal sense that he lacks the artificial accomplishments of city life. But, as Mair shows, the Indian is a natural aristocrat, understanding instinctively what Brock has had to learn. Tecumseh's insistence on boundaries (the product of a "natural" system of order and degree) and his rigid separation of Indians and Whites can be seen as another form of "true" liberty - liberty which is overwhelmed in an America that does not respect differences between individuals, classes, and races.

In the character, Lefroy, Mair has created not only a character who is central to *Tecumseh*, but also a character who anticipates some of the themes that reappear again and again in subsequent Canadian historical drama. The significance of Lefroy in the play is that he is equally opposed to American materialistic democracy, to Brock's unquestioning conservatism, and to Tecumseh's proto-apartheid policies of racial segregation. His conception of social order is based on a belief in instinct rather than reason or doctrine. "The world" he states in refutation of Brock, "is wiser than its wisest men." Social betterment, if it comes, will not be the result of the triumph of either city or wilderness over the other, but of a reconciliation of the two.

One reason that *Tecumseh* is interesting reading today when much of the poetic drama of the nineteenth century is cold and lifeless is that Mair has the true dramatist's ability to sympathize deeply with all of his characters. Brock, Tecumseh, even Harrison, all seem right from their own point of view, and each wins temporary approval from the reader. One feels, however, that it is Lefroy who has most completely captured Mair's imagination. For in the educated Englishman's search for a way of life that will combine the best elements of British civilization and savage wilderness Mair has perhaps embodied the nineteenth-century archetypical Canadian quest.

3.2.2 Twentieth Century History Plays

(a) Robertson Davies: *At My Heart's Core*

Among the later dramatists who deal with some of the issues touched on by Mair, one of the most thoughtful is Robertson Davies. In *At My Heart's Core* (1950), the playwright presents an imaginative reconstruction of events that might have taken place during the rebellion of 1837. The play is "historical" only to the extent that the characters are named after people who actually lived near Peterborough in the early nineteenth century. Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill, and Frances Stewart were distinguished Ontario pioneer women. The aspect of their lives with which Davies has chosen to deal, however, is a matter which is hidden from the factual historian. The focus on inner action enables the dramatist to grapple with themes which are not confined to a particular time or place. Nevertheless, in treating these universal topics, Davies does reveal certain prejudices (or leanings) which do reflect their regional origins. The title of the play is taken from a poem supposedly written by a Scottish immigrant to Canada which was originally published in the Cobourg newspaper.

But the fundamental issues raised by Cantwell - whether a woman's career should be sacrificed for her husband and the attendant questions of whether the creative or scientific spirits can ever flourish in the inhospitable intellectual climate of Canada - are adroitly skirted by the author. The result is a curious sense of ambivalence in the play which, is very close to the author's own attitude. For while his mind tells him that the pursuit of imaginative and scientific truth is the highest human ideal, his heart (or at least his heart's core) suggests that the discontent which drives the artist and the scientist, far from

being divine, is in fact diabolical. Like Mair, Robertson Davies seems to be saying that personal contentment and love are ultimately superior achievements of the Imagination and the intellect. In this play, as in his paperwork, the writer wrestles with the problem of wholeness. For him, personal (and, by implication, national) “virtue” consists of balance. Both conservative and radical stances are “sinful” because they are extremes. Sometimes, too, he seems to regard love as its own-justification, seeing it in spiritual or religious terms as a form of charity and humility. At other times, he tries to identify the lovable quality of Canadian life with individuals who somehow escape, or ignore, the dichotomies. In *At My Heart's Core*, for example, the Indian Sally and the Irish ruffian Phelim Brady, in different ways, represent modes of feeling and intuition which are distinct from the English and American stereotypes. But the true embodiment of wholeness in the play is Mrs. Stewart. And it is her combination of strength and sensitivity, intellect and a capacity for self-sacrifice, that Davies seems to admire most. If the vision of natural superiority embodied in this backwoods lady seems a little too romantic, a little too Shavian for the mid-twentieth century, it should be emphasized that it is modified by more than a dash of Shavian irony. For when Stewart exclaims that “women are the greatest single force against rebellion in the country,” we can sense, the ambivalence of an author still divided in his attitude to at least two of these fascinating subjects.

(b) John Coulter : *Riel, The Crime of Louis Riel, and The Trial of Louis Riel*

Rebellion, of course, is the classical subject for historical drama and it is understandable, therefore, that the comparatively few genuine rebels discoverable in Canada's past have been somewhat over-exploited by our dramatists. This is particularly true in the case of the Métis leader and religious fanatic, Louis Riel, who is rapidly becoming something of a Canadian folk-hero. Riel has been the subject of three plays by John Coulter (*Riel, The Crime of Louis Riel, and The Trial of Louis Riel*), an opera by Harry Somers, and a documentary drama, *From the Boyne to the Batoche* at Toronto Workshop Productions. Coulter's work deals with the tension between historical “fact” and the playwright's search for a myth to contain and explain such facts.

The first part of *Riel* (published in 1962 but written in 1950) deals with the Red River Rebellion of 1869-70 during which Riel set up a provisional government in what was to become the province of Manitoba, and attempted to protect the rights of some 15,000 Métis and white settlers in the area against the incursions of the central government and its various representatives.

Part One of *Riel*, then, might be described as Canadian history in Irish costume. The conflicts which seize Coulter's imagination are the Protestant-catholic, English-Irish ones with which he himself is intimately familiar. Although these conflicts do play their part in the Riel story there are similarities between the Canadian and the Irish situations that are not at all exact. One difference is that whereas Manitoba was a new, relatively open society in the nineteenth century, Ireland was burdened with some four hundred years of sectarian strife. Coulter's own Irish background leads him to see the West not as a last stronghold of a “natural” social order (as Mair does in *Tecumseh*), not as an area of total anarchy (as it appears in some representations of the American “wild” west), but as an arena in which essentially Old World battles are restaged. An even stronger tendency to interpret Canadian history in terms of European mythology is evident in Part Two. The second half of the play takes place some fifteen years later during the North West Rebellion and concludes with Riel's trial and execution. It focuses on the Métis leader's developing religious fanaticism and culminates in the trial in which Riel's sanity becomes the main question at issue. There is much in the historical documents to justify regarding

Riel as a religious fanatic, possibly even a religious mystic.

Coulter presents the story against a background of European (as opposed to Indian or French Canadian) Catholicism and introduces embarrassing parallels between the lives of Riel and Christ. By creating Riel as a kind of half-breed Saint Joan, Coulter obscures other aspects of his personality which are possibly more significant. Some suggestion of those other aspects is presented in Coulter's later play, *The Trial of Louis Riel*, produced in 1967 and published the following year, in this work, the dramatist concentrates on the final trial and incorporates into his play many passages from the actual courtroom proceedings.

Riel embodies many of those contradictions which have been explored in the dramatic fiction of Charles Mair and Robertson Davies. Riel is a product of those tensions between tradition and revolt, authoritarianism and radicalism, mysticism and practicality, which seem central to much Canadian drama. Furthermore, he combines these characteristics in a particularly complicated way. Superficially he seems to be the archetypal revolutionary - the leader of an oppressed minority against unrepresentative government, the champion of regional autonomy against indifferent centralized authority, the advocate of personal inspiration against the claims of a traditional priesthood. But, like so many other Canadian heroes, Riel is less radical than he at first appears. He rejects republicanism and the assistance of the Irish Fenians, preferring to advance his claims as far as possible by constitutional methods within the framework of the British Empire. Thus he succeeds in antagonizing both the revolutionaries and the priests in his own faction, as well as the Protestants and the central government ranged against him. In the end, Riel stands alone. Like Lefroy, he attempts to embrace both sides and is left empty-handed.

(c) James Reaney's *Sticks and Stones: The Donnellys, Part One*

Social and spiritual isolation is also a very important theme in James Reaney's *Sticks and Stones: The Donnellys, Part One* (1974). Reaney's talent as a poet has been evident for many years, but his reputation as a dramatist has grown more slowly. In early works, such as *The Killdeer* or *The Easter Egg*, he revealed flashes of genius, but these were largely overshadowed by his clumsiness with, or indifference to, conventional dramatic structure. Undaunted by the lukewarm reception of these plays, Reaney spent several years working out his own theories of drama with young actors in London, Ontario. The result of this work was a series of scripts in which the poet experimented with improvisation, children's plays, and other techniques inspired by Oriental theatre and modern technology. This stage in the playwright's career culminated in the highly successful *Colours in the Dark* produced at the Stratford Festival in 1967 by John Hirsch. That play established Reaney as a theatrical poet of striking originality, but one who remained apparently indifferent to the ordinary conventions of stage narrative. *The Donnelly Trilogy*, of which *Sticks and Stones* is the first part, is Reaney's first major dramatic work since *Colours in the Dark*, and it shows a significant advance in technical finish. The play combines elements of folk-lore, ritual, fantasy, and historical fact into a celebration of courage and the unyielding human spirit. In form it might be described as a kind of latter day miracle play. It is religious in that it presents human actions in a larger, spiritual framework. But paradoxically it celebrates, not the deeds of a saint, but those of a family traditionally regarded as wicked.

The period of the Donnellys' settlement in Biddulph was marked by sectarian violence, riots, arson, murder, intimidation, and endless litigation. Most of this ceased in 1880, and it has been generally assumed that the extermination of "the Black Donnellys" was the reason. Reaney inverts this popular legend, transforming the Donnellys into the innocent victims of circumstance and conspiracy. According

to Reaney's version of the story, the Donnellys are moderates (like Riel) who are caught in the middle of Old Country feuds and who, because they refuse to join either side, are isolated and finally destroyed. Mr. and Mrs. Donnelly and their crippled son, Will, constitute a centre of opposition to the ambition, greed, and opportunism of their strongest neighbours and represent, Reaney seems to suggest, the only element of courage and sensitivity that has not been driven from the township.

In *Sticks and Stones*, the Donnellys symbolize those few individuals who dare to stand alone and repudiate the values of the society around them in favour of a higher, more imaginative ideal. As Jennie explains at the end of the play, the Donnellys were persecuted "Because they were tall; they were different and they weren't afraid."

It is unfair, perhaps, to quote this passage out of context. Its rather cloudy rhetoric gives a distorted impression of the play which is much more spare and original, on the whole, than this single speech might suggest. What is particularly interesting about *Sticks and Stones* is the way in which Reaney has given to historical events a sense of timeless significance. What he presents to the audience is less a story than a ritualistic ceremony. The fate of the Donnellys is never in question. If that fate fails to evoke in the audience the same sense of catharsis which one experiences in other "history plays," it is only because one cannot quite believe in the high destiny Reaney attributes to his characters.

3.2.3 Features Of History Plays

The most striking peculiarity of these works is the kind of hero they celebrate. These plays do not record the triumphs of national champions such as Aeneas or Henry V. They focus on the defeated, the impractical visionary, the defenders of lost causes, the failures. In most of these plays, the strong, the self-confident, the courageous but uncomplicated characters are regarded with suspicion, or relegated to positions of secondary importance. The qualities these dramatists admire are not the assertive and belligerent ones usually extolled in epics of war and politics. They are the more passive virtues of instinct, imagination, and self-sacrifice. To a certain extent, this emphasis may be owing to the climate of the times which makes the unqualified admiration of brute courage difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless there is an elegant, even devotional, mood to these plays.

(a) Emphasis from Public To Private Issues

The shift of emphasis from public to private issues in these plays inevitably affects the way in which conflict is presented. It is an interesting characteristic of these works that in them strife is frequently resolved, not by direct confrontation, but by strategic retreat. Closely related to this temperamental desire to avoid direct conflict is an interesting syndrome which might be described as "xenophilia." Whereas much historical drama is based on a hearty dislike of foreigners, these dramatists are strongly drawn to the exotic stranger. The characters embody an alternative to that English tradition and represents qualities which are presented as superior.

(b) Desire For Inclusiveness

If there is a single characteristic which could be said to unite the visions presented in these five plays, it is possibly the desire for inclusiveness. Unlike conventional historical dramatists who celebrate the establishment or defence of national boundaries, these Canadian playwrights are assimilationists. They regard with distrust the physical and spiritual obstacles that separate people, and seem to long for a Utopia in which such divisions would disappear. To the extent that it is possible to discern a

“Canadian myth” in these plays, therefore, that myth might be described in part as a search for a workable synthesis of authority and liberty, intellect and intuition, self-assertion and sacrifice.

3.3 Let Us Sum Up

Like the poets and novelists, Canadian dramatists in their quest for a myth of origins have often turned to historical incidents.

The biblical dramas of Robert Norwood, *The Witch Of Endor* (1916) and *The Man Of Kerioth* (1918), and Marjorie Pickthall’s *The Woodcarver’s Wife* (1922) are in the late nineteenth-century romantic tradition. More modern approaches have been made by Ralph Gustafson, whose *Alfred The Great* (1937) portrays the character and honours the achievements of this early English King; by Earle Birney whose *Trial Of A City* (1952) is an indictment of urban life as seen in Vancouver.

The writing and production of stage plays in Canada was encouraged by Earl Grey who, as governor general of Canada from 1907 to 1911, sponsored a music and drama competition, and by the spread of the little-theatre movement. Important work was done in a community theatre at Naramata, B.C., under the leadership of Carroll Aikins who, in 1919, became the first director of Hart House Theatre, Toronto.

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By the 1950s and ’60s several professional theatres had been successfully established, producing a more sophisticated milieu for dramatists such as John Coulter, whose *Riel* (1962) creates a heroic figure of Louis Riel, the leader of the Métis rebellion in 1885.

During the 1970s, groups such as Toronto’s Theatre Passe Muraille experimented with collective productions in which actors participated in script writing and which were performed in nontraditional venues (e.g., barns).

At the beginning of the 21st century, several collective and multimedia companies emphasized physical and visual experimentation akin to the avant-garde traditions in contemporary Quebec productions, including One Yellow Rabbit in Calgary, Necessary Angel, da da kamera, Theatre Smith-Gilmour, and Theatre Columbus in Toronto, and Electric Company and Boca del Lupo in Vancouver.

3.4 Review Questions

1. James Reaney’s *Sticks And Stones: The Donnellys*, John Coulter’s : *Riel*, *The Crime Of Louis Riel*, *The Trial Of Louis Riel* and Robertson Davies’ *At My Heart’s Core*, all have certain common features. Elucidate.
2. Name a few works by expatriates and temporary residents of nineteenth century.
3. What are the features of Canadian drama?
4. Briefly enumerate the features of the novels of the first part of Twentieth century.
5. Referring to the Twentieth century history plays, write short notes on:
 - i) Desire for inclusiveness

ii)Emphasis from public to private issues.

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UNIT-4

NORTHROP FRYE: "CONCLUSION" TO THE LITERARY HISTORY OF CANADA

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 About the Author
- 4.3 Introduction to the Text
- 4.4 Summary of the Text: Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada
- 4.5 Impediments in the Development of a Canadian Literary Tradition
 - 4.5.1 Use Of Language: The Most Obvious Tension
 - 4.5.2 Cultural History
 - 4.5.3 Canadian Sensibility and Identity
 - 4.5.4 Position of the Frontier in the Canadian Imagination
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- 4.7 The Cultural Development of Garrison Mentality
 - 4.7.1 Developing of the Garrison Mentality
 - 4.7.2 Religion as the Major Cultural Force in Canada
 - 4.7.3 Canadian Rhetorical Tradition
 - 4.7.4 Changes in Garrison Mentality
- 4.8 Literature: An Expression of Reading, Not Experience
- 4.9 Canadian Literary Tradition
 - 4.9.1 Literature: A Conscious Mythology
 - 4.9.2 Writing as a Form of Self-Expression
 - 4.9.3 Romance Versus Contemporary Realism
 - 4.9.4 The Role of Romance and Melodrama in Consolidating a Social Mythology
- 4.10 The Total Effect of Canadian Popular Fiction
- 4.11 Detachment in Canadian Writing
- 4.12 Pastoral Myth
 - 4.12.1 Pastoral Myth In The Sense Of Kinship With The Animal And Vegetable World

- 4.12.2 The Pastoral Myth, An Idealization Of Memory
- 4.13 Canadian Poetry: Narrative Rather Than Lyrical
- 4.14 Typical Characteristics Of Canadian Poetry
- 4.15 Canadian Radicalism
- 4.16 Writers of the Last Decade
- 4.17 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.18 Review Questions
- 4.19 Bibliography

4.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to the “Conclusion” to the Literary History of Canada by Northrop Frye
- To familiarize them with the different opinions on the type of fiction and poetry of Frye’s times.
- To enable the students to gain a knowledge of the idea of “garrison mentality” as presented by Frye
- To understand Frye’s theory that it is the creative imagination, which expands and invigorates culture.

4.1 Introduction

Northrop Frye argued that irrespective of the formal quality of the writing, it was imperative to study Canadian literary productions in order to understand the Canadian imagination and its reaction to the Canadian environment. During the 1950s, Frye wrote annual surveys of Canadian poetry for the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, which led him to observe recurrent themes and preoccupations in Canadian poetry. Subsequently, Frye elaborated on these observations, especially in his conclusion to Carl F. Klinck’s *Literary History of Canada* (1965). In this work, Frye presented the idea of the “garrison mentality” as the attitude from which Canadian literature has been written.

4.2 About the Author

Frye, Northrop (1912-). Herman Northrop Frye was born in Sherbrooke, Que., and educated at Moncton, N.B., and at Victoria College and Emmanuel College, University of Toronto; he was ordained in the United Church ministry in 1936. After a short term in Saskatchewan he completed his studies at Oxford and at the University of Toronto where he joined the staff of the English department of Victoria College in 1940 and was its principal from 1959 to 1966 when he became University Professor. In 1958 the Royal Society of Canada awarded him the Lorne Pierce Medal for distinguished service to Canadian Literature.

An outstanding scholar and teacher, Frye has won an international reputation for erudition, originality, and the analytical and deductive method he has applied to the science of criticism with a view to reinterpreting literature in terms of the modern age. His writing is distinguished by clarity, wit,

and the felicitous use of colloquialisms. In 1936, while still a student, he contributed articles to the Canadian forum of which he was later editor-in-chief for some years. From 1950 to 1960 he wrote the section on Canadian poetry in English for 'Letters in Canada', the University of Toronto Quarterly's annual survey of Canadian writing. He has contributed many articles to learned and literary publications and has been guest lecturer for American foundation and universities. His important critical work *Fearful Symmetry: A Study Of William Blake* (1947) involved him in an examination of the nature and use of myth and symbol and in a study of the differences among literary genres. From his reflections on these subjects came *Anatomy Of Criticism* (1957), a significant analysis of techniques of criticism by application of the principles of Aristotle's *Poetics*. These techniques are historical, or the consideration of modes; ethical, or the examination of symbols; archetypal, or relationships with myth; and rhetorical, or classification of genres. Frye is also the author of *T.S. Eliot* (1963), a small volume in the Writers and Critics series. His published lectures, essays, and addresses are *Culture And The National Will* (1957); *By Liberal Things* (1960); three volumes published in 1963—*Fables Of Identity: Studies In Poetic Mythology*, *The Well-Tempered Critic*, and *The Educated Imagination*; and two volumes that appeared in 1965—*The Return Of Eden: Five Essays In Milton's Epics* and *A Natural Perspective: The Development Of Shakespearean Comedy And Romance*. Frye contributed a survey of postwar poetry to *The Arts In Canada* (1958) and wrote the last chapter of the *Literary History Of Canada* (1965) in which he gives a lucid summary of the achievements of Canadian authors. He has edited the work of two men under whom he studied: *Across My Path* (1952), *The Memoirs Of Pelham Edgar*, and *The Collected Poems Of E. J. Pratt* (2nd ed. 1958), in which he included an important introductory essay. He has also edited two volumes of essays for the English Institute: *Sound And Poetry* (1957), for which he wrote the first essay, and *Romanticism Reconsidered* (1963).

Frye collected his disparate writings on Canadian writing and painting in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (1971). He also aided James Polk in compiling *Divisions on a Ground: Essays on Canadian Culture* (1982). In the posthumous *Collected Works of Northrop Frye*, his writings on Canada occupy the thick 12th volume.

4.3 Introduction to the Text

Frye's conclusion to *The Literary History of Canada* (1965), represents his most complete formulation to this time of Canadian literary and cultural history. The piece, in four parts, outlines the historical, social, political, and economic factors that have shaped the "Canadian sensibility."

Frye's overview reiterates several elements of his vision of Canada which he had been developing for more than two decades, particularly the unique myths that seem to haunt the Canadian imagination, including the "garrison mentality" of a beleaguered society at odds with its hostile environment, the quest for a peaceable kingdom, and the imaginative difficulty of adapting a highly developed European verbal culture to a newly settled country. With its penetrating and patient judgements on individual writers, and its development of seminal attitudes to the function of the writer in a society emerging from colonialism, *The Bush Garden* helps to explain the influence Frye has wielded on both critics and writers.

An observation in his 'Conclusion' to *The Literary History of Canada* gave the impression

that he regarded Canadian literature as inferior to the work of 'the world's major writers' but that he was willing to treat it more leniently because of its 'social significance,' a value that he earlier had disparaged as 'usually disastrous' to literary excellence. The impression that he was either unfair or excessively generous to Canadian literature should be corrected by the 674 pages of essays in this volume, which display his prolonged, patient, insightful, and sometimes whimsical response to Canadian writing, painting, and history. It is remarkable that in such a busy career he found time to survey the Canadian scene so carefully. As a critic, Frye was drawn to the big picture. The momentum of his theorizing pushed him to seek the broadest possible view by setting literary works in an ever-expanding network as wide as human imagination, a network whose unifying principles he articulated in a symphony of elegant patterns. What can be lost in this immense project are the specific virtues of specific works, which are felt, as he admitted in a footnote to *Anatomy of Criticism*, only in 'the direct experience of literature, where uniqueness is everything.' Fortunately, this unique experience is often evident in his reviews of Canadian poetry and art, which begin by generalizing about 'the lyric imagination' or 'Canadian identity,' but then record his sensitive responses to individual poems and paintings. Among the pleasures of his writings are the judicious phrases with which he delivers his impressions. Reading through this work reveals how Frye gradually assembled a range of judgments and preferences that coalesced into those themes - the garrison mentality, the frostbite of colonialism, the continent as leviathan - that inspired one generation of Canadian critics and provoked the next. An 'Editorial Statement' from *Canadian Forum* in 1948 proclaims 'the fight to maintain and develop civilized life in Canada.' The remark's pugnaciousness may reflect postwar determination, but the same resolve to defend Canadian culture by refining it appears throughout this collection. Years later in 1989, Frye neatly divided national culture into three levels: popular lifestyle, traditional ideology, and creative powers. Throughout his long career, he never doubted the hierarchy implicit in this analysis, or the duty of intellectuals to account for the cross-fertilization of the three levels while maintaining their distinction. He never doubted that the highest power was the creative imagination, which expands and invigorates culture.

4.4 Summary of the Text: Conclusion to the Literary History of Canada

Northrop Frye has begun his text with the following observation as to the motive of formulating a text on the history of English Canadian Literature: Some years ago a group of editors met to draw up the first tentative plans for a history of English Canadian literature. What we then dreamed of is substantially what we have got, changed very little in essentials. I expressed at the time the hope that such a book would help to broaden the inductive basis on which some writers of Canadian literature were making generalizations that bordered on guess work. 'By some writers ' I met primarily myself: I find, however, that more evidence has in fact tended to confirm most of my intuitions on the subject. In his essay Frye has made the following observation that to study Canadian literature properly, one must outgrow the view that evaluation is the end of criticism, instead of its incidental byproduct. If evaluation is one's guiding principal criticism of Canadian literature only a deliberating project leaving it a poor naked allouette, plucked of every feather of decency and dignity. True what is really remarkable is not how little but how much good writing has been produced in Canada. But this would not affect the rigorous evaluator. The evaluative view is based on the conception of criticism as concerned mainly to define and canonize the genuine classics of literature. And Canada has produced no author who is a classic in the sense of possessing a vision greater in kind than that of his best readers. There is no Canadian writer of whom it can be said, what can be said of the world's major writers, that their readers can grow up inside their work without ever being aware of a circumference. Thus the metaphor

of the critic as “judge” is more appropriate for the students of the literature which seldom raises the larger issues of criticism. This fact about Canadian literature so widely deplored by Canadians has one advantage. It is much easier to see what literature is trying to do when studying a literature that has not quite done it. If no Canadian author pulls readers away from the Canadian context towards the centre of literary experience itself, then at every point the reader remains aware of his social and historical setting. This conception of what is literary has to be greatly broadened for such a literature. The literary, in Canada, is often only an incidental quality of writings which, like those of many of the early explorers, are as innocent of literary intention as a mating loon. Even when it is literature in its orthodox genre of poetry and fiction, it is more significantly studied as a part of Canadian lives than as a part of an autonomous world of literature. So far from nearly admitting or conceding this, the editors have gone out of their way to emphasize it. Chapters on political, historical, religious, scholarly, philosophical, scientific, and other non-literary writings have been introduced to show how the verbal imagination operates as a ferment in all cultural life. The writings of foreigners, of travelers, of immigrants, of emigrants even of emigrants whose most articulate literary emotion was their thankfulness at getting the hell out of Canada have been included. The reader of this book even if he is not a Canadian, or much interested in Canadian literature as such, may still learn a good deal about the literary imagination as force and function of life generally. For here another often deplored fact also becomes an advantage: that many Canadian cultural phenomena are most peculiarly Canadian at all, but are typical of their wider North American and western contexts. The book is a collection of essays in cultural history, and of the general principles of cultural history of which relatively little is known. It is, of course closely related to political and to economic history, but it is a separate and definable subject in itself. Like other kinds of history, it has its own themes of exploration, settlements and developments, but these themes relate to a social imagination that explores and settles and develops, and the imagination has its own rhythms of growth as well as its modes of expression. It is obvious that Canadian literature, whatever its inherent merits, is an indispensable aid to the knowledge of Canada. It records what the Canadian imagination has reacted to. The question as to why there has been no Canadian writer of classic proportion, may naturally be asked. At any rate it often has been. Canadian authors realize it is better to deal with what is there than to raise speculations about why something else is not there. But it is clear the question haunts their minds. And as so little is known about cultural history that one cannot only answer such a question, but one does not even know whether or not it is a real question. The notion, doubtless of romantic origin, that “genius” is a certain quantum that an individual is born with, as he might be born with red hair is still around, but mainly as a folktale motive in fiction like the story of Finch in Jalana books. “Genius is as much, and essentially a matter of social context as it is of individual character. One does not know what the social conditions are that produce great literatures, or even when there is causal relation at all. If there is, there is no reason to suppose that they are good conditions or conditions that one should try to reproduce. The notion that the literature one admires must have been nourished by something admirable in the social environment is persistent, but has never been justified by evidence. One can still find books on Shakespeare that profess to make his achievement more plausible by talking about a “background” of social euphoria produced by the defeat of Armada, the discovery of America a century before, and the conviction that Queen Elizabeth was a wonderful woman. There is a general sense of filler about such speculations, and when similar arguments are given in a negative form, to explain the absence of a Shakespeare in Canada they are no more convincing. Puritan inhibitions, pioneer life, “an age too late, cold climate or years”——these may be important as factors or conditions of Canadian culture, helping us to characterize its qualities. To suggest that any of them is a negative

cause of its merit is to say much more than anyone knows. One theme which runs all through this book is the obvious and unquenchable desire of the Canadian cultural public to identify itself through its literature. Canada is not a bad environment for the author, as far as recognition goes: In fact the recognition may even hamper his development by making him prematurely self-conscious. Canada has two languages and two literatures and every statement made in a book like this about 'Canadian literature' employs the figure of speech known as synecdoche, putting a part for the whole. Every such statement implies a parallel or contrasting statement about French-Canadian literature. The advantages of having a national culture based on two languages are in some respects very great, but of course they are for the most part potential. The difficulties, if more superficial, are also more actual and more obvious. Canada began, says Mr. Galloway, as an obstacle, blocking the way to the treasures of the East, to be explored only in the hope of finding a passage through it. English Canada continued to be long after what is now the United States had become a defined part of the Western world. The revolution did not essentially change the cultural unity of the English speaking community of the north Atlantic that had London and Edinburgh on one side of it and Boston and Philadelphia on the other. But Canada has, for all practical purposes, no Atlantic seaboard. To enter the United States is a matter of crossing an ocean: to enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed by an alien continent. The original impetus begins in Europe, for English Canada in the British Isles, hence though adventurous it is also a conservative force, and naturally tends to preserve its colonial link with its starting point. The simultaneous influence of two larger nations speaking the same language has been practically beneficial to English Canada, but theoretically confusing. It is often suggested that Canada's identities is to be found in some *via media*, or *via mediocre*, between the other two. This has a disadvantage that the British and American cultures have to be defined as extremes. Canada in its attitude to Britain tends to be more royalist than the Queen, in the sense that it is more attracted to it as a symbol of tradition than as a fellow-nation. The Canadian attitude to the United States is typically that of a smaller country to a much bigger neighbour sharing in its material civilization but anxious to keep clear of the huge mass movements that drive a great imperial power. Canada having a seat on the sidelines of the American Revolution adheres more to the inductive and the expedient. The Canadian genius for compromise is reflected in the existence of Canada itself.

4.5 Impediments in the Development of a Canadian Literary Tradition

4.5.1 Use of Language: The Most Obvious Tension

The most obvious tension in the Canadian literary situation is in the use of language. Here, first of all, a traditional standard English collides with the need for a north American vocabulary and phrasing. As long as the north American speaker feels that he belongs to a minority, the European speech will impose a standard of correctness. This is to a considerable extent still true of French in Canada, with its campaign against 'Joual' and the like. But as Americans began to outnumber the British, Canada tended in practice to fall in with the American developments, though a good deal of Canadian theory is still anglophile. A much more complicated cultural tension arises from the impact of the sophisticated on the primitive, and vice versa.

4.5.2 Cultural History

Cultural history, we said, has its own rhythms. It is possible that one of these rhythms is very like an organic rhythm: that there must be a period, of a certain magnitude, as Aristotle would say, in

which a social imagination can take route and establish a tradition. American literature had this period, in the north eastern part of the country, between the Revolution and the Civil Wars. Canada has never had it. English Canada was a part of the wilderness, then a part of the north America and the British Empire, then a part of the world but it has gone through these revolutions too quickly for a tradition of writing to be founded on any one of them.

4.5.3 Canadian Sensibility and Identity

Canadian sensibility has been profoundly disturbed, not so much by our famous problem of identity, important as that is, as by a series of paradoxes in what confronts that identity. It is less perplexed by the question 'Who am I?' Than by some such riddle as 'Where is here?' Mr. Bailey, writing of the early Maritimes, warns us not to read the "mystique of Canadianism" back into Confederation period. The mystique of Canadianism was, as several chapters in this book make clear, specifically the cultural accompaniment of Confederation and the imperialistic mood that followed it. But it came so suddenly after the pioneer period that it was still full of wilderness.

4.5.4 Position of the Frontier in the Canadian Imagination

One wonders if any other national consciousness has had so large an amount of the unknown, the unrealized, the humanly undigested, so built into it. What is important here for our purpose is the position of the frontier in the Canadian imagination. In the United States one could choose to move out to the frontier or to retreat from it back to the seaboard. The tensions that are by such migration have fascinated many American novelists and historians. In the Canada's even in the Maritimes, the frontiers was all around one, a part and a condition of one's whole imaginative being. The frontier was primarily what separated the Canadian, physically or mentally, from Great Britain, from the United States, and, even more important, from other Canadian communities. Mrs. Waterston speaks of a feature of the Canadian life that has been noted by writers from Susanna Moodie onward: 'the paradox of vast empty spaces plus lack of privacy', without defenses against the prying or avaricious eye. The resentment expressed against this in Canada seems to have taken political rather than literary forms: this may be partly because Canadians have learned from their imaginative experience to look at each other in much the same way: 'as objects, even as obstacles', to quote Miss Macpherson on a Canadian autobiography. It is not much wonder if Canada developed with bewilderment of a neglected child, preoccupied with trying to define its own identity, alternately bumptious and diffident about its own achievements. Certain features of life in a new country that are bound to handicap its writers are obvious enough. The difficulties of drama, which depends on a theatre and consequently on a highly organized urban life, are set, put by Mr. Tait. Other literary genres have similar difficulties. Culture is born in leisures and an awareness of standards, and pioneer conditions have disappeared. Emerson remarks in his journals that in a provincial society it is extremely easy to reach the highest level of cultivation, extremely difficult to take one a step beyond that. In surveying Canadian poetry and fiction, one feels constantly that all energy has been absorbed in meeting a standard, a self defeating enterprise because real standards can only be established, not met, such writing is academic in the pejorative sense of that term, an imitation of a prescribed model second-rate in conception, not nearly in execution. It is natural that academic writing of this kind should develop where literature is a social prestige symbol. However, it is not the handicaps of the Canadian writers but the distinctive features that appear inspite of them which are the main concern of this book and so of its conclusion.

4.6 Violence Against Nature

The feeling of nomadic movements over great distances persists uneven into the age of the airplane, in a country where writers can hardly meet one another without a social organization that provides travel grants. Pratt's poetry is full of its fascination with means of communication not simply the physical means of great ships and locomotives, though he is one of the best of all poets on such subjects but with communication as message, with radar and asdic and wireless signals, in its war poems, with the power of the rhetoric over fighting men. What is perhaps the most comprehensive structure of ideas yet made by Canadian thinker, the structure embodied in 'Innis's Bias of Communication, is concerned with the same thing as a disciple of Innis, Marshall McLuhan, continues to emphasize the unity of communication, as a complex containing both verbal and non-verbal factors, and warns us against making unreal divisions within it. Civilization in Canada, has advanced geometrically across the country, throwing down the long parallel lines of the railways, dividing up farmlands into chess boards of square mile sections and concession –line roads. There is little adaptation to nature: in both architecture and arrangement, Canadian cities and villages express rather an arrogant abstraction, the conquest of nature by an intelligence that does not love it. It has been remarked—Mr. Kilbourn quotes Creighton and the subject - that Canadian expansion west ward had a tight grip of authority over it that American expansion, with its outlaws and sheriffs from the back country to the wild west ; Canada moved from a new France held down by British military occupation to a north west patrolled by mountains police. Canada has not had strictly speaking, an Indian war: there has been much less of the 'another red skin bit the dust' feeling in our historical imagination. Frye has long been impressed in Canadian poetry by a tone of deep terror in regard to nature. It is not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest. The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values.

4.7 The Cultural Development Of Garrison Mentality

4.7.1 Developing of The Garrison Mentality

Analyzing what has helped develop Canadian imagination in its literature, Frye has observed, "Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological 'frontier'. Separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources. Communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting— such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality." A garrison is a closely knit and beleaguered society, and its moral and social values are unquestionable. In a perilous enterprise one does not discuss causes or motives: one is either a fighter or a deserter. Here again we may turn to Pratt, with his infallible instinct for what is central in the Canadian imagination. The societies in Pratt's poems are always tense and tight groups engaged in war, rescue, martyrdom, or crisis, and the moral values expressed are simply those of that group. In such a society the terror is not for the common enemy, even when the enemy is or seems victorious. The real terror comes when the individual feels himself becoming an individual, pulling away from the group, losing the sense of driving power that the group gives him, aware of a conflict within himself far subtler

than the struggle of morality against evil.”They were so certain of their moral values”, says Mr. Cogswell, a little sadly, speaking of the early Maritime writers. “Right was white, wrong black and nothing else counted or even existed”. He goes on to point out that such certainly invariably produces a sub-literary rhetoric. Or, as Yeats would say, man makes rhetoric out of quarrels with one another, poetry out of the quarrel with ourselves. Ideas are weapons; one seeks the verbal *coup de grace* the irrefutable refutation. Such a use of words is congenial enough to the earlier Canadian community: all the evidence, including the evidence of this book, points to a highly articulate and argumentative society in nineteenth century Canada. There are historical reasons for this, that scholarly writing is more easily attached to its central tradition.

4.7.2 Religion as the Major Cultural Force in Canada

Religion has been the major cultural force in Canada, at least down to the last generation or two. The names of two Methodist publishers William Briggs and Lorne Pierce, recur more than this book, and illustrate the fact that the churches not only influenced the culture climate but took an active part in the production of poetry and fiction, as the popularity of Ralph Connor reminds us. But the effective religious factors in Canada were doctrinal and evangelical, those that stress the arguments of religion at the expense of its imagery. But using language as one would use an axe, formulating arguments with sharp cutting edges that will help to clarify one’s view of the landscape, remains a rhetorical and not a poetic achievement.

4.7.3 Canadian Rhetorical Tradition

To create a disinterested structure of words, in poetry or in fiction, is a very different achievement, and it is clear that an intelligent and able rhetorician finds it particularly hard to understand how different it is. A rhetorician practicing poetry is apt to express himself in spectral arguments, generalizations that escape the feeling of possible refutation only by being vast enough to contain it, or vaporous enough to elude it. The mystique of Canadianism was accompanied by an intellectual tendency of this kind.

a. World Views World views that avoided dialectic, of a theosophical or transcendentalist caste, became popular among the Canadian poets of that time, Roberts and Carman particularly, and later among painters as the reminiscences of the Group of Seven make clear.

b. Literature Of Protest Mr Watt’s very important chapter on the literature of protest isolates another rhetorical tradition. In the nineteenth century the common assumption that nature had revealed the truth of progress, and that it was the duty of reason to accommodate that truth to mankind, could be either a conservative or a radical view. But in either case it was a revolutionary doctrine, introducing the conception of change as the key to the social process.

c. The Depression The depression introduced a dialectic into Canadian social thought which profoundly affected its literature. In Mr. Watt’s striking phrase, ‘the depression was like an intense magnetic field that deflected the courses of all the poets who went through it. In this period there were, of course, the inevitable Marxist manifestos, assuring the writer that only social significance, as understood by Marxism, would bring vitality to his work.

d. Social Significance It is not surprising, given this background, that the belief in the inspiration of literature by social significance continued to be an active force long after it had ceased to be attached to any specifically Marxist or other political programmes. The existentialist movements, with its emphasis on the self determination of social attitudes, seems to have very little direct influence in Canada.

e. Freudianism During the last decade or so a kind of social Freudianism has been taking shape, mainly in the United States, as a democratic counterpart

of Marxism. Here society is seen as controlled by certain anxieties real or imaginary which are designed to repress or sublimate human impulses toward a greater freedom. These impulses include the creative and sexual, which are closely linked. The enemy of the poet is not the capitalist but the 'square', or representative of repressive morality. The advantage of this attitude is that it preserves the position of rebellion against society for the poet, without imposing on him any specific social obligation. This movement has had a rather limited development in Canada, somewhat surprisingly considering how easy a target the square is in Canada... Thus it represents to some extent a return to the undifferentiated radicalism of a century before, though no longer in a political context.

4.7.4 Changes in Garrison Mentality

As the center of the Canadian life moves from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality, changes correspondingly. It begins as an expression of the moral values generally accepted in the group as a whole, and then, as society gets more complicated and more in control of its environment, it becomes more of a revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society. But though it changes from a defense of to an attack on what society accepts as conventional standard, the literature it produces, at every stage, tends to be rhetorical, an illustration or allegory of certain social attitudes. These attitudes help to unify the mind of the writer by externalizing his enemy, the enemy being, the anti-creative elements in life as he sees life. To approach these elements in a less rhetorical way, would introduce the theme of self-conflict, a more perilous but ultimately more rewarding theme. The conflict involved, is between the poetic impulse to construct and the rhetorical impulse to assert, and the victory of the former is the sign of the maturing of the writer. There is of course nothing in all this that differentiates Canadians from other related cultural developments. The Canadian literary mind, beginning as it did, so late in the cultural history of the West, was established on a basis, not of myth, but of history. The conceptual emphasis in Canadian culture we have been speaking of is a consequence, and an essential part, of this historical bias.

4.8 Literature: An Expression Of Reading, Not Experience

Canada, of course or the place where Canada is can supply distinctive setting and props to a writer who is looking for local colour. Tourist –writing has its own importance, as has the use of Canadian history for purposes of romance. But it would be an obvious fallacy to claim that the setting provided anything than novelty. When Canadian writers are urged to use this distinctively Canadian themes the fallacy is less obvious, but still there. The forms of literature are autonomous: they exist within literature itself, and cannot be derived from any experience outside literature. What the Canadian writer finds in his experience and environment may be new, but it will be new only as content: the form of his expression of it can take shape only from what he has read, not from what he has experienced. A writer who is or who feels removed from literary tradition tends rather to take over forms already in existence. We notice how often the surveyors of Canadian fiction in this book have occasion to remark that a novel contains a good deal of sincere feeling and accurate observation, but that it is spoiled by an unconvincing plot, usually one too violent or dependant on coincidence for such material. What has happened is that the author felt he could make a novel out of his knowledge and observation, but had no story in particular to tell. His material did not come to him in the form of a story, but as a consolidated chunk of experience, reflection, and sensibility. He had to invent a plot to put this material in causal shape, to pour the new wine of content into the old bottles of form.

4.9 Canadian Literary Tradition

4.9.1 Literature: A Conscious Mythology

Literature is conscious mythology: as society develops, its mythical stories become structural principles of storytelling, its mythical concepts, sun-gods and the like, become habits of metaphorical thought. In a fully mature literary tradition the writer enters into a structure of traditional stories and theories. He often has the feeling and says so, that he is not actively shaping his material at all, but is rather a place where a verbal structure is taking its own shape. If a novelist, he starts with a story telling impetus; if a poet, with a metaphor-crystallizing impetus. Down to the beginning of Twentieth century at least, the Canadian who wanted to write started with a feeling of detachment from his literary tradition, which existed for him mainly in his school books. He had probably been educated in a way that heavily stressed the conceptual and argumentative use of language. The Indians began with a mythology which included all the main elements of Canadian literary tradition. It was impossible for Canadians to establish any real continuity with it: Indians, like the rest of the country, were seen as nineteenth-century literary conventions. Certain elements in Canadian culture, too, such as the protestant revolutionary view of history, may have minimized the importance of the oral tradition in ballad and folk song, which seems to have survived best in catholic communities. In Canada the mythical was simply the 'prehistoric' and the writer had to attach himself to his literary tradition deliberately and voluntarily.

4.9.2 Writing is a Form of Self-Expression

The separation of subject and object is the primary fact of consciousness. Writing for him does not start with a rhythmical movement, or an impetus caught from or encouraged by a group of contemporaries: it starts with reportage, a single mind reacting to what is set over against it. Such a writer does not naturally think metaphorically but descriptively; it seems obvious to him that writing is a form of self-expression, dependent on the gathering of a certain amount of experience granted some inborn sensitivity toward that experience. Many Canadian novelists have written only one novel, or only one good novel and many Canadian poets have written only one good book of poems, generally their first and even the dream of 'the great Canadian novel', the feeling that somebody, someday will write a Canadian fictional classic, assumes that whoever does it will do it only once. The Canadian writers who have overcome these difficulties and have found their way back to the real headwaters of inspiration are heroic explorers. There are a good many of them, and the evidence of this book is that the Canadian imagination has passed the stage of exploration and has embarked on that of settlement. But it is of course full of the failures as well as the successes of exploration, and imaginative voyages. Canadians write many historical romances, popularly called the rut and thrust variety. The tendency to melodrama in romance makes it part of a central convention of that time. They get a little sexier and more violent, as they go on but the formula remains much the same: so much love-making, so much 'research' about antiquities and costume copied off filing cards, more love-making, more filing cards. This is what is expected of best sellers, and it is true of Canadian best sellers also.

4.9.3 Romance Versus Contemporary Realism

In Mr. Roper's chronicle not all the fictions is romance, but nearly all of it is formula-writing. In Mr. Pacey's period there is a more consistent distinction between the romancer, who stays with

established values and usually chooses a subject remote in time from himself, and the realist, who deals with contemporary life, and therefore—it appears to be a therefore—is a more serious in intention, more concerned to unsettle a stock response. One tendency culminates in Mazo de la Roche, the other in Morley Callaghan, both professional writers and born story-tellers, though of very different kinds. By Mc Pherson's period, the two tendencies have more widely diverged. One is mainly romance dealing with Canada's past, the other is contemporary realism dealing with what is common to Canada and the rest of the world, like antique and modern furniture stores. There is something similar in the poetry, a contrast between a romantic tradition closely associated with patriotic and idealistic themes, and a more intellectualized one with a more cosmopolitan bias. This contrast is prominently featured in the first edition of A.J.M Smith's anthology, *A Book Of Canadian Poetry*. This contrast of romantic and realistic, the latter having a moral dignity that a former lacks, reflects the social and conceptual approach to literature already mentioned. We all feel a general difference between serious and soothing literature, like popular literature... though I know of no critical rule for distinguishing them, nor is there likely to be one. The same work may belong to both mythologies at once, and in fact the separation between them is largely a perspective of our own revolutionary age.

4.9.4 The Role of Romance and Melodrama in Consolidating a Social Mythology

In many popular novels, especially in nineteenth century, we feel how strong the desire is on the part of the author to work out his situation within a framework of established social values. There is nothing hypocritical or cynical about this: the author usually believes very deeply in his values. Moral earnestness and the posing of serious problems are by no means excluded from popular literature; any more than serious literature is excused from the necessity of being entertaining. The difference is in the position of the reader's mind at the end, whether he is being encouraged to remain within his habitual social responses or whether he is being prodded into making the steep and lonely climb into the imaginative world. The distinction in itself is familiar enough, what is being referred to here, is the garrison mentality which is highly favourable to the growth of popular literature. The role of romance and melodrama in consolidating a social mythology is as follows: in romance, the characters tend to be psychological projections, heroes, heroines, villains, father figures, comic relief caricatures. The popular romance operates on Freudian principles, releasing sexual and power fantasies without disturbing the anxieties of the super ego. The language of melodrama, at once violent and morally conventional, is the appropriate language for this.

4.10 The Total Effect of Canadian Popular Fiction

The total effect of Canadian popular fiction, whatever incidental merits in it there may be, is that of a murmuring and echoing literary collective unconscious, the rippling of a watery Narcissus world reflecting the imaginative patterns above it. Occasionally a writer is individualized by accident. Thus Susanna Moodie in the Peterborough bush, surrounded by a half-comic, half-sinister rabble that she thinks of indifferently as Yankee, Irish, native, republican, and lower class, is a British army of occupation in herself, a one-woman garrison. As in Leacock, we find a spirit of criticism, even of satire, that is the complementary half of a strong attachment to the mores that provoke the satire. That is, a good deal of what goes in Mariposa may look ridiculous, but the norms or standards against which it looks ridiculous are provided by Mariposa itself. In Sara Jennette Duncan there is something else

again, as she watches the garrison parade to church in a small Ontario town: ‘the repressed magnetic excitement in gatherings of familiar faces, fellow beings bound by the same convention to the same kind of behavior, is precious in communities where the human interest is still and sparse.’ Here is a voice of genuine detachment, sympathetic but not defensive either of the group or of herself, concerned primarily to understand and to make the reader see. The social group is becoming external to the writer, but not in a way that isolates her from it.

4.11 Detachment in Canadian Writing

This razor’s edge of detachment is naturally rare in Canadian writing, even in this author, but as the twentieth century advances and Canadian society takes a firmer grip of its environment, it becomes easier to assume the role of an individual separated in standards and attitude from the community. When this happens an ironic or realistic literature becomes fully possible. This new kind of detachment of course often means only that the split between subject and object has become identified with a split between individual and society. But some of the most powerful Canadian novels have been those in which this conflict has been portrait objectively. The feeling of detachment from society means only that society has become more complex, and inner tensions have developed in it. If the general line of thought is sound, the imaginative writer is finding his identity with the world of literature itself. He is withdrawing from what Douglas Le Pan calls a country without a mythology, into the country of mythology, ending where Indians began. But the progress may not be for saking the Canadian for the international, the province for the capital. It may be that when the Canadian writer attaches himself to the world of literature, he discovers, or rediscovers, by doing so, something in his Canadian environment which is more vital and articulate than a desk.

4.12 Pastoral Myth

At the heart of all social mythology lies what may be called, becomes it usually is called, a pastoral myth, the vision of a social ideal. The pastoral myth in its most common form is associated with childhood, or with some earlier social condition: pioneer life, the small town, the habitant rooted to his land: that can be identified with childhood. The nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it. With a leisure and composure not to be found today, is particularly strong in Canada. It is the theme of all the essayists who write of fishing and other form of simpler life, especially as lived in the past. Mr. Bailey speaks the eighteenth-century loyalist as looking ‘to a past that have never existed for comfort and illumination’, which suggest that the pastoral myth has been around for some time. Another form of pastoral myth is the evocation of an earlier period of history which is made romantic by having a more uninhibited expression of passion or virtue or courage attached to it. This of course links the pastoral myth with the vision of vanished grandeur that comes into the novel about the ancient regime.

4.12.1 Pastoral Myth in the Sense of Kinship with the Animal and Vegetable World

Close to the center of pastoral myth in the sense of kinship with the animal and vegetable world, which is so prominent a part of the Canadian frontier. It must be very rarely that a novelist—a wide awake and astute novelist—can call her heroine a cow with such affection even admiration. Prevalence in Canada of animal stories, in which animals are closely assimilated to human behaviours

and emotions, has been noted by Mr. Lucas and Miss. Macpherson particularly. The theme of Grove's *A Search For America* is the narrators search for a North American pastoral myth in its genuinely imaginative form, as distinct from its sentimental or socially stereotyped form. The narrator, adrift in the New World without means of support, has a few grotesque collisions with the hustling mercantilism of American life—selling encyclopedias and the like—and gets badly bruised in spirit. He becomes convinced that this America is a false social development which has grown over and concealed the real American social ideals, and tries to grasp the form of this buried society. He wants to become, to reverse Mr. Lucas's clever phrase, a Rousseau and not a Crusoe of his new world. Grove drops a hint in a footnote near the end that what his narrator is looking for has been abandoned in the United States but perhaps not yet in Canada. This is not the present moral: pastoral myths, even in their genuine forms, do not exist as places. They exist rather in such things as the loving delicacy of perception in Grove's own *Over Prairie Trails And The Turn Of The Year*. Still the remark has some importance because it indicates that the conception 'Canada' can also become a pastoral myth in certain circumstances. Mr. Daniells speaking of the nineteenth-century mystique of Canadianism, says: 'A world is created, its centre in the Canadian home, its middle distance the loved landscape of Canada, its protecting wall the circle of British institutions . . . a world as centripetal as that of Sherlock Holmes and as little liable to be shaken by irruptions of evil.' The myth suggested here is somewhat Virgilian in shape, pastoral serenity serving as a prologue to the swelling act of the imperial theme. Nobody who saw it in that way was a Virgil, however, and it has been of minor literary significance.

4.12.2 The Pastoral Myth : an Idealization of Memory

The pastoral myth, in its popular and sentimental form, has been found to be an idealization of memory, especially childhood memory. The same myth exists in a genuinely imaginative form, and its influence has been found in some of the best Canadian writers. It has been pointed out that a literature creates a detached and autonomous mythology, and that society itself produces a corresponding mythology, to which a good deal of literature belongs. The present problem is to see if a step can be taken beyond Grove and some characterization of the myth he was looking for, be attempted, a myth which would naturally have an American context but a particular reference to Canada. The sentimental or nostalgic pastoral myth increases the feeling of separation between subject and object by withdrawing the subject into a fantasy world. The genuine myth, then, would result from reversing this process. Myth starts with the identifying of subject and object, the primary imaginative act of literary creation. It is therefore the most explicitly mythopoeic aspect of Canadian literature and found centered in the poetry rather than the fiction. There are many reasons for this: one is that in poetry there is no mass market to encourage the writer to seek refuge in conventional social formulas.

4.13 Canadian Poetry: Narrative Rather than Lyrical

A striking fact about Canadian poetry is the number of poets who have turned to narrative forms rather than lyrical ones. It has two characteristics that account for its being especially important in Canadian literature. In the first place, it is impersonal. The bald and dry statement is the most effective medium for its treatment of action, and the author, as in the folk song and ballad, is able to keep out of sight or speak as one of a group. In the second place, the natural affinities of poetic narrative are with tragic and ironic themes, not with the more manipulated comic and romantic formulas of prose fiction. Consistently in its impersonal form, tragedy and irony are expressed in the action of the

poem rather than in its moods or in the poet's own comment. It is hardly expected of the earlier narratives to be successful all through, but if read with sympathy and historical imagination, it can be seen how the Canadian environment has exerted its influence on the poet. The environment, in nineteenth-century Canada, is terrifyingly cold, empty and vast, where the obvious and immediate sense of nature is the Romantic one, increasingly affected by Darwinism, of nature red in tooth and claw.

4.14 Typical Characteristics of Canadian Poetry

a. Human Suffering-The recurrence of such episodes as ship wreck, Indian massacres, human sacrifices, lumbermen mangled in log-jams, mountain climbers crippled on glaciers, animals screaming in traps, the agonies of starvation and solitude—in short, the 'shutting out of the whole moral creation' is noticed in Canadian poetry. Human suffering, in such an environment, is a byproduct of a massive indifference which, whatever else it may be, is not morally explicable. What confronts the poet is a moral silence deeper than any physical silence, though the latter frequently symbolizes the former, as in the poem of Pratt that is explicitly called 'Silences'. **b. Riddle Of Unconsciousness-**The nineteenth-century Canadian poet can hardly help being preoccupied with physical nature; the nature confronting him presents him with the riddle of unconsciousness, and the riddle of unconsciousness in nature is the riddle of death in man. Hence his central emotional reaction is bound to be elegiac and somber, full of loneliness and fear, or at least wistful and nostalgic, hugging, like, Roberts, a 'darling illusion'. The riddle of unconsciousness in nature is one that no moralizing or intellectualizing can answer. More important, it is one that irony cannot answer: "The grey shape with the Paleolithic face/Was still the master of the longitudes." The conclusion of Pratt's *Titanic* is almost documentary: it is as stripped of irony as it is of moralizing. The elimination of irony from poet's view of nature makes that view pastoral—a cold pastoral, but still a pastoral. There is only physical nature and a rudimentary human society, not strong enough yet to impose the human forms of tragedy and irony on experience. **c. The Eliot Myth-**The same elegiac and lonely tone continues to haunt the later poetry. Those who in the twenties showed the influence of the death-and-resurrection myth of Eliot, notably Leo Kennedy and A.J.M. Smith, were also keeping to the centre of a native tradition. The use of the Eliot myth was sometimes regarded as a discovery of myth. The riddle of the unconscious may be expressed by a symbol such as the agonies of a dying animal, or it may be treated simply as an irreducible fact of existence. But it meets us everywhere. Margaret Avison's 'Identity' exemplifies this feature: But on this sheet of beryl, this high sea, Scalded by the white unremembering glaze, No wisps disperse. This is the icy pole. The presence here is single, worse than soul, Pried loose forever out of nights and days And birth and death And all the covering wings. In such an environment, we may well wonder how the sentimental pastoral myth ever developed at all. But of course there are summer months, and a growing settlement of the country that eventually began to absorb at least Eastern Canada into the North Temperate Zone. Pratt's Newfoundland background helped to keep his center of gravity in the elegiac, but when he began to write, the feeling of mindless hostility of nature has largely retreated to the prairies, where, a fictional realism developed, closely related to this feeling in mood and imagery. The Wordsworthian sense of nature as a teacher is apparent as early as Mrs. Traill, in whom Mr. Lucas notes a somewhat selective approach to the subject reminiscent of Miss. Muffet. As the sentimental pastoral myth takes shape, its imaginative counterpart takes shape too, the other, the gentler, more idyllic half of the myth that has made the pastoral itself a central literary convention. **d. Triangular Conflict Of Nature, Society And Individual-**In this version nature, though still full of awfulness and mystery, is the visible representative of an order that man has violated, a spiritual unity that the intellect

murders to dissect. This form of the myth is more characteristic of the second phase of Canadian social development, when the conflict of man and nature is expanding into a triangular conflict of nature, society, and individual. Here the individual tends to ally himself with nature against society. A very direct and haunting statement of this attitude occurs in John Robins's incomplete anglers: 'I can approach a solitary tree with pleasure, a cluster of trees with joy, and a forest with rapture; I must approach a solitary man with caution, a group of men with trepidation, and a nation of men with terror.' It is the appearance of this theme in D C. Scott which moves Mr. Daniells to call Scott one of the 'ancestral voices' of the Canadian imagination. It is much stronger and more continuous in Lampman, who talks less than his contemporaries and strives harder for the uniting of subject in the imaginative experience. This union takes place in the contact of individual poet and a landscape uninhabited except for Wordsworth's 'huge and mighty forms' that are manifested by the union: "Nay more, I think some blessed power/ Hath brought me wandering idly here." Again as in Wordsworth, this uniting of individual mind and nature is an experience from which human society, as such, is excluded. Thus when the poet finds a 'blessed power' in nature it is the society he leaves behind that tend to become the god-forsaken wilderness. Usually this society is merely trivial or boring; once, in the unforgettable 'City of the End of Things,' it becomes demonic. The two aspects of the pastoral tradition that are being traced are not inconsistent with each other; they are rather complementary. At one pole of experience there is a fusion of human life and the life in nature; at the opposite pole is the identity of the sinister and terrible elements in nature with the death-wish in man. As the process of a civilization conquering the landscape and imposing an alien and abstract pattern on it goes on, the writers, the poets especially, tend increasingly to see much of this process as something that is human but still dehumanized, leaving man's real humanity a part of the nature that he continually violates but is still inviolate. Reading through any good collection of modern Canadian poems or stories, one finds every variety of tone, mood, attitude, technique and setting. But there is a certain unity of impression one gets from it, an impression of gentleness and reasonableness, seldom difficult or greatly daring in its imaginative flights, the passion whether of love or anger, held in check by something meditative. It is not easy to put the feeling in words, but if one turns to the issue of the Tamarack Review that was devoted to West Indian literature, or to the Hungarian poems translated by Canadians in the collection *The Plough and the Pen*, it can be seen by contrast something of both the strength and the limitations of the Canadian writers. They too have lived, if not in Arcadia, at any rate in a land where empty space and the pervasiveness of physical nature have impressed a pastoral quality on their minds.

4.15 Canadian Radicalism

Canada has participated to the full in the wars, economic expansions, technological achievements, and internal stresses of the modern world. Canadians seem well adjusted to the new world of technology and very efficient at handling it. Yet in the Canadian imagination there are deep reservations to this world as an end of life in itself, and the political separation of Canada has helped to emphasize these reservations in its literature. English Canada began with the influx of defeated Tories after the American Revolution, and so in its literature, with a strong anti-revolutionary bias. The Canadian radicalism that developed in opposition to Loyalism was not a revival of the American revolutionary spirit, but a quite different movement, which had something in common with the Toryism it opposed: one thinks of the Tory and radical elements in the social vision of William Cobbett, who also finds a place in the Canadian record. The strong romantic tradition in Canadian literature has much to do with its original conservatism.

4.16 Writers of the Last Decade

The writers of the last decade, at least, have begun to write in a world which is post-Canadian, as it is post-American, post-British, and post everything except the world itself. There are no provinces in the empire of aeroplane and television, and no physical separation from the centres of culture, such as they are. Sensibility is no longer dependent on a specific environment or even on sense experience itself. New conditions give the old ones a new importance, as what vanishes in one form reappears in another. One gets very tired, in old-fashioned biographies. Of the dubious embryology that examines a poet's ancestry and wonders if a tendency to fantasy in him could be the result of an Irish great-grandmother. A reader may feel the same unreality in efforts to attach Canadian writers to a tradition made up of earlier writers whom they may not have read or greatly admired. There does seem to be such a thing as an imaginative continuum and writers are conditioned in their attitudes by their predecessors, or the cultural climate of their predecessors, whether there is conscious influence or not. Again, nothing can give a writer's experience and sensitivity any form except the study of literature itself. In this study the great classics, 'monuments of its own magnificence' and the best contemporaries have an obvious priority. The more such monuments or such contemporaries there are in a writer's particular cultural traditions, the more fortunate he is; but he needs those traditions in any case. He needs them most of all when what faces him seems so new as to threaten his identity. For present and future writers in Canada and their readers, what is important in Canadian literature, beyond the merits of the individual works in it, is the inheritance of the entire enterprise. The writers featured in this book have identified the habits and attitudes of the country, as Fraser and Mackenzie have identified its rivers. They have also left an imaginative legacy of dignity and of high courage.

4.17 Let Us Sum Up

An observation in Northrop Frye's 'Conclusion' to *The Literary History of Canada* gave the impression that he regarded Canadian literature as inferior to the work of 'the world's major writers' but that he was willing to treat it more leniently because of its 'social significance,' a value that he earlier had disparaged as 'usually disastrous' to literary excellence.

- Frye gradually assembled a range of judgments and preferences that coalesced into those themes - the garrison mentality, the frostbite of colonialism, the continent as leviathan - that inspired one generation of Canadian critics and provoked the next.
- The garrison mentality is the attitude of a member of a community that feels isolated from cultural centres and besieged by a hostile landscape. Frye maintained that such communities were peculiarly Canadian, and fostered a literature that was formally immature, that displayed deep moral discomfort with "uncivilized" nature, and whose narratives reinforced social norms and values.
- Frye neatly divided national culture into three levels: popular lifestyle, traditional ideology, and creative powers.
- Like other kinds of history, literary history of Canada has its own themes of exploration, settlements and developments, but these themes relate to a social imagination that explores and settles and develops, and the imagination has its own rhythms of growth as well as its modes of expression. One theme which runs all through this book is the obvious and unquenchable

desire of the Canadian cultural public to identify itself through its literature. The notion that the literature one admires must have been nourished by something admirable in the social environment is persistent, but has never been justified by evidence.

- Puritan inhibitions, pioneer life, “an age too late, cold climate or years”——these may be important as factors or conditions of Canadian culture, helping to characterize its qualities.
- Canada has two languages and two literatures and the advantages of having a national culture based on two languages are in some respects very great, but of course they are for the most part potential. The difficulties, if more superficial, are also more actual and more obvious.
- English Canada was a part of the wilderness, then a part of the North America and the British Empire, then a part of the world but it has gone through these revolutions too quickly for a tradition of writing to be founded on any one of them.
- In the Canada’s even in the Maritimes, the frontiers was all around one, a part and a condition of one’s whole imaginative being.
- Canada, is ‘The paradox of vast empty spaces plus lack of privacy’, without defenses against the prying or avaricious eye. The resentment expressed against this in Canada seems to have taken political rather than literary forms: this may be partly because Canadians have learned from their imaginative experience to look at each other in much the same way: ‘as objects, even as obstacles’
- What is perhaps the most comprehensive structure of ideas yet made by Canadian thinker, the structure embodied in ‘Innis’s Bias of Communication, is concerned with the same thing as a disciple of Innis, Marshall McLuhan, continues to emphasize the unity of communication, as a complex containing both verbal and non-verbal factors, and warns us against making unreal divisions within it.
- Religion has been the major cultural force in Canada, at least down to the last generation or two. The effective religious factors in Canada were doctrinal and evangelical, those that stress the arguments of religion at the expense of its imagery.
- The mystique of Canadianism was accompanied by an intellectual tendency to create a disinterested structure of words, in poetry and in fiction, which is a very different achievement.
- Frye has long been impressed in Canadian poetry by a tone of deep terror in regard to nature. It is not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest. The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values.
- As the center of the Canadian life moves from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality, changes correspondingly.
- The forms of literature are autonomous: they exist within literature itself, and cannot be derived from any experience outside literature.
- Literature is conscious mythology: as society develops, its mythical stories become structural principles of storytelling, its mythical concepts, sun-gods and the like, become habits of

metaphorical thought. In a fully mature literary tradition the writer enters into a structure of traditional stories and theories.

- The role of romance and melodrama in consolidating a social mythology is as follows: in romance, the characters tend to be psychological projections, heroes, heroines, villains, father figures, comic relief caricatures. The popular romance operates on Freudian principles, releasing sexual and power fantasies without disturbing the anxieties of the super ego. The language of melodrama, at once violent and morally conventional, is the appropriate language for this.
- The two aspects of the pastoral tradition that is being traced are not inconsistent with each other; they are rather complementary. At one pole of experience there is a fusion of human life and the life in nature; at the opposite pole is the identity of the sinister and terrible elements in nature with the death-wish in man. The writers of the last decade, at least, have begun to write in a world which is post-Canadian, as it is post-American, post-British, and post everything except the world itself.
- For present and future writers in Canada and their readers, what is important in Canadian literature, beyond the merits of the individual works in it, is the inheritance of the entire enterprise. The writers featured in this book have identified the habits and attitudes of the country, as Fraser and Mackenzie have identified its rivers. They have also left an imaginative legacy of dignity and of high courage.

4.18 Review Questions

1. How is literature an expression of reading and not experience?
2. What do you know of the Canadian literary tradition?
3. "Literature is conscious mythology". Elucidate.
4. Do you agree with the statement that writing is a form of self-expression?
5. Throw light on Frye's opinion on romance versus contemporary realism.
6. Explain the role of romance and melodrama in consolidating a social mythology.
7. Write a note on the following:
 - a. The total effect of Canadian popular fiction.
 - b. Detachment in Canadian writing.
 - c. Pastoral myth
8. How is language the most obvious tension in the Canadian literary situation?
9. What do you know of the cultural history of Canada?
10. How is Canadian Sensibility and Identity expressed in Canadian literature?
11. Write a short note on the following:
 - a. Position Of The Frontier In The Canadian Imagination
 - b. Unity Of Communication
 - c. Freudianism
 - d. Writers Of The Last Decade
 - e. Canadian Radicalism.
12. Attempt an essay on Garrison Mentality, its changes and development.

13. How has religion proved to be the major cultural force in Canada?
14. Explain the “triangular conflict of nature, society and individual”.
15. What role does romance and melodrama play in consolidating a social mythology?

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UNIT-5

EDWIN JOHN DOVE PRATT (I)

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 About the Author
- 5.3 The Canadian Age
- 5.4 New Foundland
 - 5.4.1 Background of the poem
 - 5.4.2 The Text
 - 5.4.3 Critical Paraphrase
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Review Questions
- 5.7 Bibliography

5.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to Canadian poets and modernist poetry.
- To acquire a knowledge of Canadian landscape.
- To introduce the students to the life and works of Edwin John Dove Pratt and his age.
- To help the students to gain knowledge and understanding of the poet and his works.

5.1 Introduction

In the first quarter of the present century, after the confirmation of Canada's status as a separate nation state, a new sense of national consciousness was reinforced. This spirit was a kind of desire for a truly Canadian art and literature, which would confirm the Canadian identity. *The Canadian Bookman* in 1919, *The Canadian Forum* in 1920 and the Canadian Author's Association in 1921 gave a genuine expression to this desire as their aim was "to trace and value these developments of art and letters which are distinctively Canadian." In a limited sense, the same expression was applicable to the modernist poetry which was to be written. The artists and poets made conscious efforts lest the poetry in England and America be merely an echo of poetry of the parent trunk rather than being unique and original in itself. So artists like Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald and Frederick Varley who made the Group of Seven and poets like E.J. Pratt, F.R. Scott and A.J.M. Smith concluding that art is international, accommodated the developing modern movements in England and the United States "to the desire to find subjects and techniques that were genuinely Canadian." They found answer in the fusion of a distinctively Canadian landscape and cultivated

modernist technique.

In the 1940's there was an invigoration. Protest-social, environmental, personal, and economic was strenuously voiced. While the First World War had shaken individual faiths and beliefs, the Second World War smashed values wholesale. Personality, for its survival, was thrown on the toughness of character and the Canadian poets accepted the challenge posed by the situation. The Canadian poets of the forties demanded dignity, personal and social, buttressed it, defended it, and published it.

5.2 About the Author

E.J.P Edwin John Dove Pratt, (February 4, 1882 – April 26, 1964), who published as E. J. Pratt, was a Canadian poet from Newfoundland. Born in Western Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador, Pratt grew up in a variety of Newfoundland communities in Newfoundland, as his Methodist minister father (originally from Yorkshire) was posted to various communities around the colony. Pratt himself was also ordained as a Methodist minister, but never served in the church. Pratt's choice not to enter the ministry was apparently the result of a crisis of faith not uncommon in the late-Victorian era that produced him; but it also had its roots in his childhood encounters with the tragedies of Newfoundland seafaring life.

Pratt married Viola Whitney Pratt, a writer, and they had one daughter, Claire Pratt, who also became a writer and poet. Pratt studied psychology at the University of Toronto, and taught psychology and English literature at Victoria College until 1953. He travelled extensively throughout outport Newfoundland with his family in his early years, including Bonavista, Cupids, Blackhead, Brigus, Fortune, the Grand Banks, and later St. John's. For three years he apprenticed at a dry goods store in St. John's, later taught for two years in Moreton's Harbour, and was a probationary Methodist minister in and around Conception Bay.

E.J. Pratt was 'Ned' to the many friends who still remember with affection his personal warmth and conviviality –was born in 1882 in Western Bay, Newfoundland, a village on Conception Bay. Growing up on the Newfoundland coast gave him an intense feeling for the sea, especially as a place where man is tested by nature; confrontations with the elements later became a frequent subject of the poetry. As a young man, Pratt prepared himself to follow his father into the Methodist ministry, and after his education at St John's Methodist College, he served as both a student-minister and a teacher in several small Newfoundland communities. In 1907 he came to Canada to continue his education, enrolling in Victoria College, University of Toronto, where he studied theology, philosophy, and psychology. In 1919, Pelham Edgar, the chairman of the Department of Canadian poetry, provided Pratt with an alternative to a religious career by making him an Associate Professor of English at Victoria, largely on the strength of his promise as a poet. Pratt remained there until he retired as Professor Emeritus in 1953.

Pratt was never a member of any school but in Toronto he was influenced by the English tradition, by sea poets like Alfred Noyles and John Masefield, and by Thomas Hardy. He is a quintessentially Canadian poet, for unlike his predecessors who were content to continue the nineteenth century Romantic tradition and optimistic philosophies of the more sentimental Victorians; he had northern vision of life's intractable hardness. He responded to the immensity and bleakness of the Canadian landscape by writing on subjects of commensurate proportion and austerity. The documentary

precision in the presentation of his subjects gives his poems their characteristic Canadian feeling of reality. His emphasis on group action rather than individuality marks him from most American writers. Pratt was a highly original poet. He worked outside the mainstream of modernism and with a fine disregard for literary fashion, fulfilled his own needs for imaginative expression. Accordingly, Pratt wrote with direct simplicity about some of the heroic phases of Canadian history and became one of the country's significant myth-makers.

In 1907, he relocated to Victoria College, University of Toronto, where he earned a Ph.D. in theology in 1917. He had an intense interest in psychology, which he tutored, as well as working in the Department of Philosophy. He began writing after being invited to attend Pelham Edgar's poetry reading group by Viola Whitney, whom he married in 1918. Edgar became his mentor and by 1920 Pratt had taken a post with the Department of English, Victoria College. His long history with Victoria College, University of Toronto, is evident in the library there, named in his honour.

Pratt has received numerous recognition including: Fellow of the Royal Canadian Society (1930), Editor and Contributing Founder of *Canadian Poetry Magazine* (1936), Governor General's Award for *The Fable of the Goats and Other Poems* (1937), *Brébeuf and His Brethren* (1940) and for *Towards the Last Spike* (1957), Lorne Pierce Gold Medal (1940), Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George (1946), Editor of *Saturday Night* (1952-1958), Honorary President of the Canadian Authors' Association (1955), Canadian Council Award (1957), and Honorary Degrees from University of Manitoba, Queen's University, McGill University, University of Toronto, Assumption, University of New Brunswick, University of Western Ontario and Memorial University of Newfoundland .

Pratt's first published work as a poet appeared in 1914, but his first memorable collection was 1923's *Newfoundland Verse*. Pratt ultimately became the foremost Canadian poet of the early twentieth century, winning Governor General's Awards in 1937, 1940 and 1952. He was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 1930, was awarded the Society's Lorne Pierce Medal in 1940, and was editor of *Canadian Poetry Magazine* from 1936 to 1943.

Pratt's work often drew from Canadian and Newfoundland history. He broke away from the old romantic tradition of Canadian poetry to write imaginative narratives of epic events. Among these are *Titans* (1926), *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe* (1930), *The Titanic* (1935), and *Dunkirk* (1941). His most ambitious work, *Brébeuf and His Brethren* (1940), records the heroism of martyred Jesuit missionaries.

Pratt trained for the ministry and later taught for many years at the University of Toronto. The early collection *The Titans* (1926) contains his widely read "The Cachalot," an account of a whale hunt. *Brébeuf and His Brethren* (1940), perhaps his best work, chronicles the martyrdom of Jesuit missionaries. Later collections include *Dunkirk* (1941), *They Are Returning* (1945), *Behind the Log* (1947), and *Towards the Last Spike* (1952).

5.3 The Canadian Age

E.J.Pratt was one of the first moderns to be recognized by the audience. He, being influenced by the Group of Seven as he had met them frequently at Toronto Arts and Letters Club, gave voice to Canadian landscape. He knew Mac Donald, Lismer, Jackson, Harris and Johnston. By 1922, he had

met Fredrick Varley at the club and the two became close friends. Pratt's attempt of giving voice to Canadian landscape was also influenced by Carl Sandburg's Chicago poems, which made imagism return to Canada. This influence is clearly discernible in Pratt's *Newfoundland verse* in which he gave a new bold, vigorous and direct vision of Canada. Although he had described a Newfoundland landscape in earlier poetry, it was not until after his association with the Group in 1921 that he began to stress a specifically "northern" nature.

Holding a partnership with life,
Resonant with the hopes of spring
Pungent with the airs of harvest..
They die with the Largo of dusk
Their hands are full to the overflow
In their right is the breath of life,
In their left are the waters of death.

5.4 Newfoundland

5.4.1 Background of the poem

Writing in the early twentieth century, Susan Gingell notes that Pratt followed three traditions: the English literary, the Canadian tradition, most notably piqued by the Confederation poets and the new verse stemming from Britain and the United States. Complementing these movements, there was Newfoundland ballads and folk songs mixed with a rising Canadian nationalism. All of these influences are found in his works. Pratt became a poet relatively late in life, and was conservative in his poetic techniques. He owed more to Thomas Hardy than to his contemporaries T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound. In 1923 he collected his early work in *Newfoundland Verse*, which includes two of the poems reprinted in this anthology: "Newfoundland" and "The Shark". His *Newfoundland Verse* records his child encounters with the tragedies of Newfoundland seafaring life.

Although E.J.Pratt is best known for his long narrative poems on epic subjects, his first published book *Newfoundland Verse* (1923), is a collection of lyrics. In the book, however, many of the themes and assumptions of the major poems are given their first significant expression. As he later wrote, he was puzzled by "the ironic enigma of nature in relation to the Christian view of the world". In one of his earliest poems, "Clay" Pratt gave voice to this puzzlement:

What shepherd this, that so attends his flocks.
As lead them out into the wilderness
What Father, this
Who care so little for his children's fate,
That though he holds the sea within his hands,
He pours its floods upon their heads, lets loose

His lightnings, blasts and stalking pestilences . . .

Named you him, Father?

God? No. Rather a Potter with some clay.

The publication in 1923 of Pratt's *Newfoundland Verse* marked a turning – point in Canadian literary history. The short poems collected in that volume initiated the Canadian modernist movement that would eventually include Robert Finch and Dorothy Livesay in Toronto and A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, Leo Kennedy, and A.M. Klein in Montreal. A.J.M. Smith and F.R. Scott, challenged this concept of literary nationalism and argued for the values of cosmopolitanism and a contemporary sensibility. These poets were attracted to the modernist movement; they read the new poetry in the Imagist anthologies and in Harriet Monroe's poetry: *A Magazine of Verse* and quickly mastered its techniques and idiom. They were particularly attracted to imagism because its values of hardness, compression, and clarity seemed to them well suited to convey the essence of the Canadian experience. At the same time, however, they could not share the literary cynicism of the post-war writers like Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

Canada was a new country, a lonely land but not a wasteland, and Canadian poets could not write about cultural decay when the country was at its beginning.' If anything, Canada has been exhilarated by the Great War, had come of age. These writers, then, turned away from Romanticism, not because the new idiom allowed them to portray more directly and honestly the hard, rugged reality of the Canadian landscape. This new vision is set forth in Smith's "The Lonely Land," an Imagist poem similar to H.D.'s "O read, and in a series of early poems by Scott, including "Devior Molluscule," "Old Song," and "Laurentian Shield," which celebrate a stoical pleasure in confronting life's adversities and in hard-won truth. Curiously, however, the writer most responsive to the northern vision of Canada was a poet who remained indifferent to the forces of modernism. Pratt himself, however, was never a member of any school or movement but a poet who went his own way in creating a distinctive body of work. Unlike his contemporaries, he generally worked in longer poetic forms – even moulding to narratives, *Brebeuf and His Brethren* and *Towards the Last Spike*, into national epics.

While Pratt worked to depict a Newfoundland that was yet "not characterised . . . by History's pen" (Pratt, 1917, 245), with the publication of *Titans* (1926) Pratt had become the first 'Canadian' voice in a decade persistent to find an authentic Canadian poetry. As the editor of *Canadian Forum*, Barker Fairley noted, "Take any previous Canadian poet and you have to admit that an Englishman residing in Canada might have written his work. No Englishman could have written *Titans*" (Fairly, 148-9). Many of Pratt's works depict Canadian content, contributing to a growing Canadian nationalism, most notably the epic poem *The Last Spike*. Pratt's Newfoundland depictions stem from his belief that poetry "came best out of the imagination working upon the material of actual experience".

"Erosion" (1931)

It took the sea a thousand years,

A thousand years to trace

The granite features of this cliff,

In crag and scarp and base.

It took the sea an hour one night,

An hour of storm to place
The sculpture of these granite seams
Upon a woman's face.

His narrative and imagist poetry expounds on the perils of humanity's struggle with a loving but cruel nature, in particular the sea. On one of his most recognized poems, "Erosion," he recounts that it

"sprang out of a circumstance related to my early life in Newfoundland. My father, who was a minister, found as the most trying of all his duties, the announcement of death to a woman whose husband or son had been lost at sea. 'To break the news' had a special Newfoundland ring about it and my father had sometimes to ask the local doctor to accompany him to the house. Once I went with the two of them and I still remember the change on the woman's face—the pallor and the furrow as the news sank in. 'Erosion' was written more than thirty years after but the memory of the face is as vivid today as it was at the time."

5.4.2 The Text

Here the tides flow,
And here they ebb;
Not with that dull, unsinewed tread of waters
Held under bonds to move
Around unpeopled shores—
Moon-driven through a timeless circuit
Of invasion and retreat;
But with a lusty stroke of life
Pounding at stubborn gates,
That they might run
Within the sluices of men's hearts,
Leap under throb of pulse and nerve,
And teach the sea's strong voice
To learn the harmonies of new floods,
The peal of cataract,
And the soft wash of currents
Against resilient banks,
Or the broken rhythms from old chords

Along dark passages
That once were pathways of authentic fires.
Red is the sea-kelp on the beach,
Red as the heart's blood,
Nor is there power in tide or sun
To bleach its stain.
It lies there piled thick
Above the gulch-line.
It is rooted in the joints of rocks,
It is tangled around a spar,
It covers a broken rudder,
Scattered on boom
And rudder and weed
Are tangles of shells;
Some with backs of crusted bronze,
And faces of porcelain blue,
Some crushed by the beach stones
To chips of jade;
And some are spiral-cleft
Spreading their tracery on the sand
In the rich veining of an agate's heart;
It is red as the heart's blood,
And salt as tears.
Here the winds blow,
And here they die,
Not with that wild, exotic rage
That vainly sweeps untrodden shores,
But with familiar breath
Holding a partnership with life,
Resonant with the hopes of spring,
Pungent with the airs of harvest.

They call with the silver fifes of the sea,
They breathe with the lungs of men,
They are one with the tides of the sea,
They are one with the tides of the heart,
They blow with the rising octaves of dawn,
They die with the largo of dusk,
Their hands are full to the overflow,
In their right is the bread of life,
In their left are the waters of death.
And others remain unscarred,
To babble of the passing of the winds.
Here the crags
Meet with winds and tides—
Not with that blind interchange
Of blow for blow
That spills the thunder of insentient seas;
But with the mind that reads assault
In crouch and leap and the quick stealth,
Stiffening the muscles of the waves.
Here they flank the harbours,
Keeping watch
On thresholds, altars and the fires of home,
Or, like mastiffs,
Over-zealous,
Guard too well.
Tide and wind and crag,
Sea-weed and sea-shell
And broken rudder—
And the story is told
Of human veins and pulses,

Of eternal pathways of fire,
Of dreams that survive the night,
Of doors held ajar in storms.

5.4.3 Critical Paraphrase

In the poem “Newfoundland” Pratt writes that the tides ebb and flow “within the sluices of men’s hearts,” that the winds “breath with the lungs of men”. But at the same time, purposeful men and women are separate from the world of tide, wind, and rocks. One of the central conflicts in Pratt’s verse is humanity’s origin and kinship with nature. The partnership of man with the elements –the sea ,wind and land- in “Newfoundland” creates the vitality of the island ,a vitality born of struggle which sometimes ends with the harvest of the sea and sometimes with the harvest of death.

Pratt establishes himself as a poet whose vision takes root in the hard realities of life in a bleak northern land, where men and woman wage an endless struggle to make a living from the sea Loss of life on the water is the occasion around which several poems take shape. To Pratt, nature is a part of cosmic process – amoral and without intelligence. Humankind has evolved out of nature but does not conform to its laws, for it has intelligence and will and a capacity to choose the way to live.

The poem “Newfoundland” deals with the partnership of man with elements of nature: sea, wind and land, in “Newfoundland” it creates the vitality of the island, a vitality born of struggle, which sometimes ends with the harvest of death.

There is a great deal which man can learn from nature, for instance, the sea teaches him to struggle with “invasion” and “retreat” and remain as strong and fierce as the sea is.

And teach the sea’s strong voice
To learn the harmonies of new floods,
The peal of cataract,
And the soft wash of currents
Against resilient banks,
Or the broken rhythms from old chords
Along dark passages
That once were pathways of authentic fires

The colour red used to describe the sea-weed is symbolic of awe and its bloodshed, it is also indicative of how ruthlessly the sea can swallow up lives and nothing has shown the power to “bleach its stain”. It could be beautiful when it appears covering “ a broken rudder” or “tangled around a spar” but at the same the destructive nature of the sea is denoted by comparing it to the redness of heart’s blood and saltishness of tears which are indicative of the sorrow which it can rise to.

Man’s inseparability with nature is clearly depicted in the next stanza where the poet points out how the winds of the sea are resonant with man’s breath, hopes and aspirations, they blow with a familiar breath, “holding a partnership with life” they enable human beings to either succeed in harvest

or end up in waters of death ; thus interminately linked with all human activity.

They call with the silver fifes of the sea,
They breathe with the lungs of men,
They are one with the tides of the sea,
They are one with the tides of the heart,
They blow with the rising octaves of dawn,
They die with the largo of dusk,
Their hands are full to the overflow,
In their right is the bread of life,
In their left are the waters of death.

The beauty of the sea withits myriad coloured sea-shells which are scattered on “boom and rudder and weed”

Some with backs of crusted bronze,
And faces of porcelain blue,
Some crushed by the beach stones
To chips of jade;
And some are spiral-cleft
Spreading their tracery on the sand
In the rich veining of an agate’s heart;
And others remain unscarred,
To babble of the passing of the winds.

The last two lines depict the fact that amidst all different types of shells, some shells “remain unscarred” are not affected by time and tide, they are able to withstand the fury of nature and similar is the case with human beings, not all humans are sensitive to each and every incident in life, some are strong enough to withstand life’s trials and tribulations.

The ability to withstand and attack with a “blow for a blow” like the “insentient sea” is to be learnt from the crags which remain on guard flanking the harbours and holding the sea from going beyond its threshold and entering the landmass to destroy “altars and the fires of homes”. So the sea has in many ways connected itself with the lives of humans in such an inextricable manner that there are innumerable tales to be narrated now and then regarding man’s experiences with nature:

Of human veins and pulses,
Of eternal pathways of fire,
Of dreams that survive the night,

5.5 Let Us Sum Up

- In the 1940's there was an invigoration. Protest in favour of social, environmental, personal, and economic ideals were strenuously voiced.
- While the First World War had shaken individual faiths and beliefs, the Second World War smashed values wholesale.
- Pratt created a distinctive body of work and many of his works depict Canadian content, contributing to a growing Canadian nationalism.
- Unlike his contemporaries, he generally worked in longer poetic forms – even moulding to narratives, *Brebeuf and His Brethren* and *Towards the Last Spike*, into national epics.
- Pratt's narrative and imagist poetry expounds on the perils of humanity's struggle with a loving but cruel nature, in particular the sea.
- The central conflicts in Pratt's verse is humanity's origin and kinship with nature.

5.6 Review Questions

1. Why do you think Pratt is virtually known outside the country?
2. What are the themes of Pratt's poetry?
3. How and where do we find a reflection of Newfoundland in his poetry?
4. What influences are found in his poetry?
5. Give the explanation of the poem with reference to context.
6. How was the poetry of Pratt different from the earlier poets?
7. Attempt a critical estimate of Pratt as a poet.

5.7 Bibliography

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UNIT-6

EDWIN JOHN DOVE PRATT (II)

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Pratt's Darwinism
- 6.2 Pratt's poetry: A Summing up of Canadian Poetic Imagination
- 6.3 The Theme of Death in Pratt's Poetry
- 6.4 Pratt's Style
- 6.5 *The Shark*
 - 6.5.1 The Text
 - 6.5.2 Critical Appreciation
- 6.6 *Come Away, Death*
 - 6.6.1 The Text
 - 6.6.2 Critical Appreciation
- 6.7 Concluding Remarks
- 6.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.9 Review Questions
- 6.10 Bibliography

6.0 Objectives

- To enable the students to comprehend Pratt's poems and his style of writing.
- To impart the knowledge of the themes of Pratt's poems.
- To help the students understand the autobiographical element in Pratt's presentation of nature.
- To convey how Pratt gives life and imagery to Canadian landscape

6.1 Pratt's Darwinism

The Darwinism that dominated the intellectual climate of Pratt's formative years seemed to offer more comprehensible explanations of the natural world and man's place in it than those Pratt found in religion. Although Christianity continued to provide him a rich store of images, his poetry came to express, what Sandra Djwa called, an "evolutionary vision". The philosophical position implied in this poetry is not, however, entirely clear, for it variously commends humanism, Stoic heroism and aspects of Christianity. Perhaps the closest Pratt ever came to synthesizing his beliefs was in a statement he made, in a radio broadcast, about the self-sacrificing heroism shown in the sea-rescues that was the subject of *The Roosevelt and the Antiope*: 'Science in the league with good will; individual courage

and humanity behind the machine. It's that sort of thing that's the hope of the world.'

Pratt's most rousing affirmation of humanity in the face of an amoral, mechanistic cosmos is found in "The Truant," a long poem published in his last collection of lyrics, *Still Life and Other Verse* (1943). In this poem the god of the universe is called the great Panjandrum (a pretender to power), and his world is the mechanical order of the cosmos. Man, the truant, is brought protesting to the throne of the Almighty by the Master of the Revels and made to give an account of himself and his irregular ways. The Master of the Revels assures the Panjandrum that tests have been done and that man consists of the fundamentals, "calcium, carbon, phosphorous, vapour." However, man has a will and concepts are "not amenable to fire" and will not obey the laws of the cosmic dance.

Here the poet holds that human beings are more than a function of chemicals. They have a capacity for pain and joy and love and rebel against all mechanical and formal system. The Panjandrum threatens man with physical deterioration ("I shall make deaf the ear, and dim the eye / Put palsy in your touch ... shoot / Arthritic needles through your cartridge") which is, in fact, a literal account of what happens to mortal beings. But man, who through history has suffered untold agony in wars, still refuses to conform to the Panjandrum's laws. In a noble speech of defiance, he asserts the moral law of human love and brotherhood:

We who have met
With stubborn calm the dawn's hot fusillades;
Who have seen the forehead sweat
Under the tug of pulleys on the joints,
Under the liquidating tally
Of the eat-and-truncheon bastinades;
Who have taught our souls to rally
To mountain horns and the sea's rockets
When the needle ran demented through the points;
We who have learned to clench
Our fists and raise our lightless sockets
To morning skies after the midnight raids.
Yet cocked our cars to bugles on the barricades,
And in cathedral rubble found a way to quench
A dying thirst within a Galilean valley —
Not ! by the Rood, we will not join your ballet.

Although the human species have evolved out of nature, evolution has created in men and women an ethical impulse that raises the species above its primitive, savage origins.

In order to understand Pratt's poetry, we would have to keep in our mind Pratt's intention of

describing the landscape of North Pole. This can be seen in the following lines of “Iceberg” section of his most important book, *The Titanic*

Calved from a glacier near Godhaven coast,
If left for the sea - a host
Of white flotillas gathering in its wake....
No smoke
Of steamships nor the hoist of mainsails broke
The polar wastes – no sounds except the grind
Of Ice, the cry of curlews and the lore
Of winds from mesas of eternal snow...
Pressure and glacial time had stratified
The berg to the consistency of flint,
And kept inviolate, through clash of tide
And gate facade and columns with their hint
Of inward altars and of steepled bells
Ringing the passage of the parallels...
Another month and nothing but the brute
And palaeolithic outline of a face
Frantic the transatlantic shipping route.
A sloping spur that tapered to a law...

6.2 Pratt’s poetry: A Summing up of Canadian Poetic Imagination

Most of the poetry of E.J.Pratt has been a kind of summing up of the first phase of Canadian poetic imagination. In that phase Canada appeared in a flat Mercator projection with a nightmarish Green land, as a country of isolation and terror, and of the overwhelming of human values by an indifferent and wasteful nature. Pratt wrote ten long poems which deal with different phases of the evolutionary process – in *Titans* with the evolution of superior forms of animal life, in *Brébeuf and His Brethren* with civilization, in *The Titanic* with human technology, and in *Towards the Last Spike* with the development of Canada as a nation. The conflict in these poems is man versus nature, or, perhaps more precisely, the conflict between highly evolved, sophisticated forms of life and primitive, less-developed forms. Pratt grew up beside the North Atlantic, and the struggle with a harsh environment blind to human purposes was printed indelibly on his spirit. Accordingly, his imagination is most fully engaged when he is writing about those stark, primordial forms of nature which threaten to destroy civilization – the shark, the iceberg, the pitiless savages of the forest, the granite cliffs of a rocky coastline on which human beings continue to endure. As Northrop Frye has observed, there is a kind of innocence to the epic conflicts that Pratt describes because there is enmity without hatred. The

enemy is outside the human community; the conflict is part of the evolutionary process.

6.3 The Theme of Death in Pratt's Poetry

Many of Pratt's works frequently ruminate about death. Besides witnessing numerous funerals and disasters under his father's ministry, in 1898, he witnessed the *Greenland* bearing the frozen bodies of sealers back into St. John's, a subject addressed in "The Ice-Floes." Adding to this memorable tragedy, in 1912 his fiancée, Lydia Trimble, died, his friend and professor George Blewett drowned, by 1916 young Newfoundlanders died at the Battle of the Somme, and in 1924 his older brother committed suicide while his mother died a year later.

Most likely a result of his early experience with death, the heroism of humanity is sometimes hailed while at other times he writes of human defeat, tragedy and horror, reflected in his depictions of people as either saints or beasts. He also investigates the influence religion has on people, both its redemption and its paradoxes, which includes nature and humanity's struggle with technology.

Indeed, Pratt's long poems have sometimes overshadowed the short ones, many of which are important in their own right. The polished, epigrammatic quality of 'From Stone to Steel' and the density and complex dramatic construction of 'Come Away, Death' make them the most memorable poems in our literature true.

6.4 Pratt's Style

While Pratt gives these poems an epic quality-even utilising a twelve- part structure in *Brebeuf*-he never follows the epic convention of a single hero around whom events turn. Instead, individuals are inextricably part of a larger social unit, subjected not only to the not powerful influence of natural forces but to the shaping influences of their own technology or culture as well. The assimilation of historical details in these poems makes them examples of what Dorothy Livesay has called a new kind of poetry that is neither epic nor narrative, but documentary. 'The documentary quality of Pratt's poetry derives not only from subject matter but also from its specialised language, full of technical names, precise bits of knowledge, and facts, all of which cohere in such a way as to confirm Northrop Frye's observation in *The Bush Garden* that Pratt took on the role of epic bard in Canada, like a poet of an oral and pre-literate society, transforming the history and scientific knowledge of culture into a heroic and mythic whole.

6.5 *The Shark*

6.5.1 The Text

He seemed to know the harbour,

So leisurely he swam;

His fin,

Like a piece of sheet-iron,

Three-cornered,

And with knife-edge,

Stirred not a bubble
As it moved
With its base-line on the water.
His body was tubular
And tapered
And smoke-blue,
And as he passed the wharf
He turned,
And snapped at a flat-fish
That was dead and floating.
And I saw the flash of a white throat,
And a double row of white teeth,
And eyes of metallic grey,
Hard and narrow and slit.
Then out of the harbour,
With that three-cornered fin
Shearing without a bubble the water
Lithely,
Leisurely,
He swam—
That strange fish,
Tubular, tapered, smoke-blue,
Part vulture, part wolf,
Part neither—for his blood was cold.

6.5.2 Critical Appreciation

Munro Beattie holds that among the new poets Pratt stands high for his accuracy of observation and presentation. Nothing in the book is better displayed than “The Shark” in free verse that adds detail to detail at precisely the rate of perception and from a point of view that shift revealingly; rhythm and line-divisions lawlessly matched to the movement of the shark :

His fin,
Like a piece of sheet-iron,

Three concerned,
And with knife-edge,
Stirred not a bubble
As it moved
With its base line of the water...
And as he passed the wharf
He turned,
And snapped at flat-fish
That was dead and floating,
And I saw the flash of white throat,
And a double row of white teeth,
And eyes of metallic grey,
Hard and narrow and slit
That strange fish,
Tubular, tapered, smoke-blue,
Part vulture, part wolf.
Part neither—for his blood was cold.

In the early poem “The Shark”, Pratt creates a symbol of something terrifying and malignant in nature, a creature “tubular, tapered, smoke-blue.” more frightening than a vulture or wolf because its blood is cold. Admiration of nature is clearly visible in Pratt’s “The Shark” where he makes a clinical observation of the movement of the shark, of how it seemed to be comfortable with its bearings; it seemed to have thorough knowledge of each book and corner of the place where it lived.

The shark seemed to “know the harbour” and the first stanza of the poem is a picture of the leisurely movement of the shark in water. The fin appeared like a “piece of sheet iron”, it was “three cornered” and was sharp “knife-edged” and so was able to cut its way through the waters without creating bubbles or disturbing the motion of the water it was proceeding ahead very agilely and nonchalantly as if it were the lord of the seals.

A vivid description of the shark being “smoke-blue” and its body being tubular and tapered is juxtaposed with the fact that it has a cruel, killer instinct with a double row of white teeth and its nature was similar to the bird of prey- vulture and its survival instinct has made him cunning, crafty and ruthlessly cold blooded.

Part vulture, part wolf.
Part neither—for his blood was cold.

In “The Shark”, Pratt celebrates the absolute efficiency of a sea –creature whose design seems

to belong more to the realm of machine than to nature. In another poem “The Truant” Pratt pits man against the mechanical power that seems to have created the shark, the Panjandrum. “The Truant”—a central poem in the Pratt canon—asserts that man, suffering, defeated, dying, can still triumph over the ruthless power of the universe. Pratt repeatedly makes the reader shudder as he or she is forced to consider the origin of life in elements and forces remote from human intelligence and emotion. But at the same time, the poet marvels at the evolutionary process that produced human beings with their capacity for wonder, joy, and compassion.

6.6 *Come Away, Death*

6.6.1 The Text

Willy-nilly, he comes or goes, with the clown's logic,
Comic in epitaph, tragic in epithalamium,
And unsexed by any mused rhyme.
However blow the winds over the pollen,
Whatever the course of the garden variables,
He remains the constant,
Ever flowering from the poppy seeds.
There was a time he came in formal dress,
Announced by Silence tapping at the panels
In deep apology.
A touch of chivalry in his approach,
He offered sacramental wine,
And with acanthus leaf
And petals of the hyacinth
He took the fever from the temples
And closed the eyelids,
Then led the way to his cool longitudes
In the dignity of the candles.
His mediaeval grace is gone —
Gone with the flame of the capitals
And the leisured turn of the thumb
Leafing the manuscripts,
Gone with the marbles

And the Venetian mosaics,
With the bend of the knee
Before the rose-strewn feet of the Virgin.
The *paternosters* of his priests,
Committing clay to clay,
Have rattled in their throats
Under the gride of his traction tread.
One night we heard his footfall — one September night —
In the outskirts of a village near the sea.
There was a moment when the storm
Delayed its fist, when the surf fell
Like velvet on the rocks — a moment only;
The strangest lull we ever knew!
A sudden truce among the oaks
Released their fratricidal arms;
The poplars straightened to attention
As the winds stopped to listen
To the sound of a motor drone —
And then the drone was still.
We heard the tick-tock on the shelf,
And the leak of valves in our hearts.
A calm condensed and lidded
As at the core of a cyclone ended breathing.
This was the monologue of Silence
Grave and unequivocal.
What followed was a bolt
Outside the range and target of the thunder,
And human speech curved back upon itself
Through Druid runways and the Piltown scarp,
Beyond the stammers of the Java caves,
To find its origins in hieroglyphs

On mouths and eyes and cheeks
Etched by a foreign stylus never used
On the outmoded page of the Apocalypse.

6.6.2 Critical Appreciation

A formal poem on the occasion of a wedding, In “Come Away Death” critically regarded as Pratt’s finest lyric, the poet describes the possibility of humanity being thrown back to a state of savagery through its own self destructive impulses. The poem is an echo of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* in which a clown sings an ‘old and plain’ song that begins:

Come away, come away, death
And in sad cypress let me be laid
Fly away, fly away, breath,
I am slain by a fair cruel maid
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
Oh, prepare it!
My part of death, no one so true
Did share it!

The poem is a reflection on death in response to the bombing of Britain during World War 11. The cataclysmic horror of technological death is contrasted with its ritualization in earlier periods of history. In capital cities, the sound of “motor drone” and the “bolt” refer to the grating sound; perhaps also with its alternate meaning of a spasm of pain, breaking the calmness of the atmosphere. The poem refers to the introduction of tanks in modern warfare. The reference here is to the German buzz-bombs that fell during the Battle of Britain in 1940. When the drone of the bombs motor stopped, people took cover because that meant the bomb had begun its descent. The poet reminds us that all living things must die.

However blow the winds over the pollen,
Whatever the course of the garden variables,
He remains the constant,
Ever flowering from the poppy seeds.

In the second stanza the medieval dance of death is evoked to convey death’s constancy and unpredictability, but the idea of death is softened by chivalric personification and was celebrated as arriving in a formal dress with the offering “of sacramental wine”-

And with acanthus leaf
And petals of the hyacinth
He took the fever from the temples

And closed the eyelids,

A herb once in wide use for its supposed mollifying properties, Hyacinth petals were associated with the ancient festival honouring the mythic youth Hyacinthus, who was turned into a Hyacinth after his death at the hands of Apollo; the festival begins with funeral offering and lamentations, but ended with songs of joy for his achievement of immortality, just as it is romanticized in the Clown's song in Twelfth night.

The third stanza, however, asserts that chivalric death is no longer possible. In the twentieth century it takes the form of tanks used in the First and Second World Wars. The *paternosters* of his priests,

Committing clay to clay,

Have rattled in their throats

Under the gride of his traction tread

The fourth stanza describes the bombing of an English village by the sea, focusing on the terrifying moment of silence before the bomb explodes: As the winds stopped to listen

To the sound of a motor drone —

And then the drone was still.

We heard the tick-tock on the shelf,

And the leak of valves in our hearts.

A calm condensed and lidded

As at the core of a cyclone ended breathing

In the final stanza the bomb is described as a “a bolt/ Outside the range and target of the thunder” which makes human emotions return to savage modes of terror of the past that form a part of primitive religious movements such as those at Avebury and Stonehenge, which were formally believed to the work of the Druids. Piltdown, Java. When Pratt wrote the poem, Piltdown man and Java man were believed to be among the most primitive ancestors of modern man. The bomb also has the power to obliterate civilization, to return humankind to the primitive condition of the Java caves.

There is a reference to Apocalypse, another name for Revelation, the last book of the Bible, which predicts the events leading up to the end of the world, including Armageddon-the final battle between good and evil. Death in the twentieth century is an apocalypse that returns humanity to its origins in savagery. The poem rich in literary and cultural allusions, is probably most memorable for the intensity of those phrases in which the impact of physical fear is recorded.

Central to Pratt's imagination is his fascination with all forms of strength and power. Such an interest is announced by the subjects of his major poems: dinosaurs, whales, the luxury liner .Titanic, a translocation railroad. As critics have often suggested, that fascination is articulated in Pratt's poetry in a central metaphor of evolution, where in human intelligence gradually replaces brute nature as the most powerful force in the world and where a moral order is projected to supplant a natural one.

Pratt views the bedrock of existence to be in the natural forces of wind, water, and rock. There

water nurtures life, but must also kill in order to feed “the primal hungers of a reef.” The poet is spellbound by primordial forms of life, by nature “red in tooth and claw,” which from a human vantage point appears wantonly cruel and destructive. In the early poem “The Shark,” Pratt creates a symbol of something terrifying and malignant in nature, a creature “tubular, tapered, smoke-blue,” more frightening than a vulture or wolf because its blood is cold. Pratt repeatedly makes the reader shudder as he or she is forced to consider their origin of life in elements and forces remote from human intelligence and emotion.

Edwin John Pratt believed “rhyme and meter do not make a poem. . . The real flesh and blood of poetry lies in turns of phrases, vivid images, new and unusual thoughts and manners of expressing them.” The key point of Pratt’s poetry is his interest in all forms of strength and power. His major poems consist of subjects like: dinosaurs, whales, the luxury liner *Titanic*, a transcontinental railroad. This interest is articulated in Pratt’s poetry in a central metaphor of evolution, wherein human intelligence gradually replaces brute nature as the most powerful force in the world and where a moral order is projected to supplant a natural one. Much of Pratt’s poetry examines humanity’s struggle with nature. But at the same time, the poet marvels at the evolutionary process that produced human beings with their capacity for wonder, joy, and compassion.

6.7 Concluding Remarks

Pratt’s poems are distinctive by virtue of their energy and coherence. His language is sinewy and evocative. He was equally at home in blank verse, iambic tetrameter, and rhyming couplets; in sonnets, quatrains, and odes. In writing his long poems he was both a careful researcher and a scrupulous craftsman. From the beginning of his career he was a keen supporter of Canadian poetry and a promoter of his fellow poets. For a younger generation—D.G. Jones, Margaret Atwood, and Dennis Lee, among others—he has been important as a strong, original voice, whose nationalism was deep but never strident, and who demonstrated that the imagination could respond to the Canadian environment with familiarity as well as with fear.

E.J. Pratt is often considered Canada’s most important poet, but because he is technically an old-fashioned writer, influenced by Browning and Tennyson rather than by his peers, he is virtually unknown outside the country. As one American critic observed—in 1945 of Pratt’s *Collected Poems*, he is “by our standards a hundred years out of date.” Another reason for Pratt’s limited appeal is that he is an epic poet, treating specifically Canadian subjects such as the Jesuit missionaries of the seventeenth century, the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the arduous existence of the Newfoundland fisherman. But perhaps the most parochial element in Pratt’s work is the ethos it evokes of the academic poet, specifically that of the teacher from Victoria College, University of Toronto, where the austere bourgeois values of a small provincial city were mingled with Christian humanism and illumined by the wit and erudition of a classical tradition of learning. Yet for the very reasons that he has gained so little attention outside the country, Pratt stands as a figure of unique significance in Canadian letters.

6.8 Let Us Sum Up

Pratt’s poetry, in the words of Sandra Djwa, expressed an “evolutionary vision”, though Christianity continued to provide him a rich store of images.

The major themes of Pratt’s poems is man versus nature, or, perhaps more precisely, the

conflict between highly evolved, sophisticated forms of life and primitive, less-developed forms and the struggle with a harsh environment blind to human purposes. Human defeat, tragedy and horror and death also constitute his themes.

The documentary quality of Pratt's poetry derives from subject matter, its specialized language, full of technical names, precise bits of knowledge, and facts.

6.9 Review Questions

1. Critically examine the poem "The Shark".
2. What are the themes that Pratt deals with in his poems?
3. How are Pratt's experiences in life a reflection of his poetry?
4. Explain the poem "Come Away Death" in your own words.

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UNIT-7

F. R. SCOTT (I)

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction: Scott's Life and Works
- 7.2 Scott's Age
- 7.3 The Making of a Social Reformer and a Socialist
- 7.4 Scott's Humanism
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- 7.6 Scott as a Social Philosopher
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 - 7.6.2 New Social Concern, a Reaction to the Depression
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 - 7.8.4 Religion, Love and Science
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7.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to Scott as a social reformer and nationalist.
- To acquire a knowledge of the themes in Scott's poetry.
- To get an estimate of Scott as a modernist poet.
- To enable the students to grasp an idea of the themes dealt with by Scott.

7.1 Introduction: Scott's Life and Works

Francis Reginald Scott (1799-1975), Canadian poet, literary critic, and lawyer, was a leading figure in Canadian literature, politics, and law for more than 50 years. He was born on 1st August in Quebec city. He was the son of Frederick George Scott, an Anglican minister and poet. He received a B.A. from Bishop's college in Lennoxville, Québec in 1919. With his friend A.J.M. Smith, Frank Scott played a seminal role in the modernization of Canadian poetry. Francis Reginald Scott is a second-generation Canadian poet. One of the lesser-known Confederation poets, born in Quebec City, where his father was rector of St Mathew's Church, Frank Scott received a traditional Anglican upbringing. After attending the private High school of Quebec, and his father's *alma mater*, Bishop's College, he won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford University in 1920 and read history at Magdalena College. As Scott once said, 'I spent three blissful years at Oxford soaking up everything I could learn about the past and paying very little attention to the present'. On his return to Canada in 1923 he taught for a brief period at Lower Canada before enrolling in law at McGill University. He was called to the bar in 1927 and was made a professor in the Faculty of Law in 1927. He served as its dean from 1961 to 1964 and retired in 1967.

As Scott's career in law began in the 1920s, he also began to publish poetry and participate in Montréal's literary culture. While studying law at McGill in 1925 he had been introduced to *The Waste Land* and to the Imagists by the poet and critic A.J.M. Smith, then a graduate student in English. With poet A. J. M. Smith, he founded in 1925 the *McGill Fortnightly Review*, a literary journal that attacked what it saw as the stale traditions and complacent nationalism of Canadian poetry. Scott contributed to those attacks with his satirical poem mocking the Canadian Authors' Association, "The Canadian Authors Meet," which appeared in the journal in 1927. Scott helped find a number of other literary journals from the 1920s to the 1940s, including *Preview* and the *Northern Review*.

Scott's collections of poems include *Overture* (1945), *Events and Signals* (1954), *The Eye of the Needle* (1957), *Signature* (1964): *Satires, Stories, Sundries, Signature*, and *The Dance is One*. He has also published a volume of found poems, *Trouvailles: Poems from Prose*, and translations of French-Canadian poetry. In another collaboration with A.J.M. Smith, Scott compiled a popular anthology, *The Blasted Pine: An Anthology of Satire, Invective and Disrespectful Verse: Chiefly by Canadian writers* and he selected and translated the entries in *Poems of French Canada* (1977). Late in his career he received two Governor General's Literary Awards: one for nonfiction for *Essays on the Constitution: Aspects of Canadian Law and Politics* (1977) and one for poetry for *The Collected Poems of F. R. Scott* (1971).

Since 1926, Scott has been one of our most important literary catalysts. He helped found with Leo Kennedy the *avant-garde* little magazine, *The Canadian Mercury* (1927-29), and by 1929 he was the Montreal representative on the editorial board of *The Canadian Forum*. With Smith, he co-edited *New Provinces* (1936), the first anthology of modern Canadian verse. He helped establish the little magazine *Preview* (1942-45) with a group of Montreal poets in the early forties and fostered its amalgamation with the rival publication *First Statement* (1942-45) to form the joint publication, *Northern Review* (1945-55). In 1955 he presided at the Canadian Writers' Conference at Queen's University and in 1964 helped organize a conference for Quebec poets.

7.2 Scott's Age

During the Great Depression in the 1930s, Scott became involved in a number of leftist political activities. His involvement culminated when he was chairman of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (the forerunner of the socialist-oriented New Democratic Party) from 1942 to 1950. In the 1950s he successfully argued several civil rights cases before the Supreme Court of Canada against Québec premier Maurice Duplessis's government. It is difficult to separate Scott the poet from Scott the social thinker. In both roles he argued against fixed order and traditional institutions and for social change. In his several books on Canadian public policy and law, Scott argued that the Canadian federation should shed its narrow provincialism and political conservatism in response to circumstances such as the Great Depression and the possibility of democratic socialism. Similarly, in his poetry Scott was concerned with abandoning what he felt were outmoded forms of writing that ignored changing political and social conditions. A major theme of his ironic and satirical verse is that the profit motive is a banal substitute for higher ideals, such as the quest for a dynamic national identity.

For more than forty years F.R. Scott, a poet, lawyer and social philosopher, has helped to form the Canada we know today. His views on poetry and politics, developing in response to an emerging national culture, have helped to shape modern Canadian poetry and to mould, along socialist principles, Canadian political theory and practice. Scott is best known as a constitutional lawyer and political theoretician, but it is the poet that he himself considers most important. When asked in the early seventies how he would rank his long list of achievements, he says:

“—poet, lawyer, teacher, formerly Dean of Law at McGill University, constitutional lawyer, fighter for civil liberties over many years, political activist for almost forty years, former national chairman of the CCF party, Royal Commissioner, member of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism”

Scott promptly replied, “Poetry first, and the poetic element all the way through.”

7.3 The Making of a Social Reformer and a Socialist

The influence of his father had nurtured Scott's interest in poetry, both as a reader and as a writer, but before 1925 this interest had progressed little beyond reading the Georgian poets and writing sonnets. At McGill he was befriended by A.J.M. Smith, who introduced him to the new American poets, including Pound and Eliot. Together, Scott and Smith founded the *McGill Fortnightly Review*, for which they wrote so prolifically that it became necessary for them to invent pseudonyms.

As the modernist poets changed Scott's conception of poetry, so the social decay of the depression altered his ideas about politics and economics. He rejected not only the romantic poetry of his father's generation but its capitalism as well. He became a social reformer and a socialist, an authority on constitutional law, and a defender of civil liberties and social justice. He assisted in the formation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, of which he was national chairman from 1942 to 1950; in the 1950s he fought three celebrated court cases in Quebec: against Premier Duplessis' padlock law, against the censorship of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and a famous civil-liberties case. *Roncarelli v. Duplessis*. In the 1960s he was the member of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

7.4 Scott's Humanism

Scott's humanist belief in the cooperative commonwealth of man is manifested in the Canadian constitutional sphere as a strong belief in a Canadian federalism in which Quebec's special needs are recognized. This federalism stems from the recognition that only a strong central government can successfully cope with the problems faced by today's nation state. Both the depression and World War II had confirmed Scott in this opinion: during the depression Ottawa did not enact national legislation on the grounds that it had no legal power to do so. Yet when World War II was declared, Ottawa took full federal authority under the War Measures Act, thus providing for industrial development. This about-face convinced Scott that the federal policy-making powers required for the socialist state were not only practicable; they were essential for a country as balkanized as Canada. Yet despite the success of this 'socialist' experiment, when the war years ended, Prime Minister Mackenzie King handed back control of industry to the industrialists. Scott's moral outrage then exploded in "Orderly Decontrol":

Fast we must give away all the assets of war:
Stores, trucks, equipment, goods of every kind,
And all the factories built with public money.
These must be channeled toward monopolies,
Which will most surely exploit them.
This we shall call
Restoring free enterprise.

Although a strong federalist, a position which superficially might appear to be incompatible with his stand on individual rights, Scott has long been a defender of civil liberties and minority rights in Quebec. In the mid-'twenties, he had recognized that Quebecers were exploited by manufacturers and industrialists shielded by church and government; and he shared with few francophone Quebecers the political, economic, and cultural struggles of the years between the wars. As early as 1931 he was protesting against a lack of freedom of speech in Quebec. Throughout the years, Scott has consistently fought for the rights of Quebecers against those who suppressed them whether they were to be found in the English speaking industrial-financial establishment of St. James Street, or the Catholic hierarchy in the days of Cardinal Villeneuve, or the Quebec government of Taschereau in the 'thirties, or Duplessis in the 'forties and 'fifties. Through funds left from the estate of Alan Plaunt, Scott organized publication of the important study of the asbestos strike in Quebec, *La Greve de l'amiante* (1956), which brought him into active collaboration with young intellectual, Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

With his growing fluency in French, his belief in the law as a force for social change, the social concerns of the LSR and the CCF and, last but not least, with his own poetry, Scott often succeeded in bridging the two cultures. He entered actively into the literary culture of Quebec, meeting regularly in the 'fifties with a small group of Quebecois poets. As a translator, he was one of the first to make the poetry of Quebec available in English translation publishing *St. Denys Garneau, Anne Hebert: Translations* (1962) and *Dialogue sur la traduction: Anne Hebert et Frank Scott* (1970). The introduction to his recent Canada Council Award winning *Poems of French Canada* (1977) is a personal account of his own attempt to bridge the two solitudes through politics and art. As he explains

in the introduction, much of his work on minority rights in the early constitutional essays concerned the problems of Quebecers:

How to build a Canada that would allow the two principal cultures to flourish freely became an intellectual and emotional challenge, and in this endeavour literature would obviously play an important role. I heard the voice of the new Quebec in the poets and in such novels as Jean-Charles Harvey's *Les demicivilises* and Lemelin's *Au pied de la pente douce* before ever the quiet revolution had arrived.

Appropriately, the first of the modern poems translated in Scott's *Poems of French Canada* is Jean-Charles Harvey's "The Forerunner."

His probing thought cut lanes through custom and cant.

Always he followed the line of his farthest flight.

So they rose in a rage and tied his hands to his side.

In the 'sixties Scott served as a member of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which recommended a large extension of French language rights throughout Canada:

People have tried to work out an enmity of the two languages and the two cultures and tried to make that mean something in a country where the cultures and the populations are unevenly distributed. It was not an easy thing to do but I had thought that we worked it out pretty well.

But the work of the B&B Commission ran counter to the political evolution of Quebec from the quiet revolution to the present demand for complete Quebec autonomy. In his stand on the War Measures Act and in a different context on Quebec's Bills 22 and 101, Scott has been pictured by some anglophone and francophone liberals as a typical Westmount *anglais*. Yet in both instances Scott based his stand on a firm belief in equal human rights within the rule of law.

Scott's support of the use of the War Measures Act in Quebec is consistent with his belief in civil liberties. For Scott, individual freedoms can only be protected by a nation's laws: simply put, if the laws are wrong the citizen has a democratic right to attempt change but he has no right to bomb and kidnap to speed reform. The invocation of the War Measures Act "gave back to me my civil liberties which were being steadily eroded by the F.L.Q. terrorists:" Scott approved of federal government intervention because it was a response to the attempt by an illegal minority to control Quebec.

Scott's objections to Quebec's Bills 22 and 101 which deny language freedoms previously enjoyed by the English-speaking minority in that province correspond with his support of the B&B proposals for an extension of French language rights to other parts of Canada where the size of the francophone minorities make it practicable. So in 1974 when the Bourassa government introduced in the Quebec National Assembly Bill 22, The Official Language Act, making French the sole official language of the province and severely limiting the existing rights of English schools, businesses and universities, he saw that the concept of equal status for the two cultural communities was at stake. In July of that year he was one of a group of seven McGill Law professors who issued a public statement criticizing, not the entire purpose, but some of the harsher provisions of Bill 22.

It was found inconceivable that a supposedly democratic government should claim the right to limit the growth of the English minority in Quebec by denying access to its schools to any Protestants it

chose to exclude by provincial law. The idea of equal partnership between the two principal cultures, and fair treatment of other ethnic groups, which the B&B Commission sought to achieve, was utterly repudiated. Bill 22 would obviously have the effect of driving out the anglophones, and thus would achieve a form of genocide by erosion: "Cut the roots of a minority culture — use of the language, access to schools — and it will soon wither away. For a regime of rights is substituted a regime of uncertain toleration."

7.5 Scott's Vision

Scott's vision has always been of a Canada of limitless potential. In many ways this is the ideal "true north" of our national anthem, a Canada which the social, economic and political conditions of life are evolved to meet the needs of Canadians. This vision is the product of a strong social conscience, a disciplined mind and a warm humanity. Because Scott, the social critic, can be quite sharp with his adversaries, those outside his circle tend to misjudge him as a somewhat forbidding intellectual: but to his friends he is a man of immense warmth whose ready hand of greeting is joined with a witty sally and an infectious laugh. On Scott's seventieth birthday, his long-time friend and fellow poet, A.J.M. Smith, described the whole man:

A voice, not a voice alone, a hand,
a hand to grasp a hand, a leg to stand,
on, nerves to feel, and in supreme command,
the shaping mind that shapes the poem
as it shapes the man, four-square, and needle-eyed,
and Frank.

As a poet, as a lawyer and as a social philosopher, F.R. Scott is a towering figure in Canadian intellectual history—one of the very few in Canada's first century who can be justly called a great Canadian.

7.6 Scott as a Social Philosopher

In his career as a lawyer and social philosopher, Scott was most concerned with the new economic and constitutional structures that must be developed to meet the needs of an emerging Canadian society. A Rhodes scholar, he studied history at Oxford between 1920 and 1923. There his social Anglicanism was widened by participation in a student Christian study group on "Christianity and the Industrial Order." There also he met R.H. Tawney and was greatly impressed by Tawney's book, *The Acquisitive Society*, a forerunner of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. Scott absorbed from Tawney the belief that a man ought not to be ruled by an authority over which he has no control and the conviction that social rights, especially wealth, ought to be commensurate with an individual's contribution to society.

Scott's Christian socialism was to be given a nationalist framework when he returned to Montreal. In 1924 he studied law at McGill where one of his teachers, H.A. Smith, lectured on constitutional and other branches of the law. Smith had made a study of federalism in the Canadian context and his lectures convinced Scott that the then current interpretations of the Canadian constitution by the British

Privy Council, which tended to favour provincial rights, were directly opposed to the intentions of the Fathers of Confederation. Smith's teaching laid the foundation for Scott's federalism, a basis which was to be strengthened in 1927 when Scott was invited by Dean Percy Corbett to teach Law at McGill. There, for almost half a century, first as Professor and finally as Dean of Law, Scott's chief concern was Canadian constitutional law: the fruit of these years, Scott's *Essay on the Constitution* received a Governor General's Award for 1977.

It is difficult to separate Scott the poet from Scott the social thinker. In both roles he argued against fixed order and traditional institutions and for social change. In his several books on Canadian public policy and law, Scott argued that the Canadian federation should shed its narrow provincialism and political conservatism in response to circumstances such as the Great Depression and the possibility of democratic socialism. Similarly, in his poetry Scott was concerned with abandoning what he felt were outmoded forms of writing that ignored changing political and social conditions. A major theme of his ironic and satirical verse is that the profit motive is a banal substitute for higher ideals, such as the quest for a dynamic national identity.

7.6.1 Factors Shaping Scott's Nationalism

There were additional factors encouraging the young Scott towards nationalism and federalism. After 1925 he met with a gathering of bright young men including Brooke Claxton, John Farthing, G.R. McCall, T.W.L. MacDermott, Raleigh Parkin, Arthur Terroux, and V. C. Wansborough. They called themselves "The Group" and met regularly in Montreal. Many of these men were war veterans, had been to Oxford, and all were concerned with the question of Canada's future. The Group debated current literary topics, Fabianism, the new art of the Group of Seven, and Canada's colonial position in the Empire. On colonialism "there was no lack of opinions expressed," Scott wrote tersely in his diary. Dissatisfied with the thinness of cultural life in Montreal, The Group founded a Leonardo Society and opened a little shop to sell art reproductions. Not surprisingly, the shop was a failure — despite an encouraging visit from Vincent Massey and the exhilaration of a first Balm prints by Andrea Del Sarto and Leonardo Da Vinci. "Nice to think," Scott jotted, "of two such civilizing influences let loose in Montreal" During these years he was to change from a young Anglophile with aesthetic leanings to a staunchly Canadian socialist and nationalist.

7.6.2 New Social Concern, a Reaction to the Depression

This new social concern, a reaction to the Depression, first appeared in *The Forum* in 1932 in a collection of verse satirically entitled "An Up-to-Date Anthology of Canadian Poetry." Prefaced with a few lines from "O Canada," Scott's anthology ends with an excerpt from "My Creed," a 1931 New Year's message from the Honourable H.H. Stevens, then Minister of Trade and Commerce. In the midst of the depression Stevens was pledging unqualified support of Canada's "producers." In Scott's parodied version, Stevens' 'creed' becomes the equivalent of a found poem. It is used to frame declamatory verses on the pressing social issues of the day — hunger, unemployment — and what Scott saw as government irresponsibility:

Come and see the vast natural wealth of this mine

In the short space of ten years

It has produced six American millionaires

And two thousand pauperized Canadian families.

In this opening squib, “Natural Resources,” Scott identifies the problem that has characterized the development of Canada’s resources. Was she to remain “colonial,” a hewer of wood and drawer of water for her richer and more powerful neighbours, first Britain and then America? Or was she to develop a just society for Canadian based on a new social order? Throughout the thirties and forties the problem of Canada’s lingering colonialism and the desire for a new social order was to encompass legal and political issues such as Canada’s lack of constitutional sovereignty, the question of federal provincial relations and the special problems of Quebec.

7.6.3 The League for Social Reconstruction

For Scott, the answers to many of these problems could only be found in a programme of practical politics. In 1931, after meeting Frank Underhill, he helped to organize a research group on Fabian lines to develop a thorough analysis of the capitalist system in Canada. Scott recalls Underhill as an attractive man, rather shy in his manner but with a sharp mind: he “wouldn’t stand for any nonsense.” Both men recognized that the depression would very likely result in the formation of a new Canadian progressive party; should this occur a basis for a new programme of political action was required. This new research group became the League for Social Reconstruction and J.S. Woodsworth was invited to become honorary president with a national executive of Underhill, J.F. Parkinson, and E.A. Havelock from Toronto, and Scott and J. King Gordon from Montreal. Eugene Forsey, not a member of the executive, was one of the group. In the LSR Manifesto, members described themselves in Tawneyesque terms as an association “working for the establishment in Canada of a social order in which the basic principle regulating production, distribution and service will be the common good rather than private profit.”

The new party which Scott and Underhill anticipated was to come much sooner than expected. In 1932 in Calgary, J.S. Woodsworth founded the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and members of the LSR offered to assist with the drafting of a party programme for the first convention of the CCF in Regina in 1933. The theoretical socialism of the LSR consequently found its way into the Regina Manifesto, and through the CCF as a pressure group, some of it seeped into the official policies of the Liberal government. Many of these principles, such as the establishment of a central bank, economic planning, medicare, and the recurrent issue of the repatriation of the constitution strongly influenced the character of Canada today. As a member of the LSR Committee and closely associated with the CCF in the thirties, Scott helped prepare *Social Planning for Canada* (1935), a plan of action for Canadian socialism. In the forties, he co-edited with David Lewis, later National Chairman of the CCF, the influential handbook *Make This Your Canada* (1943). From 1942 to 1950 Scott was himself National Chairman of the CCF.

In his legal career Scott was most concerned with the role of the federal government in relation to constitutional matters. As a socialist, he strongly supported the concept of federal social legislation to counteract some of the effects of the depression and he was incensed when the British Privy Council disallowed R.B. Bennett’s “New Deal” legislation. In the *Canadian Bar Review* of June 1937 Scott wrote prophetically:

That which the builders rejected has indeed become the corner stone. A well-balanced distribution of sovereignty between Dominion and provinces, giving to each residuary as well as specified

powers, which was carefully planned by Canadian statesmen knowing the needs of the country, has been scrapped for an alternative theory of a severely limited Dominion but an unlimited provincial residue. None but foreign judges ignorant of the Canadian environment and none too well versed in Canadian constitutional law could have caused this constitutional revolution.

Scott foresaw the problem that Canada faces today: the rulings of the British Privy Council upset the Canadian constitutional balance and paved the way for secession by individual provinces. In the late 'thirties, however, the most important question in Canadian constitutional sovereignty was whether or not Canadians had the right to determine if and when they went to war. In *Canada Today* (1937) Scott wrote:

An increasing number of Canadians of all racial origins are coming to the belief that Canada must have the constitutional right to complete neutrality in future British wars, so that whatever course will best preserve the unity of the country may be fully taken.

Scott's insistence on Canada's right to neutrality has sometimes been interpreted as isolationist. But although Scott distrusted British policies at the time he was not, like Woodsworth, a confirmed pacifist. What he wanted for Canada was the right to determine her own destiny — whether peace or war. Mackenzie King's "Parliament will decide" was no answer for once England entered the war, Canada would, inevitably be dragged along. Then, given our colonial position in international policy-making bodies, Scott foresaw that Canadians would again become, as he wrote in the *Forum* of August 1937, the "cannon fodder of imperialism." With the death of his brother Harry at the Somme in 1916 still fresh in his mind, he wrote "Lest We Forget":

The British troops at the Dardanelles
Were blown to bits by British shells
Sold to the Turks by Vickers.
And many a brave Canadian youth
Will shed his blood on foreign shores,
And die for Democracy, Freedom, Truth,
With his body full of Canadian ores,
Canadian nickel, lead and scrap,
Sold to the German, sold to the Jap,
With Capital watching the tickers.

7.7 Scott's Early Poetry

It was also during the early war years when Scott was studying at Harvard on a Guggenheim fellowship that his interest in a more inward poetry was revived. The Canadian scholar and critic, E.K. Brown, invited to be a guest editor of *Poetry* (Chicago), asked Scott to submit some poetry. The two poems which Scott sent, "Cornice" and "Armageddon" reveal a developing awareness of the complexity of human psychology: "This foe we fight is half our own self. / He aims our gunsight as we shoot him down." The social concerns of the 'thirties, the debacle of the Spanish Civil War and the new psychology

of the 'forties had deepened Scott's poetry. He had come to realize, as he admitted in "Mural" that the socialist planners had not included in their neat blueprints the irrational drives and urges which are equally a part of human nature. The question, then, is no longer the classic struggle between Right and Left, between monopoly capitalism and private ownership, "but the kind of new order which shall arise on the ruins of the old." In reviewing Arthur Koestler's *The Yogi and the Commissar* in the first issue of *Northern Review* (December 1945/January 1946) Scott states the problem: "Can democracy and humanism not only survive the revolution but be in fact its active cause and pre-eminent spirit?" Koestler, who rejects both the saintly yogi and the Communist commissar is commended by Scott for his synthesis of "revolutionary humanism."

7.8 Themes in Scott's Poetry

7.8.1 Relationship of Man and Universe

Scott sees man and human experience silhouetted against the larger movements of the universe this relation is reflected in the form as well as the language of his poetry:

Nothing human
foreign
or small,
too small
Each verse
a universe.

For, as the title of this "Poem for Living" reminds us, Scott's art is essentially an art of process: of life as living and of poetry as experience. In "A l'ange avantgardien," he wryly embraces his own muse, the "rebellious angel," who is half guardian angel and half the insurgent spirit of the *avant garde*.

But it is you, rebellious angel, you we trust.
Astride the cultures, feet planted in heaven and hell,
You guard the making, never what's made and paid.

The emphasis is on the process of making, not on the artifact. Similarly, in "Passerby," the poet listening to the sound of footsteps passing reflects on the relation of life and art in "The linking together of time and our temporal nature." Basically a consideration of *lachrimae rerum*, a product of Scott's later years, this is very much a time poem, in which the passing footsteps carry overtones not only of people and events passing but of the ebbing of life itself. The traditional answer to this dilemma, life passes but art endures, is ironically dismissed: "We worship Beauty, goddess of reaction, / Freezing our vision into her hardened moulds." Like Bergson, Scott perceives that the flow of experience cannot be contained by the stasis of art. Because life can not be held, the human choice is that of fleeing the terror or of facing and transcending it:

But always the footsteps recede, the stone crumbles,
The tide flows out and does not return,

And from this terror we find no safety in flight

But only in faces turned to the flood of arrival.

The poem builds to the steady but muted lyricism of this last stanza with its enormously powerful conclusion; affective because although encompassing the fact of death it nonetheless chooses to affirm. In the final image of the flood is incorporated the duality of the life-giving but also life-dissolving sea. It is this finely balanced vision that distinguishes Scott (like Margaret Avison) as a Canadian poet whose poems offer most in the traditional Arnoldian sense of helping us to live our lives.

7.8.2 Man and Human Life As Microcosms Set Against a Greater Whole

The poetic perspective which sees man and human life as microcosms set against a greater whole is also to be found in “A Hill for Leopardi,” a late and interesting poem from *Signature*. The Leopardi of the title is Giacomo Lanpardi whose poem “The Infinite” provides the point of departure for Scott’s own flight into space:

The traffic and all the trivial sounds

Fade far away. I mount

Swiftly, for time is short, flight beckons

Out where the world becomes worlds, suns pass, distance

Curves into light, time bends, and motion,

A sweep of laws,

Rolls up all my strength and all

Into one marvel.

Scott has escaped from time into the vast freedom of infinite space, where “the world becomes worlds, suns pass . . . time bends.” His marvelling is a form of awe arising from the contemplation of the glories of the universe and his “shipwreck,” unlike Leopardi’s, which occurs in space, is occasioned by the return to earth.

Yet it is always the same.

A loved voice, a touch,

A phone ringing, and the thrust dies.

Another journey ends where it began

Shipwrecked on ground we tread a little while.

7.8.3 Evolutionary Structure of the Microcosm

Scott’s awe, recognition of “so great a glory in life-thrust and mind range,” also pervades his most characteristic poem, “A Grain of Rice.” Here we find the framing evolutionary structure of the macrocosm/microcosm introduced with the opening line, “Such majestic rhythms, such tiny

disturbances”. The larger rhythms are the great movements of the universe, “the rise of continents, / Invasion of deserts, erosion of hills, / The capping of ice,” the “turn of the wind” that brings the monsoon, and by implication, the tiny disturbance that is life, the grain of rice. In one sense, these tiny disturbances are events such as the delicate emergence of a great Asian moth from its chrysalis “radiant, fragile, / Incapable of not being born, and trembling / To live its brief moment.” In another sense, the tiny disturbance is man — located midway between cell and galaxy but unnatural in his cruelty to his fellows:

Today, while Europe tilted, drying the Baltic,
I read of a battle between brothers in anguish,
A flag moved a mile.

7.8.4 Religion, Love and Science

The concluding stanza is a summation of the deep structure of Scott’s poetic with reflections on religion, love and science, a belief in the order of the universe as opposed to human order and a reaching out to the frontiers of life and knowledge:

Religion build walls round our love, and science
Is equal of error and truth. Yet always we find
Such ordered purpose in cell and in galaxy
So great a glory in life-thrust and mind-range,
Such widening frontier draw out our longings,
We grow to one world
Through enlargement of wonder.

7.9 Modernism in Scott’s Poetry

F.R.Scott (1799-1975) was one of the poets who brought the forces of modernism to bear on Canadian writing. He was one of the most important catalyst of modernist Canadian poetry. Scott’s poetry has always reflected his social consciousness. As early as 1927 F.R.Scott joined other writers in helping to found the *Canadian Mercury*, a literary magazine that gave voice to three members of the ‘Montreal Group’, Leo Kennedy, A.M.Klein and Scott himself. Each member of this group wrote distinctly different poetry and as a group they all wrote about the present in new ways that freed them from traditional forms. With Smith, Scott edited an anthology of this ‘new’ poetry, *New Provinces* (1936, reissued 1976), which served as a public manifesto that Canadian poetry was indeed changing. Over the years Scott continued to be interested in helping to provide a public outlet for new voices, often by his support of literary magazines. He helped to found *Preview* in 1942 which, like the *Canadian Mercury* and the *McGill Fortnightly Review* before it, gave a new generation of writers a public forum. Scott absorbed his poetic impulses, a tradition of warfare and love for Canadian North Land from his father F.G.Scott who was Anglican clergyman and the poet of Laurentians. Later his poetic activities were influenced by “the group” (1925-29) a small gathering of friends who met regularly to discuss coronet events, literature and art. Scott’s reputation as a modernist rests mainly on his use of

Imagist techniques in the landscape nature poems in which he rejuvenated poetic language – these can be accurately be described as “modernist”. Scott’s poetry has evidently a development. His own career exemplified the tradition from Victorian romanticism to the modern. In the late 1920s he wrote northern landscape poetry influenced by Imagists, by Eliot’s “Fertility Myth”. In 1930s, in response to the depression, he wrote basically socialist often satiric program poetry. Later in the 1940s and 1950s both strains were fused into a more philosophical structure as it is obvious in his poem “A Grain of Rice” in which his humanist reflections move from cell to man, to the larger movements of physical universe. Frank Scott’s poetry has always reflected his social consciousness. As early as 1927 he joined other writers in helping to found the *Canadian Mercury*, a literary magazine that gave voice to three members of the ‘Montreal Group’, Leo Kennedy, A.M. Klein, and Scott himself. While members of this group each wrote distinctly different poetry, they all wrote about the present in new ways that freed them from traditional forms. With Smith, Scott edited an anthology of this ‘new’ poetry, *New Provinces*, which served as a public manifesto that Canadian poetry was indeed changing. Over the years Scott continued to be interested in helping to provide a public outlet for new voices, often by his support of literary magazines. He helped to found *preview* in 1942 which, like the *Canadian Mercury* and the *McGill Fortnightly Review* before it, gave a new generation of writers a public forum.

7.10 Scott: A Visual Poet

Scott is a strongly visual poet whose shaping “I” is closely associated with the “eye” that perceives. And because he sees poetry as a communication, as a signalling from one isolation to another, he writes of the “Signal” that penetrates “the screen of me / and the screen of you / the inside and outside / of a window.”

I scratch the frosted pane
with nails of love and faith
and the crystallized white opens
a tiny eye
reveals
the wide, the shining country.

Fingers scratching on the dividing pane, like a pen on paper, suddenly open up an “eye.” And because scratching at a window is a metaphor for the creative process, the “eye” becomes the vision of the poem that plays on the “I” of the persona: the image is that of a poem opening up a world, of a microcosm generating a macrocosm.

His characteristic metaphors develop from the exploration of man’s relationships to nature and society: they involve time and infinity, world and universe, love and spirit, terms that emerge as twentieth-century humanist substitutes for the Christian vocabulary. A typical Scott poem moves from specific image (the great Asian moth of “A Grain of Rice” for example) or from the natural landscape (“Hidden in wonder and snow, or sudden with summer, / This land stares at the sun in a huge silence”) to a consideration of the significance of the image in the larger pattern of human life. And the human journey, in turn, is seen as a moment in time, a part of the larger cosmic flux in which matter, striving to realize itself, is thrown up briefly in waves — ripples on Henri Bergson’s flowing stream of time. Scott

perceives that man as a physical being comes and goes; yet he maintains that there is continuity in the human spirit and in the shared human experience.

7.11 Necessity for Vision

Scott, like E.J. Pratt, is also one of our first recognizably Canadian poets in that his poetry expresses Canadian identity, an identity first associated with the new social vision of the 'thirties. In the poems of the 'forties, this early political stance is humanized by the recognition that political action must be informed by vision, and by intelligent choice. The necessity for vision is articulated in the poem "On the Death of Ghandi" and a concern with the "knowledge of how to use knowledge" is apparent in the tart but bemused tone of "To Certain Friends":

Above all they fear the positive formation of opinion,
The essential choice that acts as a mental compass,
The clear perception of the road to the receding horizon.

Such knowledge, as described in "Examiner," is the opposite of "the ashen garden" where the young are shaped by the "acid subsoil" of the old. However, the poem in which this choice is given ends ironically. Gathering from his students "the inadequate paper evidence," the examiner hears "A cross the neat campus lawn / The professional [professorial?] mowers drone, clipping the inch-high green." There is no question of the examiner's sympathies: the tension of the poem springs from a recognition of the difference between his own beliefs and the system he is obliged to uphold:

In the tight silence
Standing by a green grass window
Watching the fertile earth graduate its sons
With more compassion — not commanding the shape
Of stem and stamen, bringing the trees to pass
By shift of sunlight and increase of rain,
For each seed the whole soil, for the inner life
The environment receptive and contributory—
I shudder at the narrow frames of our text-book schools
In which we plant our so various seedlings.

The compassion and lyrical wholeness that Scott finds in nature, "not commanding the shape / Of stem and stamen," a view that incorporates the older religious spirit — "bringing the trees to pass" — is the antithesis of the inhumanity of the narrow "text-book schools." "Examiner" prefigures much of the later poetry where Scott turns increasingly to nature in an almost Wordsworthian or Arnoldian sense to find assurance of the higher human values which man lacks.

7.12 Let Us Sum Up

1. Francis Reginald Scott, a literary critic and lawyer was a leading figure in Canadian literature,

- politics, and law for more than 50 years.
2. He was the son of Frederick George Scott, an Anglican minister and poet. Frank Scott received a traditional Anglican upbringing.
 3. With poet A. J. M. Smith, he founded in 1925 the *McGill Fortnightly Review*, a literary journal that attacked what it saw as the stale traditions and complacent nationalism of Canadian poetry.
 4. Scott's collections of poems include *Overture* (1945), *Events and Signals* (1954), *The Eye of the Needle* (1957), *Signature* (1964): *Satires, Stories, Sundries, Signature*, and *The Dance is One*.
 5. He received two Governor General's Literary Awards: one for nonfiction for *Essays on the Constitution: Aspects of Canadian Law and Politics* (1977) and one for poetry for *The Collected Poems of F. R. Scott* (1971).
 6. He rejected not only the romantic poetry of his father's generation but its capitalism as well. He became a social reformer and a socialist, an authority on constitutional law, and a defender of civil liberties and social justice. He assisted in the formation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, of which he was national chairman from 1942 to 1950.
 7. It is difficult to separate Scott the poet from Scott the social thinker. In both roles he argued against fixed order and traditional institutions and for social change.
 8. As a member of the LSR Committee and closely associated with the CCF in the thirties, Scott helped prepare *Social Planning for Canada* (1935), a plan of action for Canadian socialism.
 9. Scott sees man and human experience silhouetted against the larger movements of the universe this relation is reflected in the form as well as the language of his poetry
 10. The poetic perspective which sees man and human life as microcosms set against a greater whole, religion, love and science, form the common themes in Scott's works.
 11. F.R.Scott was one of the poets who brought the forces of modernism to bear on Canadian writing being one of the most important catalysts of modernist Canadian poetry.
 12. Scott is a strongly visual poet whose shaping "I" is closely associated with the "eye" that perceives.

7.13 Review Questions

1. What are the common themes of Scott's poems?
2. What was the contribution of Scott to socialism and nationalism?
3. The credit for the formation of The League for Social Reconstruction goes to Scott. Discuss.
4. Discuss Scott as a social reformer and a socialist.
5. Give a critical estimate of Scott.
6. Write a critical note on the modernism in Scott's poetry.

7. How did land prove to be a shaping component in Scott's nationalism?
8. Give examples to show that Scott is a visual poet.
9. From where do the characteristic metaphors of Scott develop? Explain.
10. What is a typical Scott poem like?

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UNIT-8

F. R. SCOTT (II)

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Imagist Technique in Scott's Poetry
- 8.3 *Laurentian Shield*
 - 8.3.1 The Text
 - 8.3.2 Background and Critical Paraphrase
- 8.4 Scott's Satire
- 8.5 The Pun as a Poetic Device
- 8.6 *The Canadian Authors Meet*
 - 8.6.1 The Text
 - 8.6.2 Critical Paraphrase
- 8.7 *Lakeshore*
 - 8.7.1 The Text
 - 8.7.2 Critical Paraphrase
- 8.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.9 Review Questions
- 8.10 Bibliography

8.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to Canadian poets and modernist poetry.
- To acquire a knowledge of Canadian landscape.
- To introduce the students to the life and works of F.R. Scott and his age.
- To help the students to gain knowledge and understanding of the poet and his works.

8.1 Introduction

In F.R. Scott, the poet and lawyer live harmoniously together because each speaks with the same humanist voice. In the late 'fifties Scott remarked that the law is "crystallized politics" and he added that a "good constitution is like a good poem, both are concerned with the spirit of man." This remark was elaborated a few years later when he published the gnomic "Creed":

The world is my country
The human race is my race
The spirit of man is my God
The future of man is my heaven.

Although Scott is substituting the modern ‘spirit of man’ for the older ‘spirit of God,’ it is clear that he considers both terms analogous. “Creed” is a humanist statement of faith. This new faith emerged when the Anglicanism of Scott’s childhood training united with the radical Christian socialism of the ’twenties. From his father, Archdeacon F.G. Scott, Anglican priest, poet and war hero (a man who was returned by army orders to Montreal in 1919 because of his support of the Winnipeg strike), Scott acquired a strong sense of social justice. By the mid ’twenties when the religious basis for social reform had been replaced by a moral imperative, Scott retained a basically Christian sense of the dignity and worth of the individual. It is this Christian humanism which shaped his socialism and gave impetus to his defence of civil liberties.

During his four decades and more of public life, Scott has taught law and practiced it on significant occasions before the Supreme Court. At the same time, he has published verse — eight volumes — distilling in his poetry a sound and moving vision of the world and his place in it. As we read through the early periodical verse, the subsequent books of poetry and the *Selected Poems*, it becomes increasingly clear that Scott’s subject is man in the generic sense and human relationships. Although many of the poems begin with the individual experience, the movement is always from the personal to the universal. Characteristic is the last book of poetry, *The Dance is One* and the simple human act of the hand talon in “Yours”:

It lay unfolded upward on my knee
Armed five wise ways like Shiva for the day
cross-lined for life, for love, for coming fate,
Warm, as I matched it with my own right hand.

8.2 Imagist Technique in Scott’s Poetry

As has already been referred to, F.R. Scott is one of the main promoters of modernist techniques. As a modernist poet, he employed imagist technique in his poetry, particularly in landscape poetry. It is worthwhile to make a statement here that it was not only Scott who started concentrating on landscape but before him there were poets like Lampman, Roberts, Carman and D.C. Scott who had already written landscape poetry. Their ideals were Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and, to some extent, the Victorian poets like Arnold and Tennyson. It is interesting to note that the subject he turned to is the same Canadian landscape of the Confederation poets but the style he chose is the imagist style used by Pound and H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) in their poems. Scott’s poem “Old Song” is one of the best examples to demonstrate the imagistic style. For the sake of discussion the poem is quoted below:

far voice
and fretting leaves

this music the
hill side gives

but in deep
Laurentian river
and elemental song
forever

a quiet calling
of no mind
granite lips
a stone throat

Analysing the poem, T. Nageshwar Rao holds that the style in the poem is undoubtedly imagistic, and it is irresistibly appealing to a Canadian poet because it presents a Laurentian vision. We find a notable economy of words in the poem. It achieves its effect in the fewest possible number of words and then simply stops. In just thirty six words Scott presents “the sense of vast distances in space and time”. He presents a vision, essentially of the St. Lawrence not as an object or a thing. The abstract nouns in the poem are more suggestive. What he presents is a vision and a vision is rather abstract and refuses to be accurate. Therefore the absolutely accurate presentation, a tenet of imagist style, does not seem to be the most important thing here. The importance of this poem is that Scott as a modernist poet is not interested in stock responses and sentimental clichés about the Laurentian landscape as used by the Confederation poets. It is apparent that Scott is refusing to be effusively sentimental about nature. He made his poetic attempt by using imagistic style “to grasp the idea of the thing and of its place in history”. This feature is discernible in his poems, particularly those which present a geological pre-history of the Canadian landscape. Scott sensitively hears the music in the hillside and a primordial song ‘in the deep Laurentian river’. Smith says:

A pure and naked perception alone could not, of course, satisfy Scott for more than a moment, and most of his poems that start out as an image soon become images, and perception soon become concepts and blossom in metaphor, analogy and conceit.

Scott’s present concern can be demonstrated in his poem, “Old Song” in which images accumulate from ‘fretting leaves’, ‘hillside’, and ‘Laurentian river’ to the ultimate images ‘granite lips’ and ‘a stone throat’. Though he presents concrete visual images yet auditory images dominate the poem. According to T. Nageshwar Rao, Scott treats the “Old Song” of the Laurentian landscape as a ‘quiet calling’ in the almost silent northern landscape. In the last two lines of the poem he uses metonymies in the words ‘lips’ and ‘throat’ which represent a human figure. In his use of images, there is a parallel structure of images on one level referring to nature, such as ‘leaves’, ‘hillside’ and ‘Laurentian river’, and on the other hand, images referring to human nature, ‘fretting’, ‘mind’, and finally ‘lips’ and ‘throat’.

In the last two lines, by using the concrete adjectives ‘granite’ and ‘stone’ he presents a concrete visual image of the Laurentian landscape by means of metaphoric metamorphosis. In this way the metaphors in the last two lines are appealing in an unusual way. We find a transformative movement from nature to human nature, through which Scott presents a totally humanized image of the Laurentian landscape. The only shortcoming of the poems is its use of abstractions which are full of only vague suggestiveness. Most of Scott’s images are metaphorical; and metaphors cannot produce “real” images. Stephen Ullmann in his explication of the nature of imagery says:

In the first place, there can be no question of an image unless the resemblance it expresses has a concrete and sensuous quality. A comparison between two abstract phenomena however acute and illuminating it may be, will not constitute a real image. Secondly, there must be something striking and unexpected in every image: it must produce a surprise effect due to the discovery of some common element in two seemingly disparate experiences.

The above account, if kept in view ascertains that his poems bear concrete and sensuous qualities. They present a visual image of the Laurentian hillside. The notable feature of Scott’s imagery is that he employs common phrases, similes and metaphors to enter in to the object described.

8.3 *Laurentian Shield*

8.3.1 **The Text**

Hidden is wonder and snow, or sudden with summer,

This land stares at the sun in a huge silence

Endlessly repeating something we cannot hear.

Inarticulate, arctic,

Not written on by history, empty as paper,

It leans away from world with songs in its lakes

Older than love, and lost in the miles.

This waiting is wanting.

It will choose its language

When it has chosen its technic,

A tongue to shape the vowels of its productivity.

A language of flesh and roses.

Now there are pre-words,

Cabin syllables,
Nouns of settlement
Slowly forming, with steel syntax,
The long sentence of its exploitation.

The first cry was the hunter, hungry for fur,
And the digger for gold, nomad, no-man, a particle;
Then the bold commands of monopoly, big with machines,
Carving its kingdoms out of the public wealth;
And now the drone of the plane, scouting the ice,
Fills all the emptiness with neighbourhood
And links our future over the vanished pole.

But a deeper note is sounding, heard in the mines,
The scattered camps and the mills, a language of life,
And what will be written in the full culture of occupation
Will come, presently, tomorrow,
From millions whose hands can turn this rock into children.

8.3.2 Background and Critical Paraphrase

The inspiration for Scott to write this poem arises from the above quoted line by Stephen Spender. Just as Spender was struggling to create a poem with “a language of flesh and roses” so also Scott was trying to depict the effect of man on the deserted land and the land on the inhabitants.

The landscape as such was cold, dreary and covered with ice and snow with nothing much to boast of. There was no history of Canada recounting, nor was the beauty of the landscape worth enumerating. There were miles and miles of emptiness and what was noticeable was the silence and monotony of existence.

The poet is not clear of what words he could choose to write poetry about this snow covered land. He felt he lacked language and could not find exact words to describe the country. It was then that he remembered Stephen Spender had the same experience of having to write poems about man-made landscapes of a mining country. This makes him acquire the verve to slowly begin forming pre-words, cabin syllables and gradually composing a poem about the settlers in Canada and about their exploitation. So all that Canada has to offer is the story of the hunter, who is hungry for fur, and the gold miner, and the nomads to begin with. Later on the nation got industrialized and started pulsating with life.

So actual creativity will follow when once the inhabitants are able to convert the rocky landscape into a more fruitful and productive place fit for survival. Only then will the place be acknowledged in poetry as brimming with life.

As a poet and a man of law, Scott is most concerned with the kind of social order or 'writing' with which man hopes to shape his world. His fear, expressed in "Laurentian Shield" (1945-46), is that language of a developing Canada, "pre-words, / Cabin syllables, / Nouns of settlement," might be reduced to the syntax of rapacious technology, "the long sentence of its exploitation."

The basis of this socialist and humanist thought was set out in the 'twenties. Like many of his contemporaries, Scott was absorbed by the attempt to define the 'Canadian' — to find a new order adequate for a developing post-war society. By 1926 he had written "New Paths," a poem which shows that he was already part of the prevailing political and artistic mainstream. Politically, he was a nationalist: "Child of the North / Yearn no more after old playthings . . . all the burdensome inheritance, the binding legacies, / Of the Old World and the East." Artistically, as did the Group of Seven, he turned to the northern land for inspiration:

Here is a new soil and a sharp sun
Turn from the past
Walk with me among these indigent firs
Climb these rough crags . . .

His interest in the new Canadian art was deepened by Marian Dale, a painter, who became his wife in 1928. And, as the hint of Imagism suggests, Scott had begun to read the new poetry. A shaping component in Scott's nationalism was the land itself. After his three years abroad immersed in the cultural past of Europe, he found Canadian culture superficial; Montreal, with its mercantilism, its foot-high curbs and false facades, seemed tawdry and ugly. Scott's observation was that Canada had nothing in the way of an historical past to match that of Europe — nothing that is, except the vast, open stretches of the Pre-Cambrian Shield.

But the Laurentian country was wonderful, open, empty, vast, and speaking a kind of eternal language in its mountains, rivers, and lakes. I knew that these were the oldest mountains in the world. Geologic time made ancient civilization seem but yesterday's picnic.

For Scott, the enormous age of the land seems to have been transmuted into a substitution for an historical past. But at the same time, because of its associations with the new nationalism and because it was open, unexplored, unpeopled, the land presented itself as an open page or clean canvas for the artist's impression. He soon realized that it was on the basis of this natural landscape that Canada's new literature must be built:

Who would read old myths
By this lake
Where the wild duck paddle forth
At daybreak?

Nonetheless, this early nature verse required the humanizing influx of social concern before

Scott could develop a poetry of more general relevance.

A line from an essay by Stephen Spender ('The Making of a Poem', from a book of the same title, 1955), which he uses to discuss the process of making poetry. This line, never developed into a poem, came to Spender upon seeing the man-made landscape of mining country, 'a landscape of pits and pit-heads, artificial mountains, jagged yellow wounds in the earth.' This landscape, and similar creations of 'man's mind', seemed to Spender 'a kind of language of our inner wishes and thoughts'. He found himself 'thinking that if the phenomena created by humanity are really like words in a language, what kind of language we really aspire to?' His answer was 'a language of flesh and roses'. Scott developed Spender's idea in 'Laurentian Shield' to come to his own terms with effect of human beings on the land and of the land on its inhabitants, as well as his own theory of poetry-making.

Scott's "Laurentian Shield" is an important landscape poem. Here he expresses a feeling for the Canadian landscape in all its harshness and coldness and finds an analogy between language and the landscape:

This waiting is wanting
It will choose its language
When it has chosen its technic
A tongue to shape the vowels of its productivity
A language of flesh and of roses
Now there are pre-words,
Cabin syllables,
Nouns of settlement
Slowly forming with steel syntax
The long sentence of its exploitation.

In this poem the "prewords" refers to the evolutionary origin and "nouns of settlement" refers to the early human settlement in a harsh Canadian environment, and 'steel syntax' refers to the Trans Canadian railway. The word 'sentence' refers both to language and to the imposition of man's will on the environment. The land is "sentenced" to exploitation by hunters and miners. Here Scott's dislocation of conventional syntax functions as a part of the process by which the normal perception of reality is broken down in order to reveal man's relationship with the landscape.

To F.R.Scott, like many artists, this Laurentian country, which was open, empty and vast, had a kind of eternal language in its mountains and rivers and lakes. The enormous age of its land served the purpose of historical past. Thus the land presented itself as an open page or clean canvas for him. In "Laurentian Shield", he holds:

Hidden in wonder and snow, or sudden with summer
This land states at the sun in a huge silence
Endlessly repeating something we cannot hear

Inarticulate, arctic,
Not written on by history, empty as paper.
It leans away from the world with songs in its lakes
Older than love, and lost in the miles.

In fact, “Laurentian Shield” is the culmination of Scott’s landscape poetry of the twenties. It expresses a feeling for the Canadian landscape in all its harshness and coldness.

To some extent, it is an account of northern vision, given in the twenties, which holds a general conception of land without man, external, mysterious and complete in itself. Sandra Djwa underlines this conception in some of the poems of Earle Birney, F.R.Scott, A.J.M.Smith and W.W.E. Ross. F.R.Scott’s “Iceberg” is one of the best examples which delineates the northern vision:

Dropped from its sloping womb
A huge cliff of blue
It roars its birth into an ocean
Of slow death
returning
its giant pride
to deeper water
recycling silently
its self-destructive art.

This view of a strong, rugged nature, that demands equally strong inhabitants, was being developed as an artistic program by the Group of Seven. F.R.Scott and many others right from the beginning were associated with this program. F.R.Scott himself said in an interview in 1985 that he was introduced to the new art by 1925. He had an encounter with the Group of Seven which he, in turn, discussed with A.J.M.Smith. Besides this artistic encounter, Scott had also tasted *The New Poetry* (1917), an influential modernist anthology through which imagism was to return to Canada. Thus he, having been exposed to the main stream, was responding variously to the Canadian landscape. In his poem, “New Paths”(1926), he sets forth his artistic vision of land.

Child of the North
Yearn no more after old playthings
Temples and towers and gates
Memory – haunted thorough fares and rich palaces
And all the burdensome inheritance, the binding legacies
Of the Old World and the East
Here is a new soil and a sharp sun

Turn from the past
 Walk with me among these indigent firs,
 Climb these rough crags
 And let winds that have swept cityless plains,
 Gathering no sad tales of past endeavour
 Tell you of fresh beauty and full growth....
 ...while we face a North
 Uncaptivated virgin free
 Our thought shall be swift-running mountain brooks
 Our dreams the shadow of a cloud on hills.

Here the poet seems to offer the landscape of modern Canadian poetry. He describes the land as an image, “a new soil and a sharp sun” which evokes the northern light. He sees the land virgin, fresh and free. On his return from Europe in 1922-23, he found Canadian culture superficial which had nothing except the vast open stretches of the Pre-Cambrian Shield. In an interview with Elspeth Chisholm in 1963, Scott expresses this view explicitly:

“In those days – don’t forget, this was in the 1910s, 1920s– you could go fifteen to twenty miles north of Quebec City and there would be absolutely nothing between you and the North Pole.... The importance of this open Laurentian country was its enormous unoccupied antiquity, a profound sense of pre-human, which made you very small indeed, almost an invader. It seems to me that this has been a common psychological experience of a great many Canadians right across the country, this sense of [the] northern fact and our relation-ship to it.”

Another important landscape poem by Scott is “Tree in Ice”. This poem, as such, is suggestive, of a ‘bleak winter landscape’ described in the following way :

these gaunt prongs and points of trees
 pierce the zero air with flame
 every finger of black ice
 stealing the sun’s drawn fire
 to make a burning of a barren bush
 underneath
 from
 still
 flakes branch
 of and
 light arm

fleck fall
 ing fall
 the
 dark
 white
 snow

this cruelty is a formal loveliness

on a tree's torn limbs

this glittering pain.

Here “gaunt”, “barren”, “dark white snow” suggest the bleakness or the cruelty of the landscape which is “a formal loveliness” to Scott. He humanizes the bleak natural world by using “finger”, “arm”, “limbs” and “pain”. In fact, these words are important images which animate the poem. In Scott's poems, it is marked, there is a progress from abstract to concrete in his use of images. For the Canadians, this treatment of land became the source of the artistic inspiration, national identity, cultural past and the hope for future development.

8.4 Scott's Satire

Besides this treatment to Canadian landscape, his poetry also reflects social consciousness. F.R. Scott, a professor of constitutional law and civil rights, invoked satire as a way of indicating and mocking the literary establishment: “can/ a day go by without new authors springing/ to paint the native maple, and to plan / more ways to set the selfsame welkin ringing?” although he dismisses too easily the earlier confederation poets, he practiced a social verse, closely linked to the political movements of his time, that denounced social injustices and championed social change and reform.

For those radicals who were politically powerless in the years between the wars, satire was the most telling weapon in the battle to change overly conservative thinking. Scott in his poem “W.L.M.K.” satirizes Mackenzie King's stand on conscription by pointing out that King, Prime Minister of Canada for most of the period from 1921 to 1948, “never let his on the one hand / Know what his on the other hand was doing.” As the enjambment of the lines suggests, Scott sees King as both the cause and symbol of a Canada without direction: It was “ ‘Conscription if necessary / But not necessarily conscription.’” Here it is the unerring accuracy of the portrait, the witty parody of political rhetoric (“Truly he will be remembered / Wherever men honour ingenuity, / Amity, inactivity, and political longevity.”) and the flexibility of the speaking voice, alternately angry and rueful, which we savour.

Not all of Scott's work is written in the satiric vein. A frequent figure in his poems is the lone subject located in the wilderness, contemplating nation and nature simultaneously. To Scott, the natural elements represent an ideal Canadian identity, which possesses its own mythological heritage and which rejects narrow provincialism.

8.5 The Pun as a Poetic Device

Scott characteristically uses the **pun**, a bringing together instantaneously in the mind of the

unexpected similarities and relationships. Examples of this technique range from the simple pun of the ballad depicting his defence of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, "A Lass in Wonderland" (which amalgamates Alice with a rueful "Alas!") to variations such as the portmanteau "L'ange avantgardien." The pun as a poetic device is characterized by wit and humour and certainly this tendency is evident in the zestful opening line of the love poem "Return" ("Bolder than brass, and brazen in our bed"). Yet as the second line demonstrates ("We mine the stripped veins of our own sub-ground"). Scott is able to develop emotional resonance from pun in much the same way as did the Metaphysicals, by transforming an initially audacious comparison into a structural conceit. He can do this because he shares with the Metaphysicals an agility of mind which delights in witty comparison and a structured vision of the human as a microcosm within the macrocosm of the universe.

It is clear that Scott's primary objection to participation in a new European war was that conscription would be inevitable. This would further exacerbate relations between French and English and further divide the country. Then too, Scott was not convinced, at the outset, that the "phoney war" as it was called, threatened the cause of world democracy. The Maginot Line in France still seemed intact and the real fighting had not started. Many intellectuals still viewed the new war as similar to World War I — as a primarily European struggle for power. However, after 1940 the phoney war began to accelerate into a real struggle for democracy in Europe: France collapsed, the bombs began to fall on Britain and the British Labour Party joined the National Government under Churchill. Scott with the CCF was facing a new situation. In July 1942, as a member of the CCF executive, Scott helped to draft policy of support for the democratic war effort.

8.6 *The Canadian Authors Meet*

8.6.1 The Text

Expansive puppets percolate self-unction
Beneath a portrait of the Prince of Wales.
Miss Crotchet's muse has somehow failed to function,
Yet she's a poetess. Beaming, she sails
From group to chattering group, with such a dear
Victorian saintliness, as is her fashion,
Greeting the other unknowns with a cheer—
Virgins of sixty who still write of passion.
The air is heavy with Canadian topics,
And Carman, Lampman, Roberts, Campbell, Scott,
Are measured for their faith and philanthropics,
Their zeal for God and King, their earnest thought.
The cakes are sweet, but sweeter is the feeling
That one is mixing with the *litterati*;

It warms the old, and melts the most congealing.
 Really, it is a most delightful party.
 Shall we go round the mulberry bush, or shall
 We gather at the river, or shall we
 Appoint a Poet Laureate this fall,
 Or shall we have another cup of tea?
 O Canada, O Canada, O can
 A day go by without new authors springing
 To paint the native maple, and to plan
 More ways to set the selfsame welkin ringing?

8.6.2 Critical Paraphrase

Scott's poem, "The Canadian Authors Meet" is one of his most popular poems and it has attracted attention of readers and scholars due to its satirical treatment given to the subject of the poem based on the Canadian Authors Association founded in 1921. In order to analyze the poem, it is important to recognize that this organization was founded with a new sense of national consciousness to promote Canadian literature. Like *The Canadian Bookman*, founded in 1919 and *The Canadian Forum* in 1920, this Association too attempted at promoting the genuine Canadian poetry, which expressed the spirit of the time. But the Association, being too much enthusiastic, promoted the poetry of its members blindly. Besides this, the members of the Association reacted fanatically and conservatively against the work manifesting experiment in Canadian literature. To Scott, this Association appeared to be a self-congratulatory and self-indulgent group that has mostly a refuge for poetasters, and that celebrated safely established poets, ignoring modern innovators. After attending a meeting of the group, F.R.Scott, in response to the attitude of the Association, wrote this poem in the spring of 1927. In the poem, Scott presents the typical C.A.A. poet as a "Miss Crotchet", a poetess who moves from group to chattering group at a meeting that takes place under a "portrait of the Prince of Wales" and which is characterized by plethora of qualities loathed by the high modernist, from "Victorian saintliness" to Canadian content. Here Scott seems to give a satirical picture of poets who were the members of the Association. This picture is painted by his use of binary opposites - "chattering" and "saintliness" - which are employed by Scott obliquely. This oblique use of the binary opposites finds explicit expression in the following lines:

The cakes are sweet, but sweeter is the feeling
 That one is mixing with the literati ;
 It warms the old, and melt the most congealing
 Really, it is a most delightful party.

Here the repetition of the first and fourth line satirises the Association's move. It is further seen

in the comparison of the “Poet Laureate” to a “cup of tea”: “. . . shall we / Appoint a Poet Laureate this fall, / or shall we have another cup of tea.” It is important to note here that when Scott attended the meeting of Association, the appointment of a Poet Laureate was discussed seriously. In this regard Scott attacks mental slavery or colonial hangover ingrained in Canadian poets. He seems to suggest how unfortunately Canadian poets imitate or accept Britain’s literary verdict or decision which decides the status of Canadian poetry. In the mood of protest, Scott calls Canadian poets as puppets. He holds:

Expansive puppets percolate self-unction
Beneath a portrait of the Prince of Wales
Miss Crotchet’s muse has somehow failed to function,
Yet she is a poetess. Beaming she sails
From group to chattering group, with such a dear
Victorian saintliness, as is her fashion,
Greeting the other unknowns with a cheer-
Virgins of sixty who still write of passion.

The ‘put on’ airs and artifacts of modern society and that too the so called literate and learned people of society is brought to light in the poem “The Canadian Authors Meet”. The poem is a satire on the newly established “Canadian Author’s Association”. Scott wrote the poem after attending a meeting held by the association. The Association established in 1921, appeared to Scott to be a self-congratulatory and self-indulgent group that was mostly a group for poetasters and that it supported safely established poets while ignoring modern innovators.

The opening lines humorously describe the meeting of poets whose poetry has failed to succeed. Miss Crochet’s was greeting others and chattering from group to group of ladies above sixty who still write of passion. The atmosphere was of an ‘academic’ nature and Canadian writers like Carman, Lampman, Roberts, Campbell, Scott were being discussed not for their academic achievements but as to how much faith they had or how great a philanthropist they were, or what zeal they had for God and king.

The satire lies in the fact that even though the cake served as refreshment was sweet, the meeting and academic interaction with the so-called “literati” was sweeter as it was able to create a feeling of warmth and gladness.

What was of great concern, was not the discussion of how they could become better poets of service to society but it was whether they could meet at the mulberry bush or river or appoint another “Poet laureate”, or have another cup of tea. So the whole meeting was rather a get together or picnic with no botheration about academic achievement. What was seriously being discussed in the meeting was the appointment of a “Poet Laureate”.

Scott was concerned about such a state of affairs and in these lines the poet’s sarcasm is blended with emotional charge when he says pathetically:

O Canada, O Canada, oh can

A day go by with new authors springing
To paint the native maple, and to plan
More ways to set the self same welkin ringing.

Scott's poem, W.M.L.K. is another satirical piece in which the formerly Canadian Prime Minister, William L. Mackenzie King, whose name's abbreviation forms the title, has been degraded for his follies like inactive and dull attitude. Before the periods of his prime-ministership (1921-1930, 1935-48), in the twenties there was a revival of political and cultural nationalism. An immediate cause of the new national consciousness was Canadian's participation in the Great War. With the conclusion of the war, Prime Minister Robert Borden had sought and obtained an independent seat for Canada at the Peace Tables at Versailles. But Mackenzie failed to procure the national consciousness.

F.R.Scott gives caustic treatment of the life and achievements of Mackenzie King whom he regards as the epitome of personal eccentricity and political centrelessness. The poem reflects the seriously unbalanced personality of a politician whose inability to appreciate the symmetries of left and right, high and low "on the one hand" and on the other hand", effectively deformed Canada and created a nation without a centre. Scott says that Mackenzie,

... blunted us.
Because he never took sides
And no sides
Because he never allowed them to take shape.
He skilfully avoided what was wrong
Without saying what was right
And never let his on the one hand
Know what his on the other hand was doing.
The height of his ambition
Was to pile a Parliamentary Committee on a Royal
Commission

His poetry reflects the wide diversity of such experience, ranging in style the reportorial and satiric "Summer Camp" to the fine lyric "Departure." Yet underlying both lyric and satire is a common vision of the poetic ideals. He has remarked that satire is "inverted positive statement" and certainly the obverse of Scott the lyrical idealist is Scott the satirist. From the empirical inversions of poems such as "W.L.M.K." and "The Canadian Authors Meet" —

O Canada, O Canada, Oh Canada,
A day goes by without new authors springing
To paint the native maple, and to plan
More ways to set the selfsame welkin ringing?

We can infer the political and the poetic ideals for which Scott stands. Such poems, which at first glance might appear to offer a discontinuity of subject and style, have, in fact, a fundamental unity derived from a central vision and from the strength of an engaging poetic personality. Not all of Scott's work is written in the satiric vein. A frequent figure in his poems is the lone subject located in the wilderness, contemplating nation and nature simultaneously. To Scott, the natural elements represent an ideal Canadian identity, which possesses its own mythological heritage and which rejects narrow provincialism.

The poems are also united by an enormously flexible speaking voice which can move from the satiric ("Did you ever see such asses / As the educated masses?") to the Burly reflective. In "Windfall" he speaks of a leaf:

This small complete and perfect thing
Cut off from wholeness is my heart's suffering.
This separate part of something grown and tom
Is my heart's image that now rests on stone.
This is a leaf I talk to as a lover
And lay down gently now my poem is over.

8.7 *Lakeshore*

8.7.1 The Text

The lake is sharp along the shore
Trimming the bevelled edge of land
To level curves; the fretted sands
Go slanting down through liquid air
Till stones below shift here and there
Floating upon their broken sky
All netted by the prism wave
And rippled where the currents are.
I stare through windows at this cave
Where fish, like planes, slow-motioned, fly.
Poised in a still of gravity
The narrow minnow, flicking fin,
hangs in a paler, ochre sun,
His doorways open everywhere.
And I am a tall frond that waves

Its head below its rooted feet
Seeking the light that draws it down
To forest floors beyond its reach
Vivid with gloom and eerie dreams.
The water's deepest colonnades
Contract the blood, and to this home
That stirs the dark amphibian
With me the naked swimmers come
Drawn to their prehistoric womb.
They too are liquid as they fall
Like tumbled water loosed above
Until they lie, diagonal,
Within the cool and sheltered grove
Stroked by the fingertips of love.
Silent, our sport is drowned in fact
Too virginal for speech or sound
And each is personal and laned
Along his private aqueduct.
Too soon the tether of the lungs
Is taut and straining, and we rise
Upon our undeveloped wings
Toward the prison of our ground
A secret anguish in our thighs
And mermaids in our memories.
This is our talent, to have grown
Upright in posture, false-erect,
A landed gentry, circumspect,
Tied to a horizontal soil
The floor and ceiling of the soul;
Striving, with cold and fishy care
To make an ocean of the air.

Sometimes, upon a crowded street,
I feel the sudden rain come down
And in the old, magnetic sound
I hear the opening of a gate
That loosens all the seven seas.
Watching the whole creation drown
I muse, alone, on Ararat.

8.7.2 Critical Paraphrase

In 1950, at the age of fifty, in midcentury and midcareer, F.R. Scott completed “Lakeshore,” what may be his most ambitious, successful, and paradoxical poem. It is a poem unlike any other he wrote.

The theme of “Lakeshore,” told twice over, is of a threatening but ultimately vivifying escape from self. The first escape is regressive and into nature, the flat surfaces of the lake (“All netted by the prism wave/And rippled where the currents are”) leading him down to a “prehistoric womb” and an inverted reality of formlessness (“Till stones below shift here and there / Floating upon their broken sky”). In the last stanza, the second escape, voiced in echoes of Yeats and the Bible, is in the opposite direction, a glimpse in the mind while in the city of an apocalyptic deluge. Both escapes are self-annihilating and self-transcending, strivings through the language of the poem to a realm beyond language. At first, seeing his own inverted reflection, the poet regresses in geological time toward a depth “Too virginal for speech or sound”.

In the poem “Lakeshore” the poet has given a pen-picture of the lakeshore. The stunningly beautiful natural scenery and the arousal of passions at the lakeshore. The detailed meticulous description of the outline of the lakeshore, of how it was sharp along the shore and how it trimmed the edge of land to level curves and how the pressure of water above makes the sand go sliding down, disturbing the stones, and the water currents to create beautiful ripples have been portrayed so marvellously by the poet.

The scenic beauty of the lake in which the swimming fish appear like flying planes and the fish poised in the middle of the lake appears beautiful and admirable-more so because his doorways are open everywhere-that is, the whole of the lake is available to him for survival.

The poet then allows his fancy to imagine himself as a tall frond in the lake, which waves its head below roots and is drawn down to the darkness underneath the lake, where it is gloomy and fills his mind with “eerie” dreams. Swimming in the deepest colonnades of water makes his blood congeal and like him there are other swimmers also who are attracted to the water reminding them of their amphibious stage in the course of evolution. The fluid motion of the swimmers themselves adept at swimming is noticeable in the following lines:

They too are liquid as they fall
Like tumbled water loosed above

Until they lie, diagonal,
Within the cool and sheltered grove
Stroked by the fingertips of love.

While each one is enjoying his sport, there is absolute silence and everyone is complacently moving along his own private, personal path. But the swimming cannot continue for long, because the strain of swimming long hours causes them to feel exhausted, so it becomes mandatory for them to rise up and dream of mermaids who have the pleasure of endlessly and eternally swimming in the water.

Too soon the tether of the lungs
Is taut and straining, and we rise
Upon our undeveloped wings
Toward the prison of our ground
A secret anguish in our thighs
And mermaids in our memories.

After swimming in the amphibious stage, the swimmers arrive at the next stage of evolution and rise up with undeveloped wings to arrive on land and adapt to the next stage of evolution by standing erect and upright in posture as a landed gentry having to settle on horizontal soil and striving to adapt to the new situation by trying to make an ocean of the air.

In the last stanza Scott while standing in the middle of a crowded street has the vision of the end of the world with the waters from all the seven oceans flowing in from all directions to create a deluge and drown all creation while the poet stands musing on top of the mountain Ararat the mountain on which Noah landed after the flood.

In this poem, life comes full circle with the lakeshore taking the poet across different stages of evolution and the final deluge which shall engulf the world leaving the poet back as one of his species to carry on with procreation and the continuity of the world.

8.8 Let Us Sum Up

Scott's poetry can be divided into 'public' and private' poems, or grouped into the predominating modes and subjects of nature, satire, social and humanitarian idealism, and love. However, even a poem as personal as "Overture" is not without its larger context, nor is the public satire in "The Canadian Authors Meet" without a personal voice. In his poetry we find the best aspects of modernism: a penetrating vision expressed in a spare and precise style. To this Scott adds his own special qualities of grace and wit, so that his treatment of such subjects as social injustice or the artifacts of popular culture are given force and memorability by means of elegant diction and sharp satire. His is a comprehensive poetry that unites the mythic nature of the land with the reality of personal experience that scrutinizes the trivialities of a cellophane-wrapped society while also seeing a lake shore with the eye of a visionary. He writes of man's mediocrity as well as of his ultimate promise. His poetry depends not so much on metaphor as on verbal wit and word-play, and frequently on echoing allusions that can force the reader to look at the world both in terms of the past and with reference to the kind of future it suggests. A.J.M.

Smith's poem commemorating his friend's seventieth birthday, "To Frank Scott, Esq." brings together many aspects of Scott. It begins:

Poet and Man of Law— O brave anomaly! —
dove wise and serpent-tongued for Song or Plea—
a parti-coloured animal, committed, parti-pris
but not a party man, a man, and free.

8.9 Review Questions

1. How does Scott deal with nature in the poem 'Laurentian Shield'?
2. How does Scott satirize the poets in the poem 'The Canadian Authors Meet'?
3. What was the background which led to the composition of the poem 'Laurentian Shield'?
4. Attempt a note on Landscape poetry.
5. "F.R. Scott, the poet and lawyer live harmoniously together." Elucidate.
6. Comment on the imagistic technique of Scott.
7. Give the critical paraphrase of the poem 'Lakeshore'.
8. Write a short note on pun used as a poetic device by F.R.Scott.
9. Comment on the use of satire by Scott.

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UNIT-9

AL PURDY (I)

Structure

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9.5 Let Us Sum Up

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9.7 Bibliography

9.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to Canadian poets and to modernist poetry.
- To acquire a knowledge of Purdy and his tradition.
- To understand the factors which influenced Purdy's work.
- To have an idea of the themes in Al Purdy's Poetry.

9.1 Introduction

In Canada, following World War II, a new breed of poets appeared, writing for a well-educated audience. These included James Reaney, Jay Macpherson and Leonard Cohen. Meanwhile, some maturing authors such as Layton, Souster, Harold Standish and Louis Dudek, moved in a different direction, adopting colloquial speech in their work. Canada experienced a cultural renaissance in its poetry, a phenomenon that started in the fifties. One reason for the rising popularity of poetry was coffeehouse poetry readings that made it possible for a poet to become a public figure and persona. This renewed sense of nation helped foster new voices: Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Leonard Cohen, Eli Mandel and Margaret Avison. Others such as Al Purdy, well-known Canadian “coffeehouse” poet, Milton Acorn and Earle Birney, whose roots lay in Canada’s working class published, produced some of their best work during this period.

9.2 Introduction to the Poet

9.2.1 Life and Works

Alfred Wellington Purdy was born on 30th Dec 1918, “of degenerate Loyalist stock” as he claims, at Wooler, Ontario. Al Purdy was one of a group of important Canadian poets - Milton Acorn, Alden Nowlan and Patrick Lane, who had little formal education and whose roots were in Canada’s working-class culture. He is best known, along with Milton Acorn, Alden Nowlan, and Patrick Lane, as a “working class” or “poet of the people” writer. He spent most of his childhood in Trenton and was educated there and at Albert College in Belleville; he never attended college but his autodidactic erudition is extraordinary. During the nineteen thirties, that is the Depression, he rode the rods to Vancouver, working there for several years at a number of manual occupations. He worked in a mattress factory and in other manual occupations, which he later followed in Montreal. He served in the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War II. Following the war, he took up various jobs until the 1960s, when he was able to support himself as a writer, editor and poet.

In the late 1950s, Purdy moved to Roblin Lake in Ameliasburg, Ontario, (South of Trenton in Prince Edward County) and this became his preferred location for writing. In his later years, he divided his time between North Saanich, British Columbia, and his cottage at Roblin Lake. In 1957 he settled in Ameliasburg, the small Loyalist community celebrated in his poems, and from that period he made his living by free lance writing and related tasks, such as editing, poetry-reading, and stints as writer-as-residence in various places. He won the Governor General’s Award for poetry in 1965 and 1986, and has received several Canada Council awards.

In his teens he rode the rails and later spent six years in the RCAF. After several years as a labourer in British Columbia and Ontario, Purdy started earning his living as a writer in the early 1960’s. A restless traveller, Purdy is well-known internationally, not only as a poet, but also as a TV and radio play writer, anthologist, editor, travel writer and book reviewer. Purdy won the Governor General’s Literary Award in the poetry category in 1965 with *The Cariboo Horses* and again in 1986 with *Collected Poems, 1956-1986*. In regard to his status as a “working class” poet, he won the 1987 Peoples’ Poet Award (in memory of Milton Acorn) for *Collected Poems* and received the Order of Canada in 1982. The influence of Purdy’s extensive travels is reflected in many of the poems in the collections *North of Summer* (1967), *Wild Grape Wine* (1968), *Sex and Death* (1973), and

Birdwatching at the Equator (1982). Poems about his native Ontario are featured in the collections *In Search of Owen Roblin* (1974), *Being Alive* (1978), and *Morning and It's Summer* (1983). His other books of poetry include *Hiroshima Poems* (1972), *Piling Blood* (1984), and *The Woman on the Shore* (1990). In 1990 Purdy published his first novel, *A Splinter in the Heart*, and his autobiography, *Reaching for the Beaufort Sea*, appeared in 1993. A collection of reviews, essays, travel pieces, and anecdotes, *Starting from Ameliasburgh: The Collected Prose of Al Purdy*, was published in 1995; most of the pieces are about Canada and Canadian authors. His introspective and melancholic work *To Paris Never Again* (1997) contains poems about death and lost friends, as well as a short memoir recounting his development and experiences as a poet. Purdy was a two-time recipient (1965 and 1986) of the Governor General's Award for Poetry, the highest poetry prize in Canada. Al Purdy died in North Saanich, B.C., on April 21, 2000. His final collection of poetry, *Beyond Remembering: The Collected Poems of Al Purdy*, was released posthumously in the fall of 2000.

9.2.2 A Prolific Canadian Poet

Among these new crusaders struggling for this disillusioned affirmation and fresh poetic sensibilities, Al Purdy is one of the most important names. Paying tribute to Purdy's achievement, Peter Stevens writes: "Purdy has hammered out for himself his own poetic method, intensely personal and yet also Canadian in its remarkable welding of disparate elements. It is almost as if Purdy wants to find an entirely new beginning for poetry to express the emergence of new generation."

Al Purdy has instilled the true Canadian spirit into his poetry. He, born in Wooler, Ontario, is known as the poet of rural Ontario. David Stouck holds that "as Ontario is central to any conception of Canada as a nation, so Purdy's work has assumed a central position of importance in the growing body of Canadian poetry since the Second World War". Purdy has been one of Canada's most prolific poets. His first volume of verse *The Enchanted Echo* was published in 1944 where he appeared as a traditional and derivative poet influenced largely by Canadian late romantics like Roberts and Carman. Purdy began to find a sure and distinctive voice, publishing *Poems for All the Annettes* (1962) and *The Cariboo Horses* (1965). In 1968 *Poems for All the Annettes* was reissued in an expanded edition, in which Purdy collected and revised all the poetry upto 1965 that he wished to preserve. He has published some twenty more collections since then, including three more retrospective volumes: *Selected poems* (1972) *Being Alive: Poems 1958-1978* (1978) and *Bursting into Song: An Al Purdy Omnibus* (1982). His recent book of new poems *The Stone Bird* (1981), published when he was sixty three, was felt by many readers to contain some of his best work.

Purdy belonged to lower middle class. His father was a farmer who died of cancer when he was two. His mother moved to town and devoted her life to going to church and bringing him up. He became a great reader, reading all the crappy things that kids read. There was a series of paperback books back then called the Frank Merriwell series. When he was about thirteen, a neighbour moved away and gave him two hundred copies of Frank Merriwell, who was an American, went to Yale University and won at everything he did naturally. In order to read these books, Purdy pretended to be ill, staying in bed for two months and reading all two hundred books. Then he went back to school and passed into the next form.

9.2.3 Formative Influences

Purdy was dedicated to poetry. He wrote restlessly and copiously since boyhood. It was a poetry closely related to his experience, shaped in many ways by the working class life style he so long maintained, and fed by lengthy travels that took him far and into many cultural zones : in Canada to Newfoundland west to Vancouver island and north to Baffin Island; abroad to Cuba and Mexico, to most of Europe, to Turkey, Japan, and Africa.

Purdy is a poet whose experience moves very quickly into his work. Some of his best poems have emerged almost immediately from his travels; others, especially the poems about loyalist Ontario— have come through the long channels of memory and tradition. Purdy has combined a strong sense of place with a deep awareness of the past pressing upon the present to produce a kind of geohistorical poetry which marvelously projects the nature of Canada and of other places. This has probably been the aspect of his poetry that has most influenced other poets.

Experience has tended to affect the form as well as the content of Purdy's poems. During the 1960s he took part zestfully in the movement that took the poets wandering over the country, reading their work to audiences of many kinds, and there seems no doubt, while it would be unjust to dismiss him as an oral poet, that this exercise helped him loosen his rhythms and also fostered the elements of humour and anger which were already present in his work.

Important factors in Purdy's poetic liberation from his early dependence on moribund romantic models were the humour and the anger he began to introduce, a characteristic style and form with relaxed, loping lines and a gruff, garrulous and engaging poetic persona. Purdy was at the heart of the 1960s movements that set Canadian poets wandering the country, reading their poems to large audiences. There is no doubt that this experience helped him to develop a poetry more closely related to oral speech patterns than his 1940s apprentice poems. The influence of readings on his work is one aspect of the close contact between experience and writing in Purdy's work. He was described as a "versifying journalist," and some of his books have in fact been poetic accounts of journeys, such as *North of Summer* (1967), based on a trip to the Arctic, and *Hiroshima Poems* (1972), on a visit to Japan.

9.3 Themes

9.3.1 Polarity Between Whites and Non-Whites

Like "The Cariboo Horses" and "Wilderness Gothic", "Eskimo Graveyard" is also a representative poem of Purdy. In this poem we find one more juxtaposed world caused by the contrast between the Whites and the non-Whites. In his poem non-White or native is represented by the Eskimos who are viewed neither as good nor as bad but as simply **other**. Atwood holds that in his poem Purdy allows them to symbolize anything, and he has a habit of undercutting his own symbolism, they embody a primitive civilization which is being trivialized by the gimmicks of white culture. In the poem, the White tents of the community, visited regularly by government aeroplanes, are compared to glowing swans. The myth of Leda impregnated by Zeus in the form of a swan is evoked. One of the children of that union was Pollux, who loved deeply his mortal brother Castor. The narrator of the poem is skeptical that such brotherly love will be born from the contact of White and Eskimo people; the community will simply die out.

Purdy's "North of Summer" expresses more prominently the polarity between Whites and non-Whites. In the poem, the White protagonist immerses herself in the forest and the alien people, returning to tell the story. Again we have the artefacts, abandoned and decaying; in this case the rotting totem poles with their gigantic animal shapes. Again we have the enveloping, faintly threatening environment, not the freezing North this time but the lush and impenetrable British Columbia rain forests. The Indians, however, are not extinct; they have merely declined. Although the causes are not explicitly set forth they are there in the sharply-drawn details of the sketches. The missionary teachers are imposing on Indian children a culture they have no interest in learning and which will accomplish nothing for them. The results are there too the squalor, the indifferences, the unfinished houses, the Pidgin English the Indians are forced to use when speaking with the Whites. Most memorable are the Indian mothers whose babies die with predictable regularity and are buried one after another in the Indian cemeteries.

9.3.2 Canadian Landscape

Apart from these contrasts and opposites that are such persistent characteristics of his poetry, Purdy has also written realistic yet poetically beautiful descriptions of the charms of the vast Canadian land especially of the Northern parts of his country. In "North of Summer" he presents a charming literary portrait of the stern, uncompromising and cold landscape. Here the North stands for a new frontier and also becomes the symbol of another polarity in his poetry because most of the settlements and hubs of modern civilization are located along the Southern border of Canada.

9.3.3 Discord Born out of War Between Man and Man

In the poem, "Lament for the Dorset" there is a dynamics of discord born out of war between man and man. In the poem the poet versifies about the mysterious disappearance of the Eskimos, who were probably absorbed or expelled by the Thule Inuit in the fourteenth century.

Killers of seal
they could not compete with little men
who came from the west with dogs
or else in a warm climate cycle
the seal went back to the cold waters
and the puzzled Dorsets scratched their heads.
Could not figure it out
went around saying to each other plaintively.
What's wrong? What happened ?
Where are the seals gone?
And died.

This mysterious disappearance of the Eskimos reminds us of the similar destruction being turned back towards the despotism of the twentieth century science. He writes :

Twentieth century people
apartment dwellers
executive of neon death
warmakers with things that explode
—they have never imagined us in their future
how could we imagine them in the past
squatting among the moving glaciers
six hundred years ago
with glowing lamps?

Like other poems, “The Death of Animals” is expressive of the element of discord or tension caused by the juxtaposition between the animal deaths and trivial human activities. The following stanza of the poem expresses the dynamics of this discord:

Fox in deep burrow
suddenly imagined
a naked woman inside his rubric fur,
lacquered fingernails pushing, edging him out:
and screamed, directly into death.

9.4 Characteristic Features of Purdy’s Poetry

9.4.1 Tension between Poetic and Carnival Elements

As John Van Rys has observed in “Alfred in Baffin Land: Carnival Traces in Purdy’s *North of Summer*” the contents of the poems often constitute a poetic journey in carnival form. The poet’s voyage takes him from an urban to a hinterland world. Travelling from Montreal to Frobisher, Frobisher to Pangnirtung, Pangnirtung to Brown’s Harbour and on to the Kikastan Islands in Cumberland Sound, Purdy moves consistently further to the world’s edge and further away from his own cultural matrix. The poet drops down onto a Baffin Island once named Meta Incognita, the world beyond even the unknown. With the poet, we cross a carnival threshold into an upside down underworld, a world where our rightside up southern attitudes, our essentially Old World monologisms, are uncrowned and laughed at, exposed as arbitrary, limited, and static. Official laws are swept aside to make way for change and renewal. The prevailing southern ethos of poet and reader alike is put to the test by this fluid Wonderland. Like Alice, Alfred falls into a world where he struggles to locate himself, where his wonder and confusion are mixed. The poet discovers dwarf trees above the tree line, rhododendrons in the Arctic, “the court of the Seal-King.” He inhabits an in between world, one “north of the treeline south of the pole” where “Ice castles drift by in the sunlight! blue and turquoise magic! moulded and shaped by water”. He travels “a luring Hyperborean ocean”, both of the extreme north and of a race living in a land of sunshine and plenty beyond the north wind.

Indeed, the poet's journey to Baffin Land renews his childhood wonder; book knowledge takes on flesh and blood, and long held preconceptions are dialogized by actual experience. He writes in the volume's postscript, "I enjoyed myself tremendously. Everything about the north was new and strange to me, despite having read about it in books beforehand." Purdy emphasizes repeatedly his sense of dislocation alongside his elation, a dislocation which opens him to the inverted wisdom of the Arctic, and he enacts this dislocation in poem after poem. "The Turning Point" initiates this journey with the poet's plane trip into a reversed world: "Over northern Canada! daylight ahead and growing! behind only darkness! at 2:30 in the morning". He proceeds in the poem to further map this journey into a carnivalized world:

The full shape of the Arctic moves
under us and flows
into quiet islands and swinging coastlines
blue seas reflecting our tiny aeroplane
the runaway world upside down
and no god of chaos to lift one hand
and make the place behave

Entering an inverted world, the southern poet finds himself dwarfed by a landscape in continual flux, a world embodying in its very geography change and playful relativity. The poet comes to inhabit a fluid landscape, moving and flowing and swinging, an upside down world that like a child refuses to be bounded and ordered.

Moreover, Purdy repeatedly models his own journey on the centuries long search for the Northwest Passage. The poet's New World journey takes the shape of the Old World's search for paradise and repeated discovery of hell, but in the poet's carnival version hell and paradise become reversed and conjoined. The voyages of Martin Frobisher and William Baffin, of Edward Parry and John Franklin were all driven by the search for Cathay; these men were "moored to a China-vision". In these poems, the poet joins Cathay and hell in his own exploration, If we return to "The Turning Point," we sense this voyage as a search for the Northwest Passage:

we're lost
entombed in wool blankets
and go whispering thru nothingness
without sun or moon
human instruments haywire
But we find another world
a few minutes later
with snow-streaked hills down there
that must be Baffin Island

A club-shaped word
a land most unlike Cathay or Paradise
but a place the birds return to
a name I've remembered since childhood
in the first books I've read

Descending into an underworld, the poet discovers a Cathay of childhood imagination. He enters a world where human instruments malfunction, where technology cannot follow. Furthermore, he dares to suggest in these lines that this Arctic world that proved a hell for explorers is in fact paradise, the Cathay sought for centuries. Rethinking official accounts of Arctic exploration, the poet discovers an inside out world instead of an Arctic wasteland.

The poem entitled "The North West Passage" provides us with the poet's fullest treatment of these carnival juxtapositions. Here, the poet's voyage takes shape as a parody of historical exploration. We find the bored poet in Frobisher lounging before dinner and poring over a map of the Arctic, finding in place names the residue of exploration. The poet's first words suggest that the passage "is found! needs no more searching". He himself is a latecomer, an after-the-fact explorer. The poem enacts instead his carnival journey for the passage. He goes ". . . rocking thru history! in search of dead sailors! suspended from Ariadne's quivering cord". The poet's passage is imaginative and involves an inversion of accepted laws of space and time. He fuses discourses of past and present:

Locate the Terror and Erebus that way
Franklin's ships preserved in ice
with no place-names for them
it'd be much too close to hell
and the big jets might take a wrong turn
skimming over the top of the world
or the ICBM computers make a quarter inch error
and destroy the illusion of paradise by mistake

Franklin's ships, significantly named Terror and Erebus, suggest to the poet a hellish world, but at the same time the poet fears the destruction of this illusion of paradise by modern technology. Purdy uses the search for the Northwest Passage as a model for his own imaginative search; he plays with the similarities in order to suggest the differences. Again, the poet dares to reverse the common version of the Arctic as wasteland. Indeed, in the volume's final poem, "The Country of the Young," Purdy makes this variation on a theme explicit. The poem invites us to see the Arctic wonderland anew, to see what others with their Old World perspective have missed. Explorers, ". . . boozy traders! lost in a dream of money" and "homesick seamen," failed to make the poet's discovery, namely his discovery of northern colours, ". . . the original colour-matrix! that after a giant's heartbeat! lighted the maple forests! in the country south". In a country both old and young, the poet discovers origins; he discovers an unofficial Arctic in the carnival yoking of Cathay and hell at this northern edge of the world.

9.4.2 Elements of Homeric Epic

The poems in *North of Summer*; moreover, offer what Bakhtin would call a parodic reprocessing of Homeric epic, a carnivalization of epic forms and conventions. The poet's search for the passage simultaneously reproduces an epic world and turns that world upside down. These poems pick and choose from all elements in Homer; more narrowly, however, they focus on *The Odyssey*, the travels of Odysseus, and specifically his journey into the underworld. These carnival parallels are wide sweeping. As in *The Odyssey*, the poet is concerned with questions of wandering and homecoming, of exile and return. Like Odysseus, the poet hops from island to island meeting strange peoples: we inhabit a world of the sea's depths and the shore where life itself depends on conventions of hospitality. Specific references and parallels are extant in the poems. We hear repeatedly the poet's tongue-in-cheek references to the Arctic being cold as hell, references to Franklin's ship Erebus and others with names such as Fury, Hecla, and Terror. These northern poems emphasize the poet's descent into an underworld of Inuit cemeteries, rock cairns, and tent rings, of vanished Dorsets, Skraelings, and Thules. The "noble eskimo youth" of the mock-epic "When I sat down to Play the Piano" is for the poet an "avatar of Olympian excellence," "Zeus in the Arctic dog pound". In "Canso," one-eyed Sedna, "mother of all sea mammals", offers a carnival parallel to the Cyclops. Moreover, the poet's tent home is repeatedly likened to a cave, offering a parallel to the caves of the Cyclops and Calypso. "Still Life in a Tent" finds the poet "In a cave hollowed out in the rain near a pile of ghostly groceries"; in his feverish state, he contemplates the "seal towns! of Erewhon and Atlantis" and journeys to the Seal-King's court; when the fever leaves his body, "the huskies bark like hell". The elements of Homeric epic are loosely knit together in this fantastic imaginative journey there and back again.

9.4.3 Carnivalization of Epic Forms

According to John Van Rys in "Alfred in Baffin Land: Carnival Traces in Purdy's *North of Summer*", Purdy's poems constitute, in addition, a carnivalized version of epic heroism. Rather than Odysseus of the nimble wits we have the confused poet. While Odysseus' disguises allow him to test people and gain his revenge, the poet's masks cover instead a fully ambivalent identity. The poet is Nobody, but a carnivalized version of the clever Odyssean Nobody. He is continually caught in unheroic, debasing postures: lounging before dinner, defecating among hungry huskies, washing clothes, urinating into the ocean. "Odysseus in Kikastan" provides a paradigm of this carnival overturning of epic heroism and specifically of Odyssean travel. Written as Purdy journeyed from Brown's Harbour, which he had mentally renamed "Slaughter Beach," to the Kikastan Islands, it provides an immediate parallel for Odysseus' many escapes from horrific experiences. Punctuated with reversals of epic voyaging and hospitality, the poem exposes the comical underside of Odyssean heroism. We find the mariner poet between islands, leaving behind slaughter "with 3 days beard and a hangover! from drinking so much hot tea! and being hospitable if it chokes me". When offered yet another cup, the poet refuses by making a carnival grimace; everybody shares in the laughter. "And for some sad reason I'm happy," says the poet, "lounging lazily on the gunwales! a sort of creative doing nothing! that I make a specialty of". Here we find a very un-Odyssean poet indeed, both sad and happy, inactive but creative. He goes on in the poem to flip flop any pretense at epic seriousness in his contemplation of icebergs:

And you almost expect a sign

'Castles for Sale

Apply at Circe's Island'

They come equipped with obsolete plumbing
and Franklin's ghost behind the stairs
but the most delicate dripping music
mermaids dreaming of being human
an all-girl orchestra's tinkling flutes
on Jonesee's Mediterranean Cruises maybe
What do you say Odysseus

what do you say?

If sirens sing on the Arctic islands
they come equipped with a pair of flippers
blubber lips for drinking tea
they sport a set of real false whiskers
and a cold cold bed on the floor of the sea
but they're shy of strangers
and their singing teacher
never taught them to hit high

Epic seriousness is deflated by carnival laughter; the epic world is thoroughly domesticated as the Odyssean travels are transformed into the tourist cruise and real estate scheme. Epic nymphs and goddesses take on carnival flesh; the enchanting song of the sirens becomes the oinking of seals. As the poet shifts from these thoughts, he offers a fully carnivalized version of the many arrivals and homecomings in *The Odyssey*:

But we haul our freight to Kikastan Harbour
north of the treeline south of the pole
the lord mayor dressed in his best new parka
come down to the beach with a big hello
six white whales dance through a seaweed arbour
and several thousand cordial dogs
plus an Eskimo official greeter
(it must be old home week by god)
and a guy with a CBC loudspeaker
who wants me to say a few words but not

unless I happen to be John Diefenbaker
 — which is rather confusing so I explain
 that I'm only Odysseus after all
 only Odysseus after all
 Well I join the Eskimo Stevedore's Union
 we pack our luggage up from the sea
 Now I'm hard at work on a new translation
 of Homer's *Odyssey* Arctic-fashion
 but Jonesee invites me over for tea
 — and that's what happened

North of Summer translates *The Odyssey* into an Arctic carnival double, as is suggested in these very lines where the return of the epic hero, undercut by comic rhyme, takes the form of a canine greeting and mistaken identity, of dancing whales and the news event. The un-Odyssean poet hauls his loot up from the sea, sets to work on his translation, and breaks for tea. Such epic turn arounds consistently transform the poet's journey into a carnival voyage.

The carnival traces in this individual poem suggest the carnival idiom at work more largely in the volume. Carnival forms weaken the strict boundaries and conventions defining high genres. As Bakhtin says of literary history, "carnivalization constantly assisted in the destruction of all barriers between genres, between self-enclosed systems of thought, between various styles. . . it brought closer what was distant and united what had been sundered." Essentially, Purdy dialogizes poetic genres by infecting them with low and sub-literary genres. His ostensibly lyrical observations are in fact carnival dramas, anecdotes recounted by a carnival character. Carnival elements dialogize the personal lyric, undercutting the primacy of subjectivity and the wholeness of vocal monologue, with the result that the voices we hear are objectified, turned into objects of representation themselves. Moreover, the volume offers a consistent play with concepts of the travel book. As the title indicates, these are poems *from* Baffin Island, poems sent from afar; they comprise a personal journey, a diary, and an explorer's journal in the vein of Samuel Hearne. Purdy consistently plays with the idea of poems as postcards or letters, as the prose postscript to the volume suggests. Each poem is postmarked with its place of origin. In addition, Purdy plays with the very low genre of doggerel.

9.4.4 Humour and Burlesque in Purdy's Works: A Serio-Comical Combination

Purdy purposely plays with humour and burlesque in order to lower high poetic genres and mold them to a carnival experience of the Arctic. Carnival genres infect high genres with the life of the present moment and the present person, with the debasing and renewing energy of laughter. We sense continually a play with speech genres, soliloquy and diatribe, travesty and decrowning parody. Purdy's Arctic volume combines high and low, the serious and the comic, in a carnival embrace.

This serio-comical combination is fundamental to the poems in *North of Summer*. Purdy is a

master of juxtaposition, of placing side by side pedestrian details and poetic vision. We find this combination in “South” with its joining of physiological function, contemplation, and self-parody, and in “Still Life in a Tent,” a poem whose title clearly emphasizes artistic discourse but whose subtitle “Tenting tonight in the old camp ground” offers in juxtaposition a comical understanding of being alive. “When I sat down to Play the Piano” offers this carnival mixture, with its juxtaposition of music and defecation, inflated heroic discourse and cursing. Indeed, such poems suggest that traces of ancient Menippea, are to be found in the volume. In a 1969 letter to Woodcock, Purdy speaks of the “great Philosophy” he has “regurgitated ass-backwards into poems.” Such a trope reveals the thinking at the heart of Menippea, with its testing of ideas in the world, of philosophy in the trenches, with what Bakhtin calls its “organic combination . . . of the free fantastic, the symbolic, at times even a mystical-religious element with an extreme and . . . crude *slum naturalism*.” Purdy’s poems carry traces of ancient Menippea in that they enact this carnival testing of philosophy; in poem after northern poem, the poet puts his ontological and cultural assumptions to the test through an engagement with life’s underside. At the base of this mixture of high and low is carnival laughter. Such laughter functions to disrobe and dialogize, lower and uncrown; it frees from dogmatism and mysticism by attacking the borders sealing off the official and sanctioned. Carnival laughter operates as a liberating force, philosophically, ontologically, culturally, and textually. If we return to “When I sat down to Play the Piano” for a moment, we sense this carnival humour at work. The following lines constitute the poem’s musical first movement, its prelude or theme:

He cometh forth hurriedly from his tent
and looketh for a quiet sequestered vale
he carrieth a roll of violet toilet tissue
and a forerunner goeth ahead to do him honour
yclept a snotty-nosed Eskimo kid

The poem begins with this highly parodic version of the procession of the king or entrance of the hero. The lofty edge of the poet’s vision continues to decline into mock-heroic defecation in the midst of a plague of huskies, into shrieking and cursing juxtaposed to inflated heroic discourse. The poem winds down with a mixing of the religious and the ridiculous in a parody of the twenty-third Psalm:

‘Lo tho I walk thru the valley of
the shadowy kennels
in the land of permanent ice cream
I will fear no huskies
for thou art with me
and slingeth thy stones forever and ever
thou veritable David

Amen’

P.S. Next time I'm gonna take a gun

Carnival comedy completes one-sided seriousness, offers the corrective of the low and bodily and open to the tragic and lofty and finished.

9.4.5 Realism: Beauty Mixed with Ugliness

As this poem further suggests, *North of Summer* contains the forms, symbols, and carnival ethos of grotesque realism. Popular-festive culture is filled with ritual degradations and inversions, with curses and abuses, blows and uncrownings. Drawing on and born out of this culture, grotesque realism participates in this process of materializing the world. Bakhtin relates that “the essence of the grotesque is precisely to present a contradictory and double-faced fullness of life.” The grotesque degrades in order to renew; it is profoundly Janus-faced in that it both praises and abuses. Traces of grotesque realism can be mapped and followed in Purdy's Arctic poems. Repeatedly, Purdy emphasizes his visceral experience of the Arctic, a double experience. He recalls in the preface to his *Collected Poems* his landing at Brown's Harbour twenty years before:

Rancid pieces of fat, gnawed bones, and dogshit littered the gravel beach. The sea surrounding our island was like the concentrated essence of all the blue that ever was; I could feel that blue seep into me, and all my innards change colour. And the icebergs! They were shimmery lace and white brocade, and they became my standard for the word *beauty*.

Beauty is mixed with ugliness, vibrant life with material death in this carnival world uncharted by government maps. The landscape itself is described as a grotesque body littered with grotesque debris: bones and partial carcasses, blubber and blood, dog excrement, “glacial litter” and “frost boils”. Even place names contain grotesque overtones; in “The North West Passage,” the poet thinks of Ellef and Amund Ringnes, “heroic Norwegian brewers whose names! cling alcoholically to islands up there”. He sees continually the Janus face of the Arctic, the intimate interconnection of life and death. He finds it in “Dead Seal”:

He looks like a fat little old man
an ‘Old Bill’ sort of face
both wise and senile at the same time
with an anxious to please expression
 in fact a clown
which is belied on account of the dark slow worm
of blood crawling down his forehead
that precludes laughter
or being anything but a dead animal

Everywhere the poet finds indications of life and death in a grotesque embrace, of an ambivalent play with masks and disguises. Purdy continually peoples this Arctic landscape with grotesque figures, with images of the grotesque body. The poet amuses himself in “The North West Passage” thinking of Martin Frobisher, “‘Admiral of the Ocean-Sea’ who was! ‘hurte . . . in the Buttocke with an Arrowe’

“. Similarly, in “Canso” the poet contemplates Toonjiks, Asian giants “who crossed the Bering swing bridge! and built houses of whale ribs! buttocks in cloud country”, legendary carnival figures who used death to remain alive. The grotesque body is defined by its viscera, its active internal organs, and its various orifices. Speaking of this body, Bakhtin relates that “these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation.” The grotesque body takes the world in and simultaneously imposes itself on the world. This body eats and drinks, is liberated by food and wine; conversely, it defecates and urinates. And in grotesque realism, excrement and urine serve to remind humanity of its bodily existence, of its intimate connection with the earth. As Bakhtin maintains, “We must not forget that urine (as well as dung) is gay matter, which degrades and relieves at the same time, transforming fear into laughter. If dung is a link between body and earth (the laughter that unites them), urine is a link between body and sea.” The open grotesque body supplies a variety of tropes indicative of life’s carnival ambivalence, and Purdy makes frequent use of these images.

The poet’s grotesque bodily vision continually works to degrade and lower the self. The poet grounds his poetic vision in an awareness of his own bodily existence, hints of which we have already gathered from “When I sat down to Play the Piano” and “South.” In the first poem, the poet is lowered to the excremental level. We find the poet squatting among boulders; here he “. . . beginneth the most natural of natural functions! buttocks balanced above the boulders”. The poem comically establishes the link between excrement and earth, between the poet and material existence; he flees the huskies “sans dignity! sans intellect! sans Win. Barrett! and damn near sans anus”. He finds himself stripped of his clothing, intellectual systems, and pride. He is degraded and turned upside down to enable a new understanding of the world and the self to take shape. The second poem enacts pure carnival; the poem’s emphasis lies on the poet’s mouth, kidney, and bladder as he offers an ambivalent carnival blessing to the world. Eating whale sandwiches in a boat with Jonesee, the poet drinks a toast to the world with “fermented blubber juice”. As time passes within the poem, this toast works its way to the poet’s left kidney, and the poem ends with his urinating into the Arctic Ocean:

reverse blessing on the world
 from a sacriligious well-wisher
 impure joy and powerful impulse
 love and hate together
 a libation from the Arctic
 blood of a most experienced lambkin
 stand up in the boat rocking gently
 in all directions South
 and say
 ‘Look out down there!’

The poet showers the earth with a carnival blessing; his connection of urine and sea provides an ambivalent degradation and renewal in the form of a parodic religious ritual. While establishing the poet’s material connection with both earth and sea, images of the grotesque body and its functions

further serve to demonstrate the poet's open carnival being.

9.4.6 Carnival Ethos of Foolish Wisdom

Carnival grotesque debasings model the ontological turn arounds in these northern poems. Closely linked with the tropes of grotesque realism is the carnival ethos of foolish wisdom, for the consciousness that activates grotesque debasings and renewals is that of the clown. Indeed, the masks of the fool and clown lie at the heart of the carnival traces in Purdy's *North of Summer*. These northern poems provide us with the wisdom of the fool, a wisdom that offers a new understanding of the world based on upside down and inside out logic, polemic and misunderstanding, laughter and decrowning. The Inuit, in fact, offer the poet a paradigm of foolish wisdom. By conventional standards, their world view is nothing short of folly, and yet the poet sees in their hunting culture, their past, and their interrelations the wisdom of the fool; these Hyperborean people, these Inuit who are 'The People,' have their own insight into being alive. Moreover, these northern poems loosely constitute a fool's pilgrimage, and in them the poet recounts the fool's adventures in a string of episodes and anecdotes which revise accepted truths with the mask of folly. Folly provides its own unofficial wisdom and generates its own ambivalent truth. In the postscript to the volume, Purdy relates how he set out to climb a 3,000 foot mountain near Pangnirtung, thinking it would take only an hour. As he climbed, however, it "stretched out like an accordian... including wide tundra meadows, fields paved with boulders, even a small ice-covered lake about halfway up." This incident suggests the upsetting activity of folly, its participation in a process of discovery, and its implication in a poetic of revision.

Through the fool's misunderstanding and the privileged clown's logic, Purdy's Arctic poems enact fundamental revisions in world view. The poet encounters a strange world that threatens to topple his cherished systems. In his often comical efforts to overcome language and cultural barriers, the poet comes to both understand and misunderstand the Inuit. Cultural givens, preconceptions, stereotypes, and appearances are revised as the clown's wisdom goes to work. Purdy suggests this pattern of cultural revision in his Arctic Diary, in fact, where he notes that all he had read about the Arctic left him unprepared, where he insists that we must "throw away the preconceptions" fostered by books of the Arctic as a "barren alien place, unfriendly to man." The poems in *North of Summer* and the volume itself enact this discovery; they offer the poet's unofficial view of the Arctic, one contrary to books and preconceived notions. In the postscript to the volume, Purdy offers these poems to the reader as "a set of binoculars thru which you can view the Arctic from several thousand miles away," a poetic "optic glass" attempting to be an extension of the reader's eyes and mind. The lens of the poem, shaped by carnival folly, allows the reader to experience the same discovery. These northern poems offer the poet's southern readers a communal celebration of foolish wisdom.

9.4.7 Purdy's Poems: Dramas of Self-Revision

The poet's dialogic exposure to this 'other' culture continually revises his own cultural norms. "The Sculptors" is one such poem that enacts a personal cultural revision. We find the poet bargain shopping, "Going thru cases and cases! of Eskimo sculpture" rejected by T. Eaton Co. Ltd. The poet is searching "for one good carving! one piece that says 'I AM'! to keep a southern promise," but he discovers only partial, broken, and malformed art. His search continues for "one piece that glows! one slap happy idiot seal! alien to the whole seal-nation," but he soon grows impatient. His cultural ethos, southern and Judeo-Christian, asks of these northern artists what they cannot possibly

give. The poet sees “broken bent! Misshapen failed animals! with vital parts missing,” but these carvings lead to a sudden vision of the artists themselves, their pain and failures. The poem concludes with the poet’s new understanding of them, of the old Inuit “who carve in their own image! of maimed animals.” The poet’s initial folly, his misunderstanding, allows for a deeply felt cultural revision. Again and again, these Arctic poems enact the clash of northern and southern culture through a carnival play with folly and wisdom.

These poems are, in fact, dramas of self-revision. Carnival folly and the clown’s logic turn the static and bounded individual into an open and becoming person. The carnival fool and clown are masks over the face of Nobody that allow for transformations and metamorphoses; through a dialogic debate with himself and the world, the protean poet refuses to be pinned down and defined. Like Alice, the poet carries on a conversation with himself in order to explore the question, “Who in the world am I?” Baffin Land facilitates such exploration. In Purdy’s Arctic poems, these carnival forms quite simply open the poet to self-revision. In an interview with Gary Geddes, Purdy relates, “I like to think of a continual becoming and a changing and a moving,” and he adds, “I don’t think a man is consistent; he contradicts himself at every turn.” Selfhood, for Purdy, is clearly dialogic, and in the Arctic poems this strange and new landscape allows for self-discovery. The poems record carnival threshold experiences where the poet’s self turns upside down and inside out. We find him in air lanes and sea lanes, on bloodied shores and in his cave tent (also his creative heart, womb, and nursery), in the market and cemeteries and tent rings, all at the top of the world. In “Washday,” the poet hears the Inuit woman Leah speak his name; he feels “breathed out! some of the ‘me’ I am! removed! the walled self! defenses down! altered”. These lines suggest the metamorphic process more largely at work in the poems, a process filled with ambivalence, as this poem itself goes on to suggest with its re establishment of those crumbled walls.

The poems “Metrics” and “Still Life in a Tent” enact such self—revisions. In the first poem, the lonely and disoriented poet attempts to bring order to the Slaughter Beach in front of him. He sets up his typewriter in order to do so, and wonders what he himself represents, perhaps “some hustings of the soul”. In this strange context, however, he fails to create the desired order:

Old Squaw ducks are going
 ‘ouw—ouw—ouw’

And I think to the other side of that sound
 I have to
 because it gathers everything
 all the self-deception and phoniness
 of my lifetime into an empty place
 and the RUNNER IN THE SKIES
 I invented
 as symbol of the human spirit

crashes like a housefly

The vertical aspirations of the poet plunge to earth; his personal myths are carnivalized by the world around him. The poem ends with the poet's ambivalent denial of cosmic emptiness and equally ambivalent typing. "Still Life in a Tent" enacts a similar carnival revision. Taking the form of a threshold feverish discourse, the poem explores a series of boundaries and their breaking, namely inside and outside the tent and inside and outside the self. Icebergs split both inside and outside; the poet sends his thoughts "in fevered fantasy! north of summer". The poet's fevered discourse allows for normally accepted boundaries of selfhood and uncharted regions to be explored:

I'm so glad to be here
with the chance that comes but once
to any man in his lifetime
to travel deep in himself
to meet himself as a stranger
at the northern end of the world

The poet's Arctic expedition takes him on an exploration of the stranger within himself. Carnival forms repeatedly allow for the breakdown of the monologic self, of accepted identity and unbreached borders.

The poem "Trees at the Arctic Circle" provides a paradigm of the revisions enacted through carnival forms and tropes. On the surface, few carnival traces make themselves apparent here: little in the way of grotesque bodily imagery, the clown's loud laughter in the marketplace, or the mixing of high with low and serious with comic. Nonetheless, closer examination reveals those carnival forms, from the very title to the final paradoxical lines. The poem enacts a radical cultural, philosophical, and ontological revision that finds its source in the carnival tradition of foolish wisdom, of folly exposed and turned upside down. The title initiates us into the carnival world: how can trees live above the tree line? Yet, in the poem's first two sections, the poet ignores this paradox. His fool's diatribe against these ground willows clearly reveals his southern ethos. The third section, however, marks a sharp turn for the poet. He begins to observe the landscape on its own terms: his folly, his southern ethos, his Old World stance, and he himself are all transformed. Contemplating the strength of their living, he moves deeper into this northern world and further from his own. They have three months to propagate the species, "and that's how they spend their time! unbothered by any human opinion just digging in here and now." Going still deeper, he discovers life and death in a pure carnival embrace, hell and paradise conjoined:

And you know it occurs to me
about 2 feet under
those roots must touch permafrost
ice that remains ice forever
and they use it for their nourishment

use death to remain alive

The poet's southern foolishness gives way completely to a carnival understanding of living and dying, of the ambivalence at the heart of existence. In the poem's final section, the poet makes this carnival turn around explicit, chastizing himself for his humiliating foolishness. We hear a radical revision of the self, the poet's author position, his poetic ethos, his cultural and ontological assumptions:

I see that I've been carried away
in my scorn of the dwarf trees
most foolish in my judgements
To take away the dignity
of any living thing
even tho it cannot understand
the scornful words
is to make life itself trivial
and yourself the Pontifex Maximus
of nullity

The poet exposes himself for the carnival fool he has been; his folly has made him the Pontifex Maximus of nullity, Nobody, and yet the expression of that folly and the poet's turning of it upside down allow for his radical revision. The poem enacts his metamorphosis from the oak god fool to the ground willow poet.

The final lines of "Trees at the Arctic Circle" suggest that just as the poem begins in paradox, so it ends. The poet vows to "let the stupidity remain permanent! as the trees are! in a poem! the dwarf trees of Baffin Island." In these lines we find both escape and entrapment, affirmation and denial, a concerted play with ambivalent permanence and equally ambivalent flux or even disappearance. The poet's folly, already revised and thus no longer present, will be enshrined by the poem; similarly, the trees, which he has already discovered to be engaged in a continual process of living and dying, death and life in a carnival embrace, will be made permanent *in the poem*. A double irony becomes plain: first, the irony of making permanent what is continually changing, and second, the irony of doing so in a poem, in words both static and fluid, dead on a page and alive in a reader. We find in these northern poems Purdy's New World revision of an Old World ethos through the use of carnival forms, his re-writing of official cultural and historical myths through poetic carnival. As Dennis Lee suggests in his afterword to Purdy's *Collected Poems*, Purdy has been a pioneer, one of the New World poets "who first broke through to indigenous articulacy, who subverted and recast the forms of the metropolitan imagination so as to utter the truths of the hinterland in native terms," who has done so moreover "with a rare fusion of high artistry and folk, even populist imagination." In these Arctic poems, Purdy makes a large contribution to this carnival reprocessing of Old World imaginative givens. *North of Summer* establishes what he calls in his interview with Gary Geddes "a compass point" for himself and for his culture, a compass point to which he returned again and again in subsequent volumes and individual poems.

The final lines of “Trees at the Arctic Circle,” turning inward as they do and destabilizing the process of self-revision, force upon us central questions concerning these carnival traces in Purdy’s poetry and the “*post-festum*” nature of literary carnival itself, as Michael André Bernstein describes it in “When the Carnival Turns Bitter: Preliminary Reflections Upon the Abject Hero.” Bernstein reminds us of the “bitter strand” to be found in liberating carnival forms, of the emergence in literature of “the image of a carnivalization of values during which it is no longer a question of breaking down ossified hierarchies and stale judgments but rather of being denied *any* vantage point from which a value can still be affirmed.” At the heart of Purdy’s use of carnival lies an ambivalent play between these two options, the liberating force of laughter and the darker undercurrents revealing the ego facing a void. Purdy’s carnivalized lyrics enact the ambivalent debate of the poetic ego with itself and the world. Repeatedly in these northern poems, the poet’s ego is undercut only to be re established, even while cultural and communal norms are redefined into compass points from which to navigate. In “Bestiary,” Purdy’s abc of poets, the first poet listed is the unknown author of “Tom O’Bedlam,” “the anonymous, the all-of-us,! enduring the pain of everyman,! perched on a throne in the gutter.” These initiatory lines return us to Nobody and the final lines of “Trees at the Arctic Circle,” where the poet enacts both carnival liberation and containment, both self-abasement and self aggrandisement. The uncrowned poet enters an upside down kingdom, the court of the Seal-King; he is both king and clown in a kingdom of his own making, master of and slave to his own discourse; he is both Nobody and Everyman shaped by an ambivalent pattern of play at the heart of which lies the fundamental tension between self and community, poem and culture, ego and reality.

9.5 Let Us Sum Up

Purdy, in his great, elegiac, laconic, voice of Canadian land and country, had influenced generations of Canadian poets who were drawn to his small shack in the woods near Ameliasburgh, Ontario, to drink wild grape wine and write and talk and argue through the night about the poetry that has made Canada famous around the world. Purdy travelled in time as well as in space. His poems reveal the generalist erudition that is acquired by a self-taught man with a passion for reading, and he sought especially to bring into poetry a sense of Canada’s past, of the rapid pattern of change that has made much of Canada acquire the quality of age in so brief a history. During the first forty-odd years of his life, Al Purdy wrote a lot of bad poetry. Where others would have quit, Purdy persevered until he found his own distinctive voice. His unconventional works forced Canadians to re-evaluate their understanding of poetry and themselves.

Keeping in view the account of the dynamics of discord in his poetry, it is strongly felt that while on the one hand Purdy’s complex vision of life comes out through the paradoxical contraries of life and death, finite and infinite, White and non-White, past and the present etc. on the other, even behind his seemingly ironic attitude to life is not without a positive attitude. Through all conflicting contraries plaguing his mind through the entire range of his poetry, there certainly seems a continuous search for a stable island in the running stream of life. The contraries or the opposites, he employs in his poems, contain a typical Canadian experience.

The most striking feature of the poetry of Purdy is his interest in the past and present which seem to explain his dynamics of discord. The juxtaposed worlds which take place in his poems, tend to move from present to past and back again, seeking to restore lost continuities. He struggles to understand the vanished era and finds vestiges of a more primitive era, prehistoric past in the present. For him past

is a living thing, carried within us all, and a source of strength. Because we often lose sight of our past, he attempts to recover and respond to it by bringing together the contrary worlds. In a word it can be said that in his poetry it is the past and the present which are embossed with various contrary and opposite patterns instilling true Canadian spirit.

Purdy's *North of Summer* as a volume, with its coherent shape and focussed subject, provides a paradigm for the work of carnival in Purdy's poetry. These Arctic poems give detailed expression to this poet's understanding of life's carnival underside. Indeed, Purdy's search for a New World passage establishes compass points from which to navigate, compass points as fluid and real as the Magnetic North Pole. The poet's journey into an Arctic underworld at the top of the globe, his upside down Odyssey and turned around exploration, establishes a carnival universe in which he the poet and we the readers can wander and dwell, a universe nonetheless problematic in the light of carnival culture's historical development and literature's complex appropriation of its forms. Carnival forms allow Purdy to find the Arctic and see it anew: the clown's logic and the fool's wisdom; grotesque realism's bodily images and debasing laughter; the multistyled mixing of high and low, serious and comic; and the parodic reprocessing of Homeric epic and Arctic exploration all give Purdy the artistic forms for understanding his experience as hell and paradise. Al Purdy's different face of the Arctic is an ambivalent and continually transforming carnival mask.

9.6 Review Questions

1. Which themes does Purdy deal with in his poems?
2. Enumerate the characteristic features of Purdy's poetry and explain each one in brief.
3. Write a short note on the crude realism in Purdy's poems
4. Purdy's Poems are "Dramas Of Self-Revision". Justify.
5. Give a critical estimate of Purdy as a Canadian poet.
6. Al Purdy was a prolific Canadian writer. Elucidate.
7. What were the factors influencing Purdy's poems?
8. How would you explain "tension between poetic and carnival elements" in Purdy's poems?
9. With examples, comment on Purdy's use of humour and burlesque in his works.
10. How can we say that Purdy's poems constitute the elements of Homeric Epic?
11. With reference to Purdy's writings, write short notes on the following:
 - i) Carnivalization of epic forms
 - ii) Carnival ethos of foolish wisdom

9.7 Bibliography

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UNIT-10

AL PURDY (II)

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 About the poet
- 10.2 Historical Context Of Purdy's Poems
- 10.3 Purdy's Style
- 10.4 Purdy's Method
- 10.5 Purdy's Vision
- 10.6 Purdy's Quest
- 10.7 English-Canadian Tradition in Pratt's Poetry
- 10.8 Purdy's Preoccupation With Time And Space
- 10.9 "The Cariboo Horses": Critical Analysis
- 10.10 "The Country North of Belleville": Critical Analysis
- 10.11 Wilderness Gothic
 - 10.11.1 Critical Analysis
 - 10.11.2 Themes in "Wilderness Gothic"
 - 10.11.3 Purdy's Technique in "Wilderness Gothic"
 - 10.11.4 Conclusion
- 10.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.13 Review Questions
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10.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to the life and works of Al Purdy and his age.
- To help the students gain knowledge and understanding of the poet and his works.
- To enable the students to understand Al Purdy's style and technique.
- To have a critical estimate of Al Purdy's poems.

10.1 About the Poet

A prolific poet, who won numerous awards, Purdy began writing poetry in his teens, paying to have his first book published. Though he did not continue his formal education beyond grade ten,

Purdy read voraciously and worked diligently at his craft. In his introduction to *The Collected Poems of Al Purdy*, Dennis Lee, speaking of Purdy's long, self-taught apprenticeship, observed that Purdy was one of "the slowest developers in the history of poetry."

Purdy also traveled widely and worked at various casual and manual jobs, often using these experiences for his subject matter. His poetry moved towards an exploration of indigenous myth. He mythologized the landscape of the southeastern end of Lake Ontario, the area where he was born and lived. Human behavior and destiny fascinated Purdy. His unique voice used humor and compassion as it blended the cadences of real speech with elegiac form. Because of his colloquial language, the informality of his tone, and his tendency towards using a long line, Purdy's poems are immediately accessible though they convey complex ideas that express universal values.

10.2 Historical Context of Purdy's Poems

When Purdy created "Wilderness Gothic," he was going through a major transformation that reflects the times in which he lived. Purdy had lived through the Depression and World War II, and the style of his early poetry was quite formal, which mirrored the literary and social culture of the 1940s. However, during the 1960s, the United States and Canada were experiencing significant social changes that divided older and younger generations. The younger generations were expelling rigid social constraints and getting involved in a number of political movements, such as the civil rights movement (which fought for equal rights for minority ethnic groups), the antiwar movement (which promoted civil disobedience against the war in Vietnam), the sexual revolution (which encouraged people to express their sexual desires more freely), and the women's movement (which fought for equal rights for women). In addition, the literary culture was expanding. The Beat poets in America, such as Kerouac and Ginsberg, were changing the literary landscape and redefining and revolutionizing the craft. Since the attitudes in America inevitably permeated its northern neighbor, Canada, these attitudes affected Purdy and his work, as it was at this time that he began to change his old style of writing and expand his horizons.

In addition, during the 1960s, the Canada Council began programmes that allowed Purdy to dedicate himself to writing and not to worry about supporting himself with other work. This gave him the freedom to stop doing the menial work that he'd done since he left school as a teenager and to travel extensively during this time, wandering the Canadian countryside with his fellow poets and taking his poetry directly to the people. By reading his work to large audiences and interacting with his peers, Purdy was able to modify his rigid style of poetry in favor of a freer verse. He also began traveling to different countries, such as Cuba, Mexico, Turkey, Greece, and Italy, which exposed Purdy to different people and cultures. During this time, he familiarized himself with the poets Pablo Neruda, Charles Bukowski, and Cesar Vallejo. While he recognized these poets as influences, he explained in *For Openers: Conversations with Twenty-four Canadian Writers*, "I believe that when a poet fixes on one style or method he severely limits his present and future development." This statement serves to prove that Purdy finally set aside his previous inclination of mimicking other poets to the point that his influences were no longer apparent in his work.

While "Wilderness Gothic" is not necessarily set in the 1960s — in fact, it does not have a definite time frame — the subject matter resembles a shift in generational values. Purdy's poem compares and contrasts religious faith and work between the Victorian pioneers and that of more modern people. This idea has its roots in the generational struggles that occurred during the 1960s. Young people were

at odds with their parents and the conservative political system over their views about gender, ethnic, and international relations. The 1960s, in some respects, represented a change in the cultural climate toward greater freedom. In this poem, it is Purdy's style and construction that serve to capture the spirit of the freedom of the 1960s.

10.3 Purdy's Style

At times the epic strain rises from seemingly unlikely places, for instance the poetry of Al Purdy tends to be off-hand, colloquial, tough or prosaic by turns. Yet Purdy has hammered out for himself his own poetic method, intensely personal and yet also Canadian in its remarkable melding of disparate elements. It is almost as if Purdy wants to find an entirely new beginning for poetry to express the emergence of a new nation. The poet in fact did reject the first twenty years of his own poetic career as inadequate. The epic strain comes out in his use of a scrambled chronology and references to historic time in lighting juxtaposition:

Alexander turns from the gates of the Ganges
and moves with his generals and phalank to bulldogs the Kremlin
while the eunuch priests conspire in Assyria
to defoliate the Vietnamese rice fields of bananas.

Purdy's is a haunted poetry, conjuring up a sense of the geologic age of Canada but settling in it a larger cosmic scale. Such a vision sounds romantic, and the poet is constantly on guard to prevent romanticism from taking over the poetry. He constantly injects realism into the poems in flat prosaic tones or self-mockery. In "The Cariboo Horses" he creates a tension between the ordinary horses and their displacement by the automobile, their immediate ancestry and the horse's long cosmic ancestry, and all this romantic and dangerously nostalgic piling up of detail is suddenly deflated in one undecorated picture of the horse at the end of the poem:

arriving here at chilly noon
in the gasoline smell of the
dust and waiting 15 minutes
at the grocer's.

The largeness of Canada induces travel on a grand scale, and Purdy's poems partake of both the attraction and fear of travel. Travel for Purdy means encountering space, and space offers an opportunity to break out of bounds, to transcend even the limits of the human condition, so that for Purdy, the national game of ice-hockey, "combination of ballet and murder", offers a chance to lift off from the realms of the ordinary:

Thru the smoky ends boards out
of sight and climbing up the Appalachian highlands
and racing breast to breast across laurentian barrens
over hudson's diamond bay and down the treeless tundra where

stopping isn't feasible or possible or lawful.

And yet that vast space looms large over man in the poems, reducing him to insignificance, and this littleness of man in the face of an outer force almost beyond his comprehension results in some of Purdy's best poems, elegiac in tone, expressing the polarity of the transience and persistence of man. He finds a symbol of this in the miniature Arctic trees only eighteen inches tall, the roots of which constantly touch permafrost so that 'they use death to remain alive'. That is the kind of courage; Purdy celebrates in his poetry, a kind of twentieth epic bravery. But the final paradox in the poetry is that Purdy is also a cosmic poet, often indulging in cosmic anecdote, raucous humour, even slapstick and widecrack with more often than not the poet himself as the chief butt of the joke. So the poetry becomes a vehicle for the welding of the poet, poetry and country into one whole.

After awhile the eyes digest a country and
the belly perceives a mapmaker's vision
in dust and dirt on the face and hands here
its smell drawn deep thru the nostrils down
to the lungs and spurts thru bloodstream
campaigns in the lower intestine.

Purdy has also attempted to express northern aspects of the country in his Arctic poems, "North of Summer (1967)". Northness is certainly a characteristic of Canadian literature, part of the stern, unbending quality of the landscape. The North represents a challenge, a new frontier as well as another polarity, for most of the settlement is along the southern border of the country, but the North remains an idea:

Canadian life to this day is marked by a northern quality, the strong seasonal rhythm...the wilderness venture now sublimated for most of us to the summer holiday or autumn shoot; the greatest of joys, the return from the lonely savagery of the wilderness to the peace of the home; the puritanical restraint which masks the psychological tensions set up by the contrast of wilderness roughness and home discipline.

But Purdy's however sympathetic and realistic, remains an outsider's response to Eskimo life. Strangely, the original inhabitants of our northern wilderness appear only marginally in the literary works concerned with the settlement of the land.

In both of Purdy's poems, "The Transient" and "The Cariboo Horses", Purdy uses initial verbs to emphasize either movement through a landscape ("Riding the boxcars out of Winnipeg...Riding into the Crow's Nest mountains...") or stasis at a particular point in time and within the confines of a man-made structure (Being a boy scarcely a moment...,"Stand in the swaying boxcar doorway..."). The central section of "The Cariboo Horses" shows how Purdy first mirrors the enforced stillness of his "half-fame bronco rebels" through strategically placed past-participles and present tense verbs("waiting", "hitched", "pastured") and then reflects the limited freedom of the horses and their owners through similarly placed verbs of action and movement("rushing", "clopping", "dropping"):

But only horses
Waiting in stables

Hitched at taverns
 standing at dawn
pastured outside the town with
.....oranges of dung....

10.4 Purdy's Method

Indeed, if Purdy has a method, it is error, rambling, talking: talking to oneself, talking to others, listening to others talk. From a highly conventional, formally patterned verse, Purdy developed a more flexible, cursive manner accommodated to the speaking voice, accommodating, that is, substantial variations in tone and diction and the vagaries of oral syntax: the seemingly interminable run-on sentence, the fragment, mixed tenses and other forms of mixed construction. It is a method that serves to put things in perspective, but not by adopting a single, bird's eye point of view. Non-linear, it produces a collision or concatenation of different points of view. Fact and fantasy, knowledge and desire, what one has learned and what one immediately perceives, have equal validity and presence. It works to enlarge one's sense of where and what one is. It serves to liberate, not through a simplification of the point of view, but through its complication.

If one of the effects of Purdy's method is, almost inevitably, a form of irony, it is not the irony of the satirist, who usually assumes that the world should be logical or conform to some single standard of goodness, beauty, or truth. Purdy's tone is more elegiac than angry, more humorous than satirical, informed by a kind of astonishment that the world should be so crazy, so impossible and so desirable — like one's wife, like oneself. The movement betrays the questing energy, the curiosity and exuberance of a man who is much less concerned to protest and defend himself against the world than to affirm and identify himself more largely with it. Even when he might wish to defend himself, Purdy finds the world, or his method, plays tricks on him. When in "One Rural Winter" the speaker struggles back to his house to get out of a bitter wind, the door paradoxically opens out and not in — or rather, it leads into and not out of the world.

my heavy body is doped with wind and cold
 and the house door
 drags me into the hall
 and the doorknob
is a handle I hold onto the sky with

Winter or summer, the whole earth is a domestic space. "Under the hot sun," he says in "Private Property," "I rummage in the earth / as if it were a closet." And even though the suspicious farmer implies that he has no business there, Purdy leaves thinking of "the family underground / going on and on."

10.5 Purdy's Vision

Purdy's vision is comic, a vision of the ultimate community of all things. This impulse is to explore and to celebrate the world, not to change it, however it may be difficult or even terrible at

times. And that is just as well, since his “methods,” unlike those of Empire, do not lead to material progress, cannot change and control environments and technical systems. And that too, may be just as well, since the methods of power and the imperial vision, in the long run, serve to augment rather than diminish poverty and waste. The poor, as Purdy notes in “The Darkness of Cities,” are everywhere. They are “a needless luxury and they know it.” And poems will not change that fact.

And in the face of their knowledge
all these mere words on paper
ring soundlessly in the vacuum of inattention
I know they mean nothing
as the terrible unaccusing poor know also
while brightly coloured birds
fly in and out from lonely caves of my imagination.

In terms of power, the poems mean nothing. But they have another meaning, unstated, which they demonstrate again and again: how to live without power. And that is the integrity of this poet, which neither poverty nor power can change.

10.6 Purdy’s Quest

One strange and yet quite real characteristic of the typical Canadian psyche is an overpowering tendency to examining the two opposite sides of an issue and conclude this examination directly or indirectly. W.H. New holds that this feature is prominent in Eastern and Western attitude in Canada. But this feature is not a geographical concept rather it is a persistent feature that explains viable literature in both form and content in Canadian literature. Purdy’s poems articulate the various components of this quest and show how Al Purdy seems to reach a destination in continuous search for stable values.

Purdy’s quest is to find a “basis for man’s transcendence of his own earthly life, without ceasing to embrace it.” He does it by putting together various oppositions and concentrates on the reality of the past and the present, or the historical, mythical roots and the present experiences of an individual.

10.7 English-Canadian Tradition in Pratt’s Poetry

Purdy works in the basic English-Canadian tradition of impure poetry, as opposed to that of Quebec poetry and much of the International Modern. Perhaps one could say that he has a kind of *fesse-gauche* relationship to the Anglo-American modern and its interest in the seventeenth century “metaphysical” school, perhaps one could say he is a low church Donne. He can digest anything: changing the oil on his old Pontiac, spring, Nietzsche, the passing farm girl’s buttock, and Cold War pessimism.

Unlike much Quebec poetry, though basically lyrical, Purdy’s poems expand easily into the narrative and dramatic, the descriptive and wildly discursive. They tend to be occasional, even anecdotal, focussed on quite specific characters and grounded in a quite specific place. As in the work of Earle Birney or E. J. Pratt — but not in that of Anne Hébert or Grandbois — one can generally locate the speaker in Purdy’s poems on a map. This concern with spatial orientation is evident immediately in

many of the titles: “Love at Roblin Lake,” “At the Quinte Hotel,” “The Country North of Belleville,” “The Road to Newfoundland,” “Trees at the Arctic Circle,” “Lions in Stanley Park,” “Uncle Fred on Côte des Neiges,” “Fidel Castro in Revolutionary Square,” “On the Avenida Juarez,” or “Complaint Lodged with the L.C.B.O. by a Citizen in Upper Rumbelow.”

Generally a Purdy poem focusses on a particular moment, a particular set of relationships, and then it goes round and round like an eddy, gathering up odds and ends, whatever comes to hand, whatever comes to mind, whatever can be caught up and borne along in the current of feeling. It imitates the action of daily life in which one spontaneously digests all kinds of unrelated matters as one moves from situation to situation, moment to moment. It is an action which integrates, not always logically, but sensibly and psychologically, inner and outer space, the local and the cosmic, past and present.

10.8 Purdy’s Preoccupation with Time and Space

Purdy’s preoccupation with time as well as space reflects a relatively new development in English-Canadian writing. Just as Quebec writers have begun to turn away from a traditional preoccupation with the past, to emphasize the present and the future, English-Canadian writers have moved in the opposite direction. Dismayed by the increasing Americanization of Canadian life, by the general spread of an increasingly international urban and technological culture, they have turned to the past to recover a sense of identity and of traditional values. One can also see it as an attempt to recover the pastoral vision in a world of Empire. This is particularly true of Purdy, whose pursuit of the past is distinctly less political and nationalistic.

For Purdy, past moments, past lives, are incarnate in local space. As in “Archaeology of Snow,” they persist like the cold imprint of a girl’s buttocks. Even as that trace of a moment of intimacy begins to melt and disappear, the speaker expresses his conviction that it never really disappears, that in some “unfathomed fashion” we are all immortal. We can encounter “the entire race / of men just by being / alive here.” As in the field of snow:

... in the plumed fields of light
are the shapely deeds of our flesh
the lovely omniscience of women

We need to exist but once
in the green shadows
in the sunlit places
and there’s no end of humans

For Purdy, time becomes space, a process that is suggested even more vividly in the poem “Method for Calling up Ghosts,” which also stresses its familiar, hometown character.

Walking sometimes in the streets of the town
I live in and thinking of the people who
lived here once and fill the space I fill —

If they'd painted white trails on the sidewalk
everywhere they went, it would be possible
to see them now.

Space becomes a dense palimpsest of past and present lives. All lives make traces, trails, local roads, which in time, like the farms and snake fences of "The Country North of Belleville," become "soft outlines and shadowy differences," and sink into the landscape. To return one may have to "enquire the way of strangers." The road, the highway, which has been a central motif in Canadian poetry from the nineteenth century right up to Pratt and F. R. Scott, has changed its sign. As Frank Watt has remarked, the characters in recent fiction move out of the urban centres, off the main highways, onto secondary roads and dead end trails. Purdy too, though a great traveller, generally moves toward the back streets, the back yards, the hinterlands. It is a movement backwards into the bush, away from the metropolis, to where the old farms waver like cities under the "green waves of time." Purdy's road is like that of his grandfather in the poem "My Grandfather Talking — 30 Years Ago," which ends:

They put a road there
an a girl on the road
in a blue dress
an given a place to go
from I went
into the woods with her
it bein the best way
to go and never get there .

It is a movement away from the power grid, away from an analytical to a biblical knowledge, where distinctions blur, where the living and the dead merge. In the strange poem "The Runners," two young Scots sent out to reconnoitre Newfoundland on foot simply disappear into it. A more familiar figure in which time becomes space is that of the archaeologist. So Purdy, in search of Owen Roblin and the ancestral past comes to dig through the garbage dumps of Ameliasburgh, alias Roblin's Mills. But he is not satisfied simply to recover his English, Loyalist, or Upper Canadian past. He digs deeper to recover the North American past of the Indians, the Beothuks of Newfoundland, the Cape Dorset Eskimos, and deeper still, among the bones of extinct animals, in The Badlands of Alberta or in the limestone of the east, the past world of the dinosaurs and the trilobites. There too he would discover an alien love. In "Lament for the Dorsets," he writes:

Twentieth century people
apartment dwellers
executives of neon death
warmakers with things that explode
— they have never imagined us in their future

how could we imagine them in the past
squatting among the moving glaciers
six hundred years ago
with glowing lamps?
As remote or nearly
as the trilobites and swamps
when coal became
or the last great reptile hissed
at a mammal the size of a mouse
that squeaked and fled

Just as in certain cases where Purdy tells us a poem has no meaning, here he suggests such knowledge of the past is not possible. But what the speaker says is impossible to imagine, the poem itself proceeds to imagine. Purdy does not dig up the past and haul it into the light of day so much as he sinks into it. Thus he says in “Remains of an Indian Village”:

I have seen myself fade
from a woman s eyes
while I was standing there
and the earth was aware of
me no longer —
As I observe the wispy legs of children
running in this green light from a distant star
into the near forest —
wood violets and trilliums of
a hundred years ago
blooming and vanishing —
the villages of brown people
toppling and returning

It is not an intellectual expropriation but a kind of empathy, a movement into a field with its own particular radiance. Absorbed, the speaker here sees himself literally sinking into the earth.

Standing knee-deep in the joined earth
of their weightless bones,
in the archaeological sunlight,

the trembling voltage of summer,
in the sunken reservoirs of rain,
standing waist-deep in the criss-cross
rivers of shadows,
in the village of nightfall,
the hunters silent and women
bending over dark fires
I hear their broken consonants.

Purdy's poetry is dominated by the present participle and the continuous present: "I am sitting," "I am driving," a man "keeps hammering at the door." Whatever elements enter the poem tend to exist in the present mode.

10.9 *The Cariboo Horses*: Critical Analysis

In "The Cariboo Horses" the present or the physical time is a gray morning at 100 mile house, a town in the interior of British Columbia, where "the Cowboys ride in rolling" into town to pick up supplies at the grocers. Their horses "are waiting in stables" "standing at down/pastured outside the time with/jeeps and fords and chevys..." As has already been referred to, the scene is in present but for the poet it evokes a panorama of history wherein horses played a vital role in human affairs:

Only horses
no stopwatch memories or place ancestors
not Kiangs hauling undressed stone in the Nile Valley
and having stubborn Egyptian tantrums or
Onagers racing thru Hither Asia and
the last Quagga screaming in African Highlands
Lost relatives of those
Whose hooves were thunder.

In "The Cariboo Horses" the poet recalls first the Indians of the Cariboo region who hunted on horseback, then reaching further in place and time brings to memory earlier species of horse which are the mule like Kiangs, Onagers and Quagga. The Kiang used to haul stones in the building of pyramids; The Onager was a wild ass used for hunting in Asia; and the Quagga is an extinct species related to Zebra. Here the tension of polarity of past and present, given by the splendid tradition of man's relationship to horse, is a note in the fact, that the horse, like its primitive ancestors, is slowly moving towards extinction, the combustion engine having replaced horse power.

In "The Cariboo Horses," Purdy tackles the idea that that which is Canadian is fundamentally inferior. Their horses, he points out, may seem like "only horses," of nondescript Canadian stock, but

they are the “lost relatives” of the horses who dragged stone for the pyramids and traversed Africa and Asia. The foreign horses may seem more glamorous, but Canadian horses share that line through the memory of the species. Likewise, we may be “only Canadians,” be we share the promise of ever race of humans to walk before us, and we need to work to create and shape a mythology of our own. According to Purdy, Canadian history should move them more than the stories of foreign shores, because their history is all they have to fall back on.

10.10 *The Country North of Belleville: Critical Analysis*

Purdy combines a strong sense of place with deep awareness of the past pressing upon the present to produce a kind of geographical poetry which marvelously projects the nature of Canada and of other places. In his poem, “The Country North of Belleville” expresses this tension of the past and present. Here the heroic but futile labour of his ancestors who tried to turn a poor stony land into rich farm country is expressive of the past and the poet’s response to his own attitude underlines the present. The poet is uneasy to note that he has abandoned the struggle of his ancestors. He is perturbed by this sense of denying the significance of the ancestors’ lives although he still feels their claim of loyalty and kinship on him. Here the tension or the contrary opposition between the past and the present is expressed and is sought to be resolved through a juxtaposition and telescoping of chronological time. He says

This is the country of our defeat,
and yet
during the fall blowing a man
might stop and stand in a brown valley of the furrows
and shade his eyes to watch for the same
red patch mixed with gold
that appears on the same
spot in the hills
year after after
and grow old.

In these lines the limits of the past and present and the compartmentalization of the time has been sought to be overcome by contemporarization of the defeat of the country and the present natural beauty. In this poem, Purdy also gives vent to his romantic impulse for an ideal land - a dream country of

Bushland scrub land
Cashel Township and Wollaston
Elzevir McClure and Dungannon
green lands of Weslemkoon Lake

where a man might have some
opinion of what beauty
is and none deny him
for miles —

It is worth noting here that Purdy does not carry these romantic flights, cravings, and impulses for a long time. They are immediately encountered by the concrete reality. He seems to be very much conscious of the concrete existence which shatters his romantic flights or dreams. In the poem the romantic dreams are shattered the moment he remembers:

Yet this is the country of defeat
where...
picnicking glaciers have left strewn
with centuries rubble
backbreaking days
in the sun and rain
A country of quiescence and still distance
a lean land...
where the farms have gone back
to forest
are only soft outlines
shadowy differences
has lost meaning under the meaningless sky.

But the poet is not completely lost. He has a hope still. In the end of the poem, after putting together the past and the present and romantic impulses and concrete existence or reality, he makes us aware of the past. He rebukes for forsaking the cultural and social heritage and traditions and mocks at the people for groping for vague hankering in unknown pathways and bylanes of life. He seems to reach the middle course by examining the contraries:

And this is the country where the young
leave quickly
unwillingly to know what their fathers know
or think the words their mothers do not say...
Sometimes
we may go back there
to the country of our defeat...

But it has been a long time since
and we must enquire the way
of strangers.

The importance of place comes through in all of Purdy's poems, perhaps most notably in "The Country North of Belleville," which is Purdy's elegy for the land he grew up in. For Purdy, this land is "country of defeat," a place that can be neither farmed nor mined successfully. People make a go of the land in fits and starts, but the successes and failures conflate one another so regularly that watching the cycle of the land it becomes difficult to tell when the good times are happening. The real tragedy, though, for Purdy, is that "this is a land where the young / leave quickly / unwilling to know what their fathers know / or to think the words their mothers do not say." There is not future here for the younger generation, and the land will be abandoned, or is in the process of being abandoned, over time. If we wish to return to this place, "we must enquire the way / of strangers" because the cultural memory is lost as the children step back from the land. We lose not only farmers, but the act of farming.

10.11 *Wilderness Gothic*

10.11.1 Critical Analysis

Purdy's "Wilderness Gothic" exhibits the same dynamics. It unfolds another distinct polarity in Purdy's poetry which is the polarity of faith and doubt and of the insurmountable Cosmic Machinery and the mini and the mortal strength of man or the contrast between permanence and transitoriness. The poem begins with a reference to Roblin Lake, which is located in Ontario, Canada, where Purdy and his wife bought a house in the mid-1960s. At the lake, Purdy produced a new, more vibrant poetry that looked closely at his surroundings in a rough-hewn voice, a voice like the land around him. There is a contrasting world of faith and doubt :

'Across Robin Lake, two shores away,
they are sheathing the church spine
with new metal. Someone hangs in the sky
over there from a piece of rope,
hammering and fitting God's belly scratcher,
working his way up along the spire
until there's nothing left to nail on.

When the reader arrives at the lake, he or she sees the church spire standing against the sky "two shores away." The first stanza of the poem shows a lake and sky, simple in place, epic in scale. The workman on the church steeple is given a religious persona as well — Jacob of the Old Testament, who had a dream about a ladder reaching heaven and who wrestled with an angel. Laced throughout this stanza is Purdy's characteristic roughness, a mild vulgarity, in the way he calls the spire "God's belly scratcher"; in his wry reference to there finally being "nothing left to nail on" (that the spire does not, in fact, reach heaven, and if it does, that there's nothing left there); and in the final line in reference to blue-collar labor with God as the boss. The word *mythopeia* is included as a problem with which

the laborer must contend, along with gravity (which becomes important in the final line), and “sky navigation.” Mythopeia, or mythmaking, is equated with knowing the stars and with the scientific fact of gravity, so that this church at Roblin Lake points the reader to things of great magnitude, things that the narrator considers without too much faith or too much hope. He focuses instead on the worker, which is another common trait of Al Purdy’s poetry.

Here repairing of the local church spire with new metal is symbolic of revival and refurbishing of the traditional religious faith while the figure of hammering of nails “until there’s nothing left to nail on” reminding one of crucifixion image is symbolic of doubt. Here it is the faith itself that is being nailed and the cross is Infinite space of the sky itself representing God himself who is the very basis of the faith and the religious teaching. But the polarity between loss of faith and its persistence emerges into bold relief where we are told that “Perhaps the workman’s faith reaches beyond” that is it remains unshaken in spite of all contrary persuasions and experiences.

As has already been mentioned, in this poem we also have a juxtaposed world of Cosmic Machinery and mortal man or Life and Death. This world finds expression in the second stanza of the poem in the following way:

Fields around are yellowing into harvest,
nestling and fingerling are sky waterborne
death is yodelling quiet in green woodlots,
and bodies of three young birds have disappeared
in the sub-surface of the new country highway -

In this brief middle stanza the poet, describing the yellow fields of August and the death of three young birds on the highway, reminds us that there is only one reality and all the finite subjects are subject to the inexorable laws of decay and death. From the grave metaphysics of Faith and God and the wistful appearance of the ancestors, Purdy suddenly dives into reality and inevitability and compulsions of the animal in man and he versifies about “work-sodden wives groping inside their flesh/ for what keeps moving and changing and flashing/beyond and past long from Victorian day.” The symbol of “the long frozen Victorian day” symbolically represents the prudish and passionless Victorian morality of the preceding century.

At the end of “Wilderness Gothic,” Purdy makes a statement that hints at his own fear of defeat. There is an anticipation of something tragic in the last few lines. By announcing that “something is about to happen,” Purdy exposes the anxiety that accompanies any risk — that of fear of failure. Purdy understood failure very well. In his early years as a poet, he received negative criticism about his work, causing him to doubt his own abilities. However, Purdy never stopped writing, an ambition that mirrors the man in the poem who will keep climbing his way up the spire until “there’s nothing left to nail on.”

The last line of the poem is perhaps the most shocking and most revealing in the whole piece. It also proves to be a bit of a conundrum. By saying “perhaps he will fall,” it seems that Purdy is almost willing the tragedy to occur. However, it begs the question, why would Purdy wish for the man he admires to meet his demise? One interpretation is that he is envious of the man’s dedication and wishes him to fall and be punished for his naivete. On a second reading, though, the line takes on another

meaning. When Purdy says, “perhaps he will fall,” he seems to be acknowledging one of life’s ironies — that to succeed at anything great, one must be prepared to fail. Considering the fate of Icarus, it was his failure that was captured in legend. Certainly, falling or failing is the risk one takes to achieve such grand ambitions; but, for Purdy, that fate is far more noble than never having taken the risk at all. Purdy’s last line then serves to confirm the man’s courage, because if there were no risk, the man would never have the opportunity to be a hero. On another level, Purdy is also serving to confirm his own life’s work as if to say, because he risked so much himself for the sake of his craft, he too has lived a courageous life, and he too may one day become a legend and, more importantly, a part of Canadian literary history.

10.11.2 Themes in *Wilderness Gothic*

Religion and Mythology

The themes of religion and mythology are present throughout “Wilderness Gothic.” Most prominent is the image of a workingman at the top a church repairing its spire, which is then coupled with a mention of Jacob from the Book of Genesis. This allusion serves to connect the man with the concept of whether good works and acts of faith ensure a rightful place in heaven. As the workingman hangs in the air against the blue sky, it brings to mind Jacob’s vision of a ladder that leads directly to Heaven. In addition, the Greek myth of Icarus plays a large part in the poem by exploring the idea of human aspiration and the capacity for failure. Purdy’s poem suggests a connection between the workingman’s noble ambition and Icarus’ attempts to fly. However, Icarus died because he had too much ambition, a vice that may also bring the workingman to his demise. Another association that exists involves the idea that Icarus, because of his folly, became an emblem of aspiration, and so the poem offers the same possibility to the workingman — that death may, ironically, bring him immortality.

Work

Purdy introduces the theme of work immediately with the first few lines of the poem. The first thing the narrator observes is a crew repairing a church two shores away. The focus turns on one man, who is hanging by a rope, “working his way up along the spire.” As the poem continues, Purdy announces that the man is doing volunteer work. He will not be paid for his labor nor will he receive the type of benefits that come with other jobs. However, the man is doing God’s work, a notion that has in large part disappeared from modern culture. The admiration for the workingman is evident as Purdy refers to his deeds as heroic. Since Purdy was a working-class poet, he understood the inherent value in doing hard labor. He suggests that there’s something noble in a hard day’s work, a concept that might put Purdy in direct contrast with his intellectual, university-educated peers. By creating a poem that exalts the workingman, Purdy criticizes the values of modern society by comparing modern people to the people of past centuries, who eagerly sacrificed time and labor for the greater glory of God. The workingman seems to be an exception for his time, having more in common with his medieval counterparts who were not concerned with a wage or whether they had a union job.

Death

The first image of death in “Wilderness Gothic” is a misdirection of sorts. The third and fourth lines of the poem announce that “someone hangs in the sky / over there from a piece of rope.” This immediately brings to mind someone who has committed suicide by hanging. However, it is quickly realized that the man in question is not dead, rather he is working to repair the spire on a church. It is

made clear in the next few lines that the man is putting his life in danger for the sake of God and putting his fate in God's hands. Since, the man could fall to his death at any time, the narrator believes the man's faith must reach far and wide. As the poem continues, it describes the death of three young birds who meet their demise because of the construction of a new county highway. Considering that the birds meet their death while the workingman holds his life in the balance, the poem implies that death is present everywhere and can occur randomly and without warning.

The idea of death is continued as the myth of Icarus is mentioned. Icarus met his death while trying to secure his freedom. Consequently, the workingman may lose his own life in the pursuit of a kind of spiritual freedom. Finally, the poem ends with the line, "perhaps he will fall," which predicts the death of the workingman. And while it is not definite that the man will die while working on the church, the line "something is about to happen" implies that the possibility of death hovers heavily in the air. This further confirms the concept that death can come at any time, and is, in fact, a necessary part of a life and a consequence of a world that inevitably moves and progresses over time.

10.11.3 Purdy's Technique in *Wilderness Gothic*

"Wilderness Gothic" is typical of Purdy's poetry both in subject and technique. Though located in the particular, the poem reflects complex ideas. The human figure in the poem, the workman re-sheathing the church spire, is in the poet's eyes both literally a tiny dot in the sky and metaphorically a tiny dot at the intersection of historical time. As the poet reflects on what he sees, the changing nature of his perceptions constitutes a complex meditation that moves beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the physical to the metaphysical and encompasses the historical. It expresses the idea of life as a continuing process where each new age brings in new ideas and casts off the old.

The poem works through three stanzas of free verse. Each stanza expresses the poet's changing perspective as he watches a workman contending with the physical problems of "replacing [the] rotten timber" of the church's spire "with pine thews" while being suspended in the sky. In the second stanza, the poet's perceptions broaden as he sees the workman with the framework of the countryside. In the third stanza, the poet sees the scene as a tableau, equating the scene before his eyes with a painter's landscape.

The oxymoron in the poem's title points to poets' strategy of juxtaposing the abstract and the concrete and the past and the present. The wilderness, a land in the new world, is thought of as uninhabited, uncultivated, and uncivilized. Gothic is a term that describes a style of highly evolved and excessively ornate architecture popular in Western Europe from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries. Yoking these terms highlights Purdy's intention of showing the abstract through the concrete, while collapsing the past and the present.

10.11.4 Conclusion

The poem is precise, so strongly written, that while it focuses acutely on a small place, it invokes a whole continent as well as the history of its working class, those who are often at physical and, in "Wilderness Gothic," spiritual risk when doing their jobs. The sounds of the lines, the choice of words such as "dour," "clop," "iron," "frozen," and "brim-stone" — all in the space of a few lines — casts a long shadow. The wilderness around the steeple is the living indicator that the reader should not be too confident in his or her assumptions about God. When danger is at hand, "woods shiver and

water drops hang pendant.” When the worker might fall, “leaves are still.” Purdy puts no good and evil in the poem. Wilderness is not evil, it is not against people; it is simply what existed before towns and churches and a sense of region and nation. This is another reason that “Wilderness Gothic” has such a wide lens. In the quest for true religion, for the promised land of the New World, the narrator declares that there is failure and potential failure as well as the potential for a fall, and those who build European churches in the North American wilderness ought to take that seriously.

The distinctive impression made by “Wilderness Gothic” is partly the result of the conflation of various kinds of time. The first section focusses on a workman repairing the church steeple on the far side of Roblin Lake. The man has devoted his time and labour to God, a non-paying, non-union job. Perhaps, says the speaker, he wrestles with Jacob as well as with rotten timbers and new pine. The second section introduces the surrounding fields “yellowing into harvest,” death “yodeling quiet in green woodlots,” three young birds that have disappeared “in the sub-surface of the new county highway.” The last section identifies the scene as a Durer landscape, where “gothic ancestors peer from a medieval sky.” Yet in the next lines they are transformed into Victorian pioneers, looking for omens in the weather, strange births, a miscarriage. And they then merge in the final lines with the speaker and the workman across the lake. Secular time and divine time, the slow pace of nature and the accelerated violence of the urban world, the historical past and the immediate present, all converge in a single moment. All things, the living and the dead, without distinction, share an unfolding and uncertain present, suspended between vertical and horizontal, faith and doubt, order and chaos.

10.12 Let Us Sum Up

Poems like “The Cariboo Horses” and “The Others” brought the voice of Canada itself to the page; poems like “At The Quinte Hotel” and “The Country North of Belleville” brought the voices of the men who worked and lived on that land into Canadian literary parlance. Purdy’s style and construction in the poem *Wilderness Gothic* serves to capture the spirit of the freedom of the 1960s.

If ever there was a poet who could be trusted to stand up for Canada, to paint images of Canada how she is and how her people truly talk, to not cloak Canadian vistas in classical imagery of ancient Greece and Rome and England, that poet would be Al Purdy. For Purdy, art is rooted deeply in place and people and voice, and those three things are meant to be represented as truthfully and as accurately as a poet’s hand can render. In the poem above, Purdy begs for the country not to be dismantled by selfish whims, because for him there is no other place on earth where he is himself. He is rooted in the landscape of this country in such a way that without it, he would cease to exist.

10.13 Review Questions

1. Give the historical background of Purdy’s poetry.
2. Write a short note on the style of Purdy’s poetry.
3. Give the critical analysis of the poem “The Cariboo Horses”.
4. Which themes does Purdy deal with in his poem “Wilderness Gothic”.
5. Write a critical appreciation of the poem “Wilderness Gothic”.
6. What method does Purdy adopt in his work?

7. What is the central idea of the poem “The Cariboo Horses”?
8. Critically analyze the poem “The Country North of Belleville”.
9. Critically summarize the poem “Wilderness Gothic”.
10. Comment on Purdy’s technique with reference to the poem “Wilderness Gothic”.
11. How would you explain “Purdy’s quest”?
12. Give a brief note on “Purdy’s preoccupation with time and space”
13. Write a short note on “English-Canadian tradition in Pratt’s poetry”.

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UNIT-11

MARGARET ATWOOD (I)

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 About the Age
- 11.3 About the Author
- 11.4 A Glimpse of her Major Works
- 11.5 Books for Children
- 11.6 Margaret Atwood as a Poet
- 11.7 Themes and Symbols
 - 11.7.1 Themes
 - 11.7.2 Symbols
- 11.8 Critical Reception of Atwood's Works
- 11.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.10 Review Questions
- 11.11 Bibliography

11.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to Margaret Atwood as a prolific Canadian writer.
- To enable the students to have a knowledge of the age in which Margaret Atwood established herself as a writer.
- To have a knowledge of Margaret Atwood's contribution to Canadian literature.
- To have an idea of the major works of Margaret Atwood.

11.1 Introduction

Margaret Atwood, a contemporary Canadian author, has been classified as one of this century's most renowned feminist, and near dystopian novelists. Her works illustrate how feminism has caused the downfall of contemporary society. Margaret Atwood, a prominent feminist author of the twentieth century, is driven by her sense of social reform and her realistic view of a disturbed society to produce works such as *The Handmaid's Tale*. She is a Canadian poet, novelist, and critic and noted for her feminism and mythological themes.

Internationally acclaimed as a poet, novelist, and short story writer, Atwood is recognized as a

major figure in Canadian letters. Using such devices as irony, symbolism, and self-conscious narrators, she explores the relationship between humanity and nature, the dark side of human behavior, and power as it pertains to gender and politics. Popular with both literary scholars and the reading public, Atwood has helped to define and identify the goals of contemporary Canadian literature and has earned a distinguished reputation among feminist writers for her exploration of women's issues.

11.2 About the Age

Atwood has been a voice for her generation. Her bizarre juxtapositions and collisions, her leaps in the logic of perception such as those found in *The Journals of Suzanna Moodie*, the gothic motifs that flourish in her poetry as well as her fiction, her dark humour, irony, parody, and love of duplicity are all instantly recognizable as Atwoodian. The poetry collection that illustrates Atwood's craft as a poet is *The Journals of Suzanna Moodie*. This subject allows the full play of Atwood's intellect, her ability dramatically to shift the perception of her reader to the best advantage. She is able to step into Moodie's skin for an haunting reenactment that is not only historically enlightening, but which also speaks to us in the 21st century, of our own dislocation, alienation, and environmental fears:

I am the old woman
sitting across from you on the bus,
her shoulders drawn up like a shawl;
out of her eyes come secret
hatpins, destroying
the walls, ceiling

Turn, look down:
there is no city;
this is the centre of a forest

Your place is empty

Atwood developed from the Modernist tradition of Eliot and from a reflective, lyric tradition she has made her own by 'upping the anti' of the reflective, lyric poem, demanding more of it. She shares with her contemporaries a concern for language, its power and conventions and she shares with other feminists the desire to disrupt and re-invent structures, when "writing" becomes "righting".

11.3 About the Author

Atwood was born on November 18, 1943 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. In her earlier years as a child, she lived in the Canadian wilderness where her father was an entomologist. He studied and observed insects. Atwood was the second of three children of Margaret Dorothy Kilam and Dr. Carl Edmund Atwood. Her parents were both strong and independent minded parents who wanted their children to be the same. The Atwood's were a mile, by water, to the nearest village. There was no

radio, television, movie theatre, or children, other than her brother who was two years older. Margaret attributes her outsiders' eye to this unconventional childhood. In 1946 Atwood's family moved to Toronto, Canada where Margaret attended school and went to the university. When Atwood finally went to venture into the city, all social groups seemed to her equally bizarre, all artifacts and habits peculiar.

She received her bachelor's degree from Victoria College in 1961, She made her debut with "*Double Persephone*" (1961). she then went on to receive her Master's degree from Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts Magazine, Woman of the Year 1987, Shortlisted for the Booker Prize (England) 1987, Shortlisted for the Ritz Hemingway Prize (Paris) 1987, Arthur C. Margaret Atwood's most important books are: "*The Edible Woman*" (1969) "*The Handmaid's Tale*" (1985) "*Cat's Eye*" (1989) "*Alias Grace*" (1996) "*The Blind Assassin*" (2000). Margaret Atwood's feministic views on a society being slain apart, is a direct reflection on her contemporary novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. While studying in Boston, she published her first collection of poetry, *The Circle Game* (1966), which was awarded the prestigious Governor General's Award. In 1969, she published her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, an edgy satire about a young woman working at a marketing firm. Over the next few years, she continued to alternate between poetry and prose, often publishing one work in each genre in the same year. In 1972, she published a critical work called *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, which greatly influenced the ways Canadians understand their literary traditions. Still taught in many Canadian schools, *Survival* advanced an environmental interpretation of Canadian literature and portrayed Canadian writers as victims still imprisoned by a colonial dependency—caught between America to the south and the vast wildernesses to the north. That same year, Atwood published her second novel, *Surfacing*, in which the protagonist must escape to the northern wilderness before rejoining society.

After two broken-off engagements and a five-year marriage to an American, Jim Polk, Atwood settled down with the Canadian writer Graeme Gibson in 1973. After several years of being professionally involved with the Toronto-based publishing house, House of Anansi Press, as well as intermittent teaching engagements, she and Gibson bought a farmhouse outside Alliston, Ontario, where they lived off and on for many years. In 1976, the year she published her third novel, *Lady Oracle*, Atwood gave birth to a daughter, Jess Atwood Gibson. Over the next few years, she dabbled in television screenwriting; produced a history book, *Days of the Rebels: 1815–1840* (1977).

Following more or less temporary residencies in Vancouver, Edmonton, Montreal, Berlin, Edinburgh, London, and the south of France, Atwood and her family settled in Toronto on a permanent basis in 1981. The previous year, Atwood had become vice-chairperson of the Writers' Union of Canada, a position perfectly suited to her interest in Canadian nationalism, which her years in the United States, as well as her commitment to publish Canadian writers through Anansi, had strengthened. Atwood explored the theme of Canadian identity, with varying levels of explicitness, in many of her works. Committed to forging a "*Canadian literature*," Atwood has cited fellow Canadian poets of her generation, including Michael Ondaatje and Al Purdy, as the strongest influences on her poetry. More than twenty years after publishing *Survival*, Atwood expanded on this subject in *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995).

Internationally, Atwood is celebrated for the blunt feminism of her books. From her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, to her dystopian masterpiece, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the book that

sealed her international fame, Atwood has shown a tremendous interest in the restraints society puts on women—and the facades women adopt in response. *The Handmaid's Tale*, which Atwood refuses to label as “science fiction,” depicts a society in which women are shorn of all rights except the rights to marry, keep house, and reproduce. After *The Handmaid's Tale* made Atwood a major international celebrity, she wrote a series of novels dealing with women's relationships with one another, including *Cat's Eye* (1988) and *The Robber Bride* (1993). In 1992, she published *Good Bones*, short, witty pieces about female body parts and the constraints that have been placed on them throughout history. Atwood explores women's historical roles in other works, including her renowned poetry collection, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) and her novel *Alias Grace* (1996). Both re-imagine the lives of famous pioneer women in Canadian history.

Today, Atwood is one of the best-known living writers in the world. Atwood's work has been published in more than twenty-five countries, and she has received a number of prestigious awards for her writing, including the Booker Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Molson Award, and a Canada Short Fiction Award.

11.4 A Glimpse of her Major Works

In her short fiction, Atwood specializes in revealing unexpected, often unsettling aspects of the human personality and behavior normally hidden by social conventions. However, her narrative voice has been described as distanced and unemotional, and her characters as two-dimensional representations of ideas rather than fully rounded individuals. Her stories, like her poems, often pivot on a single symbolic object: a visit to a Mayan sacrificial well in “*The Resplendent Quetzal*,” a plane crash in “*A Travel Piece*,” and the bizarre amorous behavior of a foreign student in “*The Man from Mars*,” all serve as catalysts for her protagonists' confrontations with their conflicted inner selves. More loosely structured than her poems or novels, Atwood's stories nonetheless bear her novels' trademarks of careful plotting and concise use of language. More notably, her short fiction shares with her other works Atwood's common theme of personal identity in conflict with society. In her first collection of short fiction, *Dancing Girls*, the title refers to the leading characters of the stories, women who obligingly dance repressive, stereotyped roles assigned to them by a male-dominated society rather than following their inner desires. Atwood portrays patriarchal social systems as oppressive and damaging to the individual psyche and her male characters as often malevolent or emotionally withdrawn. The typical heroine of Atwood's stories is intelligent, urbane, and discontented, alienated from her true nature as well as her environment. In later collections, such as *Murder in the Dark* and *Bluebeard's Egg*, she often incorporates autobiographical material into her stories. Other major works of Margaret Atwood are as follows:

A. *The Circle Game* (1966)

This collection, the cover of which the poet designed herself, won the Governor General's Award and established twenty-seven-year-old Atwood as a prominent voice in Canadian poetry. Dominated, as the title suggests, by images of circles, the poems in this collection explore the deceptive ordinariness of day-to-day life and the terrors of a universe threatened by technology. Many of the poems in *The Circle Game* are among Atwood's best-loved work. Characterized by uneven line lengths and the absence of conventional meters and rhymes, this collection launched Atwood's particular brand of forceful, honest poetry.

B. *The Animals in That Country (1968)*

This collection introduces many of the obsessions that will haunt much of Atwood's later work: the contrast between the familiar and the unknown, the gulf between civilization and wilderness, and the difference between society, a place where animals "have the faces of people," and the shadowy place where animals "have the faces of animals." Notable poems in this volume are "At the tourist centre in Boston," "Elegy for the giant tortoises," "The Landlady," and "More and more." Atwood explores many of the same themes in her novel *Surfacing*, which was published four years later, in 1972.

C. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie (1970)*

In these poems, Atwood re-imagines Canadian history from the perspective of a famous pioneer woman, Susanna Strickland Moodie (1803–1885), an Englishwoman who documented her immigration to Upper Canada in poems and journals. Atwood traces Moodie's life from her 1832 arrival in Canada through her years in the unsettled bush of Upper Canada to the late 1960s, when the mythic pioneer woman continues to send messages from beyond the grave. Arranged as a series of three chronological journals, this collection dramatizes what Atwood has called the "paranoid schizophrenia" of Canadian identity and revisits some of her favorite themes: the brutality of civilization and awe of the landscape, the terrors of the forest, and the space between the picturesque and the sinister. Since the publication of Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, this pioneer woman has become an iconic, archetypal figure in Canadian culture.

D. *Procedures for Underground (1970)*

Published the same year as *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, *Procedures for Underground* is a dark work dealing with haunting reflections on the past and the omnipresence of death. Many of these poems confront loss and oblivion, as conveyed by the most famous line from this collection: "Where do the words go / when we have said them?" Like its predecessor, *Procedures for Underground* explores wilderness themes, distant epochs "before electricity," and remote Canadian regions. "Girl and Horse, 1928," "A Soul, Geologically," and "Habitation" are some of its notable poems.

E. *Power Politics (1971)*

As the title indicates, this collection represents one of Atwood's most overtly political works and, it is her most explicit and anguished treatment of the battle between the sexes. However, Atwood rejects the widespread interpretation of *Power Politics* as a straightforward account of women being victimized by men. Starting with the collection's graphic epitaph, these poems confront the suffering and dependence that unite and divide men and women ("If I love you / is that a fact or a weapon?"), as well as confront larger existential concerns ("it is no longer possible to be both human and alive"). When Atwood wrote *Power Politics*, she was gaining fame as a writer at home and abroad, and many of the poems reveal her growing preoccupation with the demands of public life.

E. *You Are Happy (1974)*

After a career in poetry marked by unremittingly dark themes, Atwood seeks happiness and fulfillment amid the suffering and despair of life in this book of poems. The very title is equivocal and ironic, more an attempt at self-persuasion than a statement of fact. *You Are Happy* is divided into two sections, "Songs of the Transformed" and "Circe / Mud Poems." The first contains a series of poems

told from the animal's point of view; the second is a reworking of the Circe myth in the *Odyssey*, told from Circe's point of view.

G *Two-Headed Poems (1978)*

In her first collection after giving birth to her daughter, Jess, in 1976, Atwood returns to her preoccupation with the female body, particularly in the poems "The Woman Who Could Not Live With Her Faulty Heart" and "The Woman Makes Peace With Her Faulty Heart." *Two-Headed Poems* also contains several harrowing historical poems, most notably "Four Small Elegies," which revisits one of the bloodiest incidents in Canadian history, a revolt against the British colonizers by the civilians in Beauharnois, Quebec (then Lower Canada). Later in the collection, the prose poem "Marrying the Hangman" dramatizes the bizarre eighteenth-century law in Quebec that allows a man to escape a sentence of death by becoming a hangman and a woman to escape the sentence by marrying one.

H *True Stories (1981)*

In the early 1980s, Atwood became active in a series of human-rights organizations, particularly the Canadian branch of Amnesty International. *True Stories* displays a marked concern with political oppression and environmental devastation. The title of the volume suggests a journalist's allegiance to the "truth." In the poem "Torture," Atwood insists that power is "not abstract, it's not concerned / with politics and free will, it's beyond slogans." This collection also features the long poem "Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written" about atrocities that take place every day, everywhere. This same year, she published *Bodily Harm*, a novel that explores similar themes.

I *Interlunar (1984)*

Interlunar, one of Atwood's least-discussed collections, is divided into two sections. The first, "Snake Woman," elaborates on and explores one of her favorite motifs, the snake. The second section, "Interlunar," contains a poem that she later used as a title for a novel, "The Robber Bridegroom," and features several more "updated" myths retold from a female point of view, including "Orpheus," "Eurydice," and "Letter from Persephone."

J *Selected Poems I (1965–1975)*

This compilation includes the bulk of Atwood's first major collection, "The Circle Game", as well as sizeable excerpts from "The Animals in That Country", "The Journals of Susanna Moodie", "Procedures for Underground", "Power Politics", and "You Are Happy".

K *Selected Poems II (1976–1986)*

This collection, published in 1987, comprises selections of Atwood's work from "Two-Headed Poems", "True Stories", and "Interlunar". The last twenty poems in the book are new and previously unpublished poems written in 1985 and 1986. Among the highlights of this section are several ironic and self-reflective meditations on aging, including "Aging Female Poet Sits on the Balcony," "Aging Female Poet Reads Little Magazines," and "Aging Female Poet on Laundry Day."

L *Morning in the Burned House (1995)*

This volume, the co-winner of the prestigious Trillium Award, was Atwood's first collection of new poems to be published in more than eight years. She wrote most of the poems while on a publicity tour for *The Robber Bride*. This collection includes several humorous monologues, including "Miss

July Grows Older,” “Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing,” and “Ava Gardner Reincarnated as a Magnolia.” The final section is a series of interconnected elegies that deal with the 1993 death of Atwood’s father, which some critics rank among her finest

Atwood’s 1995 book of poetry, *Morning in the Burned House*, “reflects a period in Atwood’s life when time seems to be running out,” observed John Bemrose in Maclean’s. Noting that many of the poems address grief and loss, particularly in relationship to her father’s death and a realization of her own mortality, Bemrose added that the book “moves even more deeply into survival territory.” Bemrose further suggested that in this book, Atwood allows the readers greater latitude in interpretation than in her earlier verse: “Atwood uses grief ... to break away from that airless poetry and into a new freedom.”

Atwood’s feminist concerns also emerge clearly in her novels, particularly in *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *Life before Man*, *Bodily Harm*, and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. These novels feature female characters who are, as Klemesrud reported, “intelligent, self-absorbed modern women searching for identity They hunt, split logs, make campfires and become successful in their careers, while men often cook and take care of their households.”

M. *The Edible Woman*

The Edible Woman tells the story of Marian McAlpin, a young woman engaged to be married, who rebels against her upcoming nuptials. Her fiancé seems too stable, too ordinary, and the role of wife too fixed and limiting. Her rejection of marriage is accompanied by her body’s rejection of food; she cannot tolerate even a spare vegetarian diet. Eventually Marian bakes a sponge cake in the shape of a woman and feeds it to her fiancé because, she explains, “You’ve been trying to assimilate me.” After the engagement is broken off, she is able to eat some of the cake herself.

Reaction to *The Edible Woman* was divided. Nevertheless, many critics noted Atwood’s at least partial success. Tom Marshall, writing in his *Harsh and Lovely Land: The Major Canadian Poets and the Making of a Canadian Tradition*, called *The Edible Woman* “a largely successful comic novel, even if the mechanics are sometimes a little clumsy, the satirical accounts of consumerism a little drawn out.” A *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor described *The Edible Woman* as “very much a social novel about the possibilities for personal female identity in a capitalistic consumer society.”

N. *Life before Man*

In *Life before Man* Atwood dissects the relationships between three characters: Elizabeth, a married woman who mourns the recent suicide of her lover; Elizabeth’s husband, Nate, who is unable to choose between his wife and his lover; and Lesje, Nate’s lover, who works with Elizabeth at a museum of natural history. All three characters are isolated from one another and unable to experience their own emotions. The fossils and dinosaur bones on display at the museum are compared throughout the novel with the sterility of the characters’ lives. As Laurie Stone noted in the *Village Voice*, *Life before Man* “is full of variations on the theme of extinction.”

Life before Man is what Rosellen Brown of *Saturday Review* called an “anatomy of melancholy.” Comparing the novel’s characters to museum pieces and commenting on the analytical examination to which Atwood subjects them, Peter S. Prescott wrote in *Newsweek* that, “with chilly compassion and an even colder wit, Atwood exposes the interior lives of her specimens.” Writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, Marilyn French made clear that in *Life before Man*, Atwood “combines

several talents—powerful introspection, honesty, satire and a taut, limpid style—to create a splendid, fully integrated work.” The novel’s title, French believed, relates to the characters’ isolation from themselves, their history, and from one another. They have not yet achieved truly human stature. “This novel suggests,” French wrote, “that we are still living life before man, before the human—as we like to define it—has evolved.” Prescott raised the same point. The novel’s characters, he wrote, “do not communicate; each, in the presence of another, is locked into his own thoughts and feelings. Is such isolation and indeterminacy what Atwood means when she calls her story ‘Life before Man’?” This concern is also found in Atwood’s previous novels, French argued, all of which depict “the search for identity ... a search for a better way to be—for a way of life that both satisfies the passionate, needy self and yet is decent, humane and natural.”

O. *Bodily Harm*

Atwood further explores this idea in *Bodily Harm*. In this novel, Rennie Wilford is a Toronto journalist who specializes in light, trivial pieces for magazines. She is, Anne Tyler explained in the *Detroit News*, “a cataloguer of current fads and fancies.” Following a partial mastectomy, which causes her lover to abandon her, Rennie begins to feel dissatisfied with her life. She takes on an assignment to the Caribbean island of St. Antoine in an effort to get away from things for a while. Her planned magazine story, focusing on the island’s beaches, tennis courts, and restaurants, is distinctly facile in comparison to the political violence she finds on St. Antoine. When Rennie is arrested and jailed, the experience brings her to a self-realization about her life. “Death,” Nancy Ramsey remarked in the *San Francisco Review of Books*, “rather than the modern sense of ennui, threatens Rennie and the people around her, and ultimately gives her life a meaning she hadn’t known before.”

Anatole Broyard in the *New York Times*, claimed that “the only way to describe my response to *Bodily Harm* is to say that it knocked me out. Atwood seems to be able to do just about everything: people, places, problems, a perfect ear, an exactly right voice and she tosses off terrific scenes with a casualness that leaves you utterly unprepared for the way these scenes seize you.” Tyler called Atwood “an uncommonly skillful and perceptive writer,” and went on to state that, because of its subject matter, *Bodily Harm* “is not always easy to read. There are times when it’s downright unpleasant, but it’s also intelligent, provocative, and in the end—against all expectations—uplifting.”

P. *The Handmaid’s Tale*

In *The Handmaid’s Tale* Atwood turns to speculative fiction, creating the dystopia of Gilead, a future America in which fundamentalist Christians have killed the president and members of Congress and imposed their own dictatorial rule. In this future world, polluted by toxic chemicals and nuclear radiation, few women can bear children; the birthrate has dropped alarmingly. Those women who can bear children are forced to become Handmaids, the official breeders for society. All other women have been reduced to chattel under a repressive religious hierarchy run by men.

The Handmaid’s Tale is a radical departure from Atwood’s previous novels. Her strong feminism was evident in earlier books, but *The Handmaid’s Tale* is dominated by the theme. As Barbara Holliday wrote in the *Detroit Free Press*, Atwood “has been concerned in her fiction with the painful psychic warfare between men and women. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* ... she casts subtlety aside, exposing woman’s primal fear of being used and helpless.” Atwood’s creation of an imaginary world is also new. As Mary Battiata noted in the *Washington Post*, *The Handmaid’s Tale* is the first of Atwood’s novels “not set in a worried corner of contemporary Canada.”

Atwood was moved to write her story only after images and scenes from the book had been appearing to her for three years. She eventually became convinced that her vision of Gilead was not far from reality. Some of the anti-female measures she had imagined for the novel actually exist. “A law in Canada,” Battiata reported, “requires a woman to have her husband’s permission before obtaining an abortion.” Atwood, speaking to Battiata, pointed to repressive laws in the totalitarian state of Romania as well: “No abortion, no birth control, and compulsory pregnancy testing, once a month.” *The Handmaid’s Tale* does not depend upon hypothetical scenarios, omens, or straws in the wind, but upon documented occurrences and public pronouncements; all matters of record.” Stephen McCabe of the Humanist called the novel “a chilling vision of the future extrapolated from the present.”

Yet, several critics voiced a disbelief in the basic assumptions of *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Mary McCarthy, in her review for the New York Times Book Review, complained that “I just can’t see the intolerance of the far right ... as leading to a super-biblical puritanism.” And although acknowledging that “the author has carefully drawn her projections from current trends,” McCarthy asserted that “perhaps that is the trouble: the projections are too neatly penciled in. The details ... all raise their hands announcing themselves present. At the same time, the Republic of Gilead itself, whatever in it that is not a projection, is insufficiently imagined.” Richard Grenier of Insight observed that the Fundamentalist-run Gilead does not seem Christian: “There seems to be no Father, no Son, no Holy Ghost, no apparent belief in redemption, resurrection, eternal life. No one in this excruciatingly hierarchized new clerical state ... appears to believe in God.” Grenier also found it improbable that “while the United States has hurtled off into this morbid, feminist nightmare, the rest of the democratic world has been blissfully unaffected.”

Despite what he saw as a flaw, French saw *The Handmaid’s Tale* as being “in the honorable tradition of *Brave New World* and other warnings of dystopia. It’s imaginative, even audacious, and conveys a chilling sense of fear and menace.” Prescott compared the novel to other dystopian books. It belongs, he wrote, “to that breed of visionary fiction in which a metaphor is extended to elaborate a warning.” Prescott went on to note, “Wells, Huxley and Orwell popularized the tradition with books like *The Time Machine*, *Brave New World* and *1984*—yet Atwood is a better novelist than they.” Christopher Lehmann-Haupt identified *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a book that goes far beyond its feminist concerns. Writing in the *New York Times*, the critic explained that the novel “is a political tract deploring nuclear energy, environmental waste, and anti-feminist attitudes. But it is so much more than that—a taut thriller, a psychological study, a play on words.” Van Gelder saw the novel in a similar light: “It ultimately succeeds on multiple levels: as a page-turning thriller, as a powerful political statement, and as an exquisite piece of writing.”

Q. *The Robber Bride*

In *The Robber Bride*, Atwood again explores women’s issues and feminist concerns, this time concentrating on women’s relationships with each other—both positive and negative. Inspired by the Brothers Grimm’s *Fairy Tale*, *The Robber Bridegroom*, the novel chronicles the relationships of college friends Tony, Charis, and Roz with their backstabbing classmate Zenia. Now middle-aged women, the women’s paths and life choices have diverged, yet Tony, Charis, and Roz have remained friends. Throughout their adulthood, however, Zenia’s manipulations have nearly destroyed their lives and cost them husbands and careers. Lorrie Moore, writing in the New York Times Book Review, called *The Robber Bride* “Atwood’s funniest and most companionable book in years,” adding that its author “retains her gift for observing, in poetry, the minutiae specific to the physical and emotional lives

of her characters.” About Zenia, Moore commented, “charming and gorgeous, Zenia is a misogynist’s grotesque: relentlessly seductive, brutal, pathologically dishonest,” postulating that “perhaps Ms. Atwood intended Zenia, by the end, to be a symbol of all that is inexplicably evil: war, disease, global catastrophe.” Judith Timson commented in Maclean’s that *The Robber Bride* “has as its central theme an idea that feminism was supposed to have shoved under the rug: there are female predators out there, and they will get your man if you are not careful.”

Atwood maintained that she had a feminist motivation in creating Zenia. The femme fatale all but disappeared from fiction in the 1950s due to that decade’s sanitized ideal of domesticity; and in the late 1960s came the women’s movement, which in its early years encouraged the creation of only positive female characters, Atwood asserted in interviews. She commented that “there are a lot of women you have to say are feminists who are getting a big kick out of this book,” according to interviewer Sarah Lyall in the *New York Times*. “People read the book with all the wars done by men, and they say, ‘So, you’re saying that women are crueler than men,’” the novelist added. “In other words, that’s normal behavior by men, so we don’t notice it. Similarly, we say that Zenia behaves badly, and therefore women are worse than men, but that ignores the helpfulness of the other three women to each other, which of course gives them a power of their own.”

Francine Prose, reviewing *The Robber Bride* for the *Washington Post Book World*, recommended the book “to those well-intentioned misguided feminists or benighted sexists who would have us believe that the female of the species is ‘naturally’ nicer or more nurturing than the male.” Prose found the book “smart and entertaining” but not always convincing in its blend of exaggerated and realistic elements. *New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani also thought Atwood has not achieved the proper balance in this regard: “Her characters remain exiles from both the earthbound realm of realism and the airier attitudes of allegory, and as a result, their story does not illuminate or entertain: it grates.”

R. *Alias Grace*

Alias Grace represents Atwood’s first venture into historical fiction, but the book has much in common with her other works in its contemplation of “the shifting notions of women’s moral nature” and “the exercise of power between men and women,” wrote Maclean’s contributor Diane Turbide. Based on a true story Atwood had explored previously in a television script titled *The Servant Girl*, *Alias Grace* centers on Grace Marks, a servant who was found guilty of murdering her employer and his mistress in northern Canada in 1843. Some people doubt Grace’s guilt, however, and she serves out her sentence of life in prison, claiming not to remember the murders. Eventually, reformers begin to agitate for clemency for Grace. In a quest for evidence to support their position, they assign a young doctor, versed in the new science of psychiatry, to evaluate her soundness of mind. Over many meetings, Grace tells the doctor the harrowing story of her life—a life marked by extreme hardship. Much about Grace, though, remains puzzling; she is haunted by flashbacks of the supposedly forgotten murders and by the presence of a friend who had died from a mishandled abortion. The doctor, Simon Jordan, does not know what to believe in Grace’s tales.

Several reviewers found Grace a complicated and compelling character. “Sometimes she is prim, naive, sometimes sardonic; sometimes sardonic because observant; sometimes observant because naive,” commented Hilary Mantel in the *New York Review of Books*. Turbide added that Grace is more than an intriguing character: she is also “the lens through which Victorian hypocrisies are mercilessly exposed.”

Prose, however, writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, thought the historical trivia excessive. “The book provides, in snippets, a crash course in Victorian culture.” Prose added: “Rather than enhancing the novel’s verisimilitude, these mini-lessons underline the distance between reader and subject.” She also noted that some readers “will admire the liveliness with which Ms. Atwood toys with both our expectations and the conventions of the Victorian thriller.”

S. *The Blind Assassin*

“Dying octogenarian Iris Chasen’s narration of the past carefully unravels a haunting story of tragedy, corruption, and cruel manipulation,” summarized Beth E. Andersen in a *Library Journal* review of Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin*. The novel, which earned its author the Booker Prize, involves multiple story lines. It is Iris’s memoir, retracing her past with the wealthy and conniving industrialist Richard Griffen and the death of her sister Laura, her husband, and her daughter. Iris “reveals at long last the wrenching truth about herself and Laura amid hilariously acerbic commentary on the inanities of contemporary life,” wrote Donna Seaman in *Booklist*. Interspersed with these narrative threads are sections devoted to Laura’s novel, *The Blind Assassin*, published after her death. Seaman called the work a “spellbinding novel of avarice, love, and revenge.” Andersen noted that some readers may guess how the story will pan out before the conclusion, but argued that “nothing will dampen the pleasure of getting there.” Michiko Kakutani in the *New York Times* called *The Blind Assassin* an “absorbing new novel” that “showcases Ms. Atwood’s narrative powers and her ardent love of the Gothic.” Kakutani also noted that Atwood writes with “uncommon authority and ease.”

T. *Wilderness Tips and Other Stories*

Atwood has remained a noted writer of short stories as well as novels. *Wilderness Tips and Other Stories*, published in 1991, is a collection of ten “neatly constructed, present-tense narratives,” reported Merle Rubin in the *Christian Science Monitor*. While finding Atwood’s writing style drab and unappealing, Rubin nevertheless praised the author for her “ability to evoke the passing of entire decades ... all within the brief compass of a short story.” The tales in Atwood’s 1992 collection, *Good Bones* — published in 1994 as *Good Bones and Simple Murders* — “occupy that vague, peculiar country between poetry and prose,” stated John Bemrose in *Maclean’s*. Describing Atwood as “storyteller, poet, fabulist and social commentator rolled into one,” Bemrose claimed that “the strongest pieces in *Good Bones* combine a light touch with a hypnotic seriousness of purpose.” In the *New York Times Book Review*, Jennifer Howard labeled *Good Bones and Simple Murders* a “sprightly, whimsically feminist collection of miniatures and musings, assembled from two volumes published in Canada in 1983 and 1992.” A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer, who characterized the entries as “postmodern fairy tales, caustic fables, inspired parodies, witty monologues,” declared each piece to be “clever and sharply honed.”

U. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*

Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature is Atwood’s most direct presentation of her strong support of Canadian nationalism. In this work, she discerns a uniquely Canadian literature, distinct from its American and British counterparts, and discusses the dominant themes to be found in it. Canadian literature, she argues, is primarily concerned with victims and with the victim’s ability to survive. Atwood, Onley explained, “perceives a strong sado-masochistic patterning in Canadian literature as a whole. She believes that there is a national fictional tendency to participate, usually at some level as Victim, in a Victor/Victim basic pattern.” Nevertheless, “despite its stress on victimization,” a *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contributor wrote, “this study is not a revelation of, or a reveling in, [masochism].”

What Atwood argues, Onley asserted, that is, “every country or culture has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core: for America, the Frontier; for England, the Island; for Canada, Survival.”

Several critics find that Atwood’s own work exemplifies this primary theme of Canadian literature. Her examination of destructive gender roles and her nationalistic concern over the subordinate role Canada plays to the United States are variations on the victor/victim theme. Atwood believes a writer must consciously work within his or her nation’s literary tradition, and her own work closely parallels the themes she sees as common to the Canadian literary tradition. Survival “has served as the context in which critics have subsequently discussed Atwood’s works,” stated a Dictionary of Literary Biography contributor.

V. *Oryx and Crake*

In her novel *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood returns to themes from *The Handmaid’s Tale*. “Once again she conjures up a dystopia, where trends that started way back in the twentieth century have metastasized into deeply sinister phenomena,” wrote Michiko Kakutani in the New York Times. The story begins with a character called Snowman, the lone survivor of an Armageddon-like catastrophe. He wanders the streets trying to survive and finds that bioengineered animals are the only living creatures remaining. As the novel progresses, Snowman recalls his days as a boy and his childhood friend named Crake. Eventually, we learn that Crake became a scientist, one who was involved in the secret project that caused the global catastrophe. Kakutani called the novel “at times intriguing.” Referring to *Oryx and Crake* as a “scorching new novel,” Science contributor Susan M. Squier wrote, “Atwood imagines a drastic revision of the human species that will purge humankind of all of our negative traits.” Squier went on to note that “in *Oryx and Crake* readers will find a powerful meditation on how education that separates scientific and aesthetic ways of knowing produces ignorance and a wounded world.”

11.5 Books for Children

Atwood also wrote for children, and while much of her writing for adults is known to be quite dark, her books for juveniles are far more whimsical. For example, *Rude Ramsay* and the *Roaring Radishes* features a text of “alliterative ‘R’ sounds, making it a challenging read-aloud,” noted Denise Parrott in Resource Links. The story, illustrated by Dusan Petricic, revolves around Rude Ramsay, a red-nosed rat named Ralph, and their new friend Rilla. A Kirkus Reviews contributor noted that “Atwood’s prose is both amusing and enlightening in its use of rich vocabulary.” Atwood and Petricic also worked together on *Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda*, a takeoff on the Cinderella tale. “Atwood’s hilarious tale will amuse listeners of almost any age with its alliteration and clever wordplay,” wrote Patricia Morley in the *Canadian Book Review Annual*. Bill Richardson, writing in the Toronto Globe & Mail, concluded: “I think the virtue in this cascade of consonants is the joy that lives in the sound of the words, the merely phonetic exuberance that’s at least as important, at a certain age, as meaning.”

Atwood has also continued to write about writing. Her lectures *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* were published under the same title in 2002. She has also released several collections. These include the 2004 publication *Moving Targets: Writing with Intent, 1982-2004* and the 2005 collection *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing, 1970-2005*. Each collection is representative of Atwood’s oeuvre. Although the author has been labeled a Canadian nationalist, a feminist, and even a gothic writer, it seems reasonable to say that, given the range and volume of her work, Atwood incorporates and transcends these categories.

11.6 Margaret Atwood as a Poet

“Literature is not only a mirror, it is also a map, a geography of the mind” wrote Margaret Atwood in her critical study *Survival; A Thematic Guide To Canadian Literature*. Her poetry focuses on relationships and attitudes whether it be between human beings and nature or between people. Intensely personal and lyrical, the poems transcend these narrow confines to declare their political credo. Art for her was a moral issue and the writer’s responsibility was not merely to describe but to bear witness to failure. From her first major work, the poetry collection *The Circle Game* to her most recent collection, *Morning In The Burned House*, she has depicted civilization as tragically hostile to nature and men and women locked in uneasy relationships. Civilization and human love are but circle games trying to pattern the organic world of nature in its flux and persistently failing.

A major recurring pattern one identifies in all Atwood’s poems is the setting up of a series of binary oppositions. *The Circle Game* sets up an anti thesis between the planned world of the city planner and the natural life of the landscape, while *The Animals In That Country* records the contrast between the static European tradition and the dynamic and vibrant Canadian life. The collections *Procedures For Underground* and *The Journals Of Susanna Moodie* translates the vain attempts to etch patterns on the natural order. The failure of human effort and the fear of temporality lead Atwood towards the delineation of photographic moments that capture the tragic plight of the victim. The voice that makes itself heard is most often that of a woman who has been alienated and embittered by a reality that is oppressive and ungenerous. The issue that she constantly returns to in many of her works is the notion of survival, survival in terms of power relations, and psychological confrontations, the struggle for identity and equality for women. Often change its use to emphasize the continuity that is inescapable the haunting survival of the past in the present.

Some of Atwood’s poems directly address problems of torture and imprisonment, racism human rights isolation and hunger. Her poetry is at once personal, political, and lyrical.

11.7 Themes and Symbols

11.7.1 Themes

A. The Inevitability of Death

Atwood demonstrates a remarkable determination to confront death in her poetry. In “Another Elegy,” she asks: “Fine words, but why do I want / to tart up death?” No aspect of life occurs without some reminder of death. She is most interested in the decay of the body—or, as she cautions in “Circe/ Mud Poems,” “this body is not reversible.” The historical poem “Marrying the Hangman” includes a related observation: “There is only a death, indefinitely postponed.” The body is enslaved to time and somehow disconnected from the person inside of it. “Time is what we’re doing,” Atwood writes in “Time.” In “Bedside,” she curses “the murderous body, the body / itself stalled in a field of ice.” Atwood confronts the inevitability of death most explicitly in the last section of another collection, *Morning in the Burned House*. “Man in a Glacier” echoes the themes of “Bedside,” as it literally represents a human body suspended in ice. “A Visit” mourns the passage of her father’s days of activity and lucidity. In “Flowers,” the speaker observes a dying father and realizes that she will undergo the same experience. Nothing can stop the relentless march of death.

B. Survival

Survival- the state of continuing to live or exist, often in spite of difficulty or danger. So, survival is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Following this definition, one has to admit that this state isn't a very positive one for the people who are in this situation.

In Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A thematic guide to Canadian Literature* it is argued that the "single unifying and informing symbol" of Canada is Survival. This idea comes from Canada's history, where the inhabitants ever had to fight for survival. First, there was wilderness which threatened the life of the first settlers. Later, cultural surviving, which went from the threatened French Canada to the English Canada, was the main point for the inhabitants. The Canadians always had to fight for survival. Therefore, survival is main subject in Canadian Literature.

C. Victim

Atwood leads the reader from this theory to another one which deals with the so-called basic victim positions (which, in her opinion, results from survival as Canada's symbol). She maintains that ninety per cent of Canadian Literature deals with the problem of being a victim.

1. The person denies that he/she is a victim
2. The person acknowledges the fact that he/she is a victim, but explains this as an act of Fate, the Will of God, the dictates of Biology, the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea.
3. The person acknowledges the fact that he/she is a victim but refuses to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable.
4. The person is a creative non-victim.

11.7.2 Symbols

A. The Snake

Traditionally a symbol of sexuality and wisdom, the figure of the snake pervades much of Atwood's work. In the section of *Interlunar* dedicated exclusively to variations on the appearance of the snake, Atwood offers a bold reason for this recurring interest: "O snake," she says in the first line of "Psalm to Snake," "you are an argument / for poetry." To Atwood, this slithering beast symbolizes the unseen forces driving the universe. According to the poem "Bad Mouth," a snake is also "fanged," carnivorous, and prone to "gorge on blood," characteristics much in keeping with the violent worldview presented in much of Atwood's poetry.

In "Eating Snake," the speaker rejects the common comparison of the snake to the phallus (insisting on "two differences: / snake tastes like chicken, and who ever credited the prick with wisdom?"). In "She," the poet dismisses the easy analogies (a whip, a rope, the phallus) and describes the snake as a far more complicated creature "with nothing in it but blood." Atwood uses the masculine pronoun to describe this bloodthirsty creature, admitting in the last line that she does so out of habit. The poem ends with the line "It could be she," suggesting that women are equally capable of predatory behavior. For a poet obsessed with the individual's capacity for self-concealment, the snake's "gradual shedding"—its regular trading of one skin for another—offers an exceptionally rich metaphor for human transformations, undertaken for survival or amusement.

B. The Moon

Of the many symbols Atwood takes from the natural world, the moon is among the most malleable. Traditionally invoked as a female goddess, the moon offers a vehicle for Atwood's interest in darkness and the brief illuminations that interrupt it. In her poetry, the moon can symbolize totality, mystery, menace, and oblivion. In "You Begin," from *Selected Poems II: 1976–1986*, a child's mouth is compared to "an O or the moon." In "A Red Shirt," from *Two-Headed Poems*, she describes the male desire for woman to be "bloodless / as a moon on water." In "Night Poem," also from *Two-Headed Poems*, the moon becomes a "beige moon damp as a mushroom." In "Mushrooms," from *True Stories*, Atwood echoes this image in her description of mushrooms as "poisonous moons, pale yellow." In the title poem from this collection, the ever-elusive nature of "truth" can only be approximated in list form, as "a moon, crumpled papers, a coin." In "Landcrab I," she speaks of "that dance / you do for the moon."

The moon sees all but never comments. It is the silent, inscrutable, and probably an indifferent observer of the human comedy unfolding below. Atwood emphasizes this point in "Landcrab II," in which the subject identifies itself as a "category, a noun / in a language not human, / infra-red in moonlight / a tidal wave in air." In "Last Day," Atwood writes, "Everything / leans into the pulpy moon," suggesting the tug of this "pulpy," murky object just beyond human reach. To Atwood, the moon symbolizes several layers of contradictions, the spirit of multiplicity and ambiguity that animates all her poetry. It is visible but mysterious, massive but ephemeral, cyclical but unpredictable. As she puts it in "Sunset II": "Now there's a moon, / an irony." The moon can be anything the viewer decides it is, as in "Against Still Life," when an "orange in the middle of the table" is transformed into, among other items, "an orange moon." The moon is the proof of human subjectivity, "the reason for poetry."

11.8 Critical Reception of Atwood's Works

Although for the most part Atwood's story collections have met with critical favor, some reviewers note that Atwood's short fiction is of uneven quality and is secondary to her novels and poetry. Other critics maintain that her stories retain much of the wit and penetrating insight of her longer works of fiction while displaying the same compelling imagery found in her poetry. Reviewers have detected the significant influence of the German fairy tales of Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm on her work, and several commentators assert that much of her writing has been inspired by her studies of North American and European folklore and Gothic fiction. Moreover, her fiction has often been compared to another critically and commercially popular Canadian author, Alice Munro. In general Atwood's stories have earned positive attention and are regarded as further evidence of her prodigious literary talent.

As a poet, novelist, story writer, and essayist, Margaret Atwood holds a unique position in contemporary Canadian literature. Her books have received critical acclaim in the United States, Europe, and her native Canada, and she has been the recipient of numerous literary awards. Atwood's critical popularity is matched by her popularity with readers. She is a frequent guest on Canadian television and radio and her books are often bestsellers.

Atwood first came to public attention as a poet in the 1960s with her collections *Double Persephone*, winner of the E.J. Pratt Medal, and "The Circle Game", winner of a Governor General's award. These two books marked out the terrain her subsequent poetry has explored. *Double Persephone* concerns "the contrast between the flux of life or nature and the fixity of man's artificial

creations,” as explained by a Dictionary of Literary Biography contributor. “The Circle Game” takes this opposition further, setting such human constructs as games, literature, and love against the instability of nature. Human constructs are presented as both traps and shelters; the fluidity of nature as both dangerous and liberating. Sherrill Grace, writing in *Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood*, identified the central tension in all of Atwood’s work as “the pull towards art on one hand and towards life on the other.” This tension is expressed in a series of “violent dualities,” as Grace termed it. Atwood “is constantly aware of opposites—self/other, subject/ object, male/female, nature/man—and of the need to accept and work within them,” Grace explained. “To create, Atwood chooses violent dualities, and her art re-works, probes, and dramatizes the ability to see double.”

Linda W. Wagner, writing in *The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism*, asserted that in Atwood’s poetry “duality is presented as separation.” This separation leads her characters to be isolated from one another and from the natural world, resulting in their inability to communicate, to break free of exploitative social relationships, or to understand their place in the natural order. “In her early poetry,” Gloria Onley wrote in the *West Coast Review*, Atwood “is acutely aware of the problem of alienation, the need for real human communication and the establishment of genuine human community—real as opposed to mechanical or manipulative; genuine as opposed to the counterfeit community of the body politic.”

Wagner, commenting on the “The Circle Game”, noted that “the personae of those poems never did make contact, never did anything but lament the human condition.” Wagner added, “Relationships in these poems are sterile if not destructive.” In a review of *True Stories* Robert Sward of Quill and Quire explained that many reviewers of the book have exaggerated the violence and given “the false impression that all thirty-eight poems ... are about torture.”

11.9 Let Us Sum Up

Margaret Eleanor Atwood, (born November 18, 1939) is a Canadian author, poet, critic, feminist and social campaigner. She is among the most-honored authors of fiction in recent history; she is a winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Prince of Asturias award for Literature, has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize five times, winning once, and has been a finalist for the Governor General’s Award seven times, winning twice. While she may be best known for her work as a novelist, she is also an award winning poet, having published 15 books of poetry to date. Many of her poems have been inspired by myths, and fairy tales, which were an interest of hers from an early age. Atwood has also published short stories in *Tamarack Review*, *Alphabet*, *Harper’s*, *CBC Anthology*, *Ms.*, *Saturday Night*, *Playboy*, and many other magazines.

As a poet, novelist, story writer, and essayist, Margaret Atwood holds a unique position in contemporary Canadian literature. Her books have received critical acclaim in the United States, Europe, and her native Canada, and she has been the recipient of numerous literary awards. Atwood’s critical popularity is matched by her popularity with readers.

Although Atwood’s politics are commonly described as being left wing, she has indicated in interviews that she considers herself a Red Tory in the historical sense of the term. Atwood and her partner Graeme Gibson are currently members of the Green Party of Canada and strong supporters of GPC leader Elizabeth May, whom Atwood has referred to as fearless, honest, reliable and knowledgeable. In the 2008 federal election she attended a rally for the Bloc Québécois, a Quebec

separatist party, because of her support for their position on the arts, and stated that she would vote for the party if she lived in Quebec. In a *Globe and Mail* editorial, she urged Canadians to vote for any other party to stop a Conservative majority.

Atwood has strong views on environmental issues, such as suggesting that gas-powered leaf blowers and lawn mowers be banned, and has made her own home more energy efficient by installing awnings and skylights that open, and by not having air-conditioning. She and her partner also use a hybrid car when they are in the city.

During the debate in 1987 over a free trade agreement between Canada and the United States, Atwood spoke out against the deal, including an essay she wrote opposing the agreement.

Internationally acclaimed as a poet, novelist, and short story writer, Atwood is recognized as a major figure in Canadian letters. Using such devices as irony, symbolism, and self-conscious narrators, she explores the relationship between humanity and nature, the dark side of human behavior, and power as it pertains to gender and politics. Popular with both literary scholars and the reading public, Atwood has helped to define and identify the goals of contemporary Canadian literature and has earned a distinguished reputation among feminist writers for her exploration of women's issues.

Margaret Atwood as a poet:

Her poetry focuses on relationships and attitudes whether it be between human beings and nature or between people. Intensely personal and lyrical, the poems transcend these narrow confines to declare their political credo. Art for her was a moral issue and the writer's responsibility was not merely to describe but to bear witness to failure.

She has depicted civilization as tragically hostile to nature and men and women locked in uneasy relationships. Civilization and human love are but circle games trying to pattern the organic world of nature in its flux and persistently failing.

The collections *Procedures For Underground* and *The Journals Of Susanna Moodie* translates the vain attempts to etch patterns on the natural order. The failure of human effort and the fear of temporality lead Atwood towards the delineation of photographic moments that capture the tragic plight of the victim. The voice that makes itself heard is most often that of a woman who has been alienated and embittered by a reality that is oppressive and ungenerous.

The issue that she constantly returns to in many of her works is the notion of survival, survival in terms of power relations, and psychological confrontations, the struggle for identity and equality for women. Often change its use to emphasize the continuity that is inescapable the haunting survival of the past in the present.

A major recurring pattern one identifies in all Atwood's poems is the setting up of a series of binary oppositions

Some of Atwood's poems directly address problems of torture and imprisonment, racism human rights isolation and hunger. Her poetry is at once personal, political, and lyrical. In Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A thematic guide to Canadian Literature* it is argued that the "single unifying and informing symbol" of Canada is Survival. This idea comes from Canada's history, where the inhabitants ever had to fight for survival. Atwood leads the reader from this theory to another one which deals with the so-called basic victim positions (which, in her opinion, results from survival as

Canada's symbol). She maintains that ninety per cent of Canadian Literature deals with the problem of being a victim.

11.10 Review Questions

1. What do you know of Atwood's age?
2. *Survival* is the main subject in Canadian Literature. Discuss.
3. Attempt an essay on the symbols in Margaret Atwood's works.
4. Briefly enumerate the novels of Margaret Atwood.
5. Write a note on Atwood's contribution to children's fiction.
6. Discuss Margaret Atwood as a poet.
7. Write a note on the themes in Margaret Atwood's works.
8. Briefly enumerate the poetic works of Margaret Atwood.
9. Critically evaluate the reception of Atwood's works.
10. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* is Atwood's most direct presentation of her strong support of Canadian nationalism. Elucidate.
11. *The Robber Bride* has some elements of feminism. Discuss.

11.11 Bibliography

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UNIT-12

MARGARET ATWOOD (II)

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Style in Her Poetry
 - 12.2.1 Colloquial Tone in her Titles
 - 12.2.2 Swift Rhythm
 - 12.2.3 Punctuation
 - 12.2.4 Free Verse
- 12.3 Feminism in Margaret Atwood's Works
 - 12.3.1 The Female Body
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- 12.4 Metaphors in Her Poetry
- 12.5 "This Is A Photograph Of Me"
 - 12.5.1 Introduction to the Poem
 - 12.5.2 Feminism in the poem
 - 12.5.3 Detailed Explanation
 - 12.5.4 Critical Analysis
 - 12.5.5 Search for Identity
 - 12.5.6 The Poet Hidden Beneath the Work
 - 12.5.7 Symbolism
- 12.6 "Progressive Insanities Of A Pioneer"
 - 12.6.1 Introduction to the Poem
 - 12.6.2 Theme of the Poem
 - 12.6.3 Civilization vs. Wilderness
- 12.7 "My Beautiful Wooden Leader"
 - 12.7.1 Introduction to the Poem
 - 12.7.2 Feminist Criticism
 - 12.7.3 Critical Appreciation

12.8 Let Us Sum Up

12.9 Review Questions

12.10 Bibliography

12.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to Margaret Atwood's poems.
- To enable them to understand the themes in the poems.
- To have a knowledge of the symbols used by Margaret Atwood in her poems.
- To critically appreciate her poems.

12.1 Introduction

Margaret Atwood's *Selected Poems* offers the reader an overview of her work from 1966 to 1974. Such a collection is useful to observe development in the poet's skill and technical accomplishment, and to trace her thematic preoccupation, and to note the way the thematic preoccupations such as Atwood's concern with gender politics also allow *Selected Poems* to be read as a unified text, independent of chronologies of composition. Atwood's work enables us to see how Atwood resolves the problems generated in her poetry by the dynamics of gender politics with which she is concerned. In the *Selected Poems* the theme is of the nature of culturally defined sexual roles, that operates also at other levels in the poems. In terms of the "story" that is told, Atwood's poetry arrives at the conclusion that gender relationships are most fruitfully defined as existing in the present moment and that it is necessary always to confirm their existence and structure through negotiation between partners. Atwood, weaves her own version, which rearranges their elements into suggestive new configurations and installs her work as part of an old yet always new discourse. In *Discovering Authors*, Margaret Atwood's poetic zeal is thus described:

For Margaret Atwood life is a quest, and her writing—particularly her poetry is the charting of that journey. Atwoods' journey is seldom geographical...Atwood does not dwell on location, physical presence, details of her place. Her search is instead a piercing interior exploration, driving through any personal self-consciousness into regions marked by primitive responses, both violent and beautiful. Atwood is interested in the human condition which exists independent of sex; and she plays a variety of games in order to explore that condition fully.

12.2 Style in Her Poetry

Atwood's poetry from the 1960s through to the 1990s, focuses on language, the distinctively "Atwoodian" idiom and there is an evolution of her poetic voice. Whereas the early poetry was characterized by irony, emotional detachment, and a lethally precise vocabulary, there are shifts in her later poetry towards a multiplicity of voices and corresponding changes in tone towards compassion and elegy. Reading though imagery, critics have highlighted Atwood's "poetics of metamorphosis" in her poetic world of mutations and mirrors and the palimpsestic quality of experience and landscape, filled with unseen presences and memories. "Nothing goes away" in the fluid reality of this created world, where Atwood is presented not as a cultural historian but as a mythographer of the Canadian

imagination. Prone to understatement rather than theatricality, Atwood's performance of the poems in *Power Politics* is delivered without any fuss. Similarly, on the page, she is direct; wasting no words; writing in clean, short lines; and using punctuation sparingly. For example, a fragment of the poem, "We are hard on Each Other," appears as:

Of course your lies
are more amusing:
you make them new each time.

A thing as little as a colon makes an enormous difference in Atwood's economical verse. By opting to use a colon instead of the word, *because*, she creates a fragmentary syntax and a detached, matter-of-fact tone. The poet reads these lines easily, without straining for an invective tone. The phrase is barely an insult, the way she says it; it is cast—like many of Atwood's powerful lines—as merely an observation. When one reads Margaret Atwood's poetry, that which stands out most prominently is her intensely personal style of narration. Her style is both inviting and revealing which aides in creating an intimate relationship with the reader. This narration allows Atwood to befriend and beguile readers with her use of easy, everyday speech and soothing story-like themes while also enabling her to tackle larger and more pressing social issues. As an ardent feminist, the technical aspects of Atwood's poetry reflect her concerns for matters such as equality for women and the need to challenge social norms. Most concretely, these concerns are voiced through her usage of style, tone, punctuation and word choice. The three poems that I will be analyzing, "This Is a Photograph of Me," "They Eat Out," and from *Circe/Mud Poems* "Men With the Heads of Eagles" each focus on this theme of feminism and achieve their goals through the employment of Atwood's graceful and calming tone. Yet, by guiding the reader gently and not didactically, Atwood subtly introduces her concerns without the noise and clamor oft associated with her cause.

12.2.1 Colloquial Tone in Her Titles

Atwood's easy-going, colloquial tone is perhaps best exemplified by her titles. Her titles, "This Is a Photograph of Me," "They Eat Out," and from *Circe/Mud Poems* "Men With the Heads of Eagles," all aspire to create a friendly relationship with the reader. In the case of the title of "This is a Photograph of me," Atwood manages to combine emotions of self-indulgence, pride, and optimism with the naiveté of a young child to create an audience that is spellbound by the precociousness of this child. The very capitalization of the word "is" underscores Atwood's efforts to create this type of relationship. By capitalizing "is," Atwood makes what seems to be a grammatical mistake, a mistake one might expect from the writings of a precocious youth. Likewise, the title, "They Eat Out," seeks to produce the warm and inviting atmosphere of a friendly dinner. While the phrase "eat out" seems harsh and caustic, Atwood uses this terminology because of its colloquial value. By using this phrase, Atwood mimics the language patterns of friends and family seeking a quick meal, and thereby creates a similarly warm and caring environment. With her title, "Men With the Heads of Eagles" Atwood endeavors to amuse and interest her reader. By amusing her reader, Atwood fashions a relationship built on interesting and inquisitive nature of entertainment.

To make her relationship with the reader all the more genuine, Atwood employs the rhythms of everyday speech instead of a highly structured and restrictive meter. In "Men With the Heads of

Eagles” the reader follows the narrator on her quest to find an acceptable man. Here, Atwood guides her readers through the masses of undesirable men in order to find one that interests her. As early as the first sentence, Atwood’s rhythm makes the reader feel as if they have a personal connection with the narrator,

Men with the heads of eagles
no longer interest me
or pig-men, or those who can fly
with the aid of wax and feathers

or those who take off their clothes
to reveal other clothes
or those with skins of blue leather

or those golden and flat as a coat of arms
or those with claws, the stuffed ones
with glass eyes; or those
hierarchic as greaves and steam engines.

12.2.2 Swift Rhythm

Here we see that Atwood’s rhythm is quick and not interrupted by any unnecessary pauses. Atwood uses this swift rhythm to persuade the reader of the confidence and truth of the narrator. Simply stated the comprehensiveness and swiftness with which this laundry list is recalled forces a reader to believe that this is not the first time the narrator has voiced these complaints. The plight of the narrator has become a cause of nightly angst and seemingly endless frustration. Yet these personal and very private complaints are voiced to the unacquainted reader. In hearing these complaints the reader becomes transformed from a detached observer and instead assumes the role of a good friend, who by their listening, now commiserates with the narrator. By achieving the confidence of the closeness of a friend through her prose, Atwood gets the reader emotionally involved in the poem. In the reader’s eyes this is no longer poetry, rather it is the nightly diatribe of a friend who is exhausted by the quest for finding a worthy and interesting man.

12.2.3 Punctuation

Punctuation also serves as an extremely important part of creating an atmosphere conducive to Atwood’s oftentimes-light poetry. In her poem “This is a Photograph of Me,” Atwood presents the reader with the beautiful and innocuous image of a lake and countryside only to debase this symbol of beauty and tranquility with the startling and humorous revelation that the narrator is not actually in the picture, rather her body is submerged, having drowned in the lake a day earlier. While the beginning of

the poem is stated in a straightforward manner, the crux of the poem, the narrator's death is not. The final four stanzas of the poem—those in which the death is revealed and discussed—are enclosed with parentheses.

12.2.4 Free Verse

The construction of most of her poems is free verse. It has no discernible rhyme scheme or meter. The most prominent literary device is enjambment. *Enjambment* is a term used to describe a line of poetry that does not end with a punctuation mark but instead flows into the next line.

Recounting her own experience of writing poetry she has observed in her work” Notes Towards a Poem that Can Never Be Written” she highlights the distance between the words the poet gropes for and the unspeakable reality. In an interview with Joyce Carol Oates she has emphasised her involvement with the craft of writing in these words :”My poems usually begins with words or phrases which appeal more because of the sound than their meaning, and the movement and phrasing of a poem are very important to me. But like many modern poets I tend to conceal rhymes by placing them in the middle of lines, and to avoid immediate alliteration and assonance in favour of echoes placed later in the poems”.

12.3 Feminism in Margaret Atwood's Works

Feminism is one of the most important themes during the 1970s. For centuries, women have been subjected to a male-dominated society. Recent history however, women start to struggle with what their roles should be in the society. As a female writer, Margaret Atwood develops the theme of feminism in her works.

12.3.1 The Female Body

The female body represents servitude and entrapment, victimization and imprisonment—otherness as defined by a men. It is a battlefield of violence, as in the section “Torture” from “Notes Towards A Poem That Can Never Be Written,” from True Stories, in which the speaker describes a woman's body as a “mute symbol” of grotesque weakness: “they sewed her face / shut, closed her mouth / to the size of a straw, / and put her back on the streets.” In another poem in this series, “A Woman's Issue,” a young girl is “made to sing while they scrape the flesh / from between her legs, then tie her thighs / till she scabs over and is called healed.” The area between a woman's legs is “enemy territory”; when violated, it is proof of man's “uneasy power.” A woman's body is the theatre on which men's brutal rituals are enacted, as they vie for supremacy.

The female body also demonstrates the unbreakable connection between the Earth and women, proof of a woman's vulnerability and mortality. In “*You Begin*,” the speaker emphatically identifies the child's hand to teach her that her body is ultimately her own. “*Five Poems for Grandmothers*” observes, sons “branch out, but / one woman leads to another.” While the female body can represent continuity, sensual pleasure, and self-reliance, in most of Atwood's work, there is some disjunction between substance and spirit, between flesh and essence. In “*The Woman Makes Peace With Her Faulty Heart*,” the narrator characterizes a woman's relationship to her body as an “uneasy truce, / and honor between criminals.” Margaret Atwood has made an observation in “The Female Body,” Michigan Quarterly Review (1990), that:

The basic Female body comes with the following accessories: garter belt, panti-girdle, crinoline, camisole, bustle, brassiere, stomacher, chemise, virgin zone, spike heels, nose ring, veil, kid gloves, fishnet stockings, fichu, bandeau, Merry Widow, weepers, chokers, barrettes, bangles, beads, lorgnette, feather boa, basic black, compact, Lycra stretch one-piece with modesty panel, designer peignoir, flannel nightie, lace teddy, bed, head.

12.3.2 Role of Victim, Victimizer and Victor

The roles adopted by Atwood may be described as the positions of the victim, the victimizer, and the victor. The first two, victim and victimizer, are in Atwood's passive positions by which the female subject is locked into an unchanging and unchangeable role; the position of victor is by contrast an active one, permitting change, renewal, or termination of the role. Atwood's poems, though, do not construct the roles of victim and victimizer as the only possibilities for the female subject. At "Circle" 'centre, section iv, is the couple's climactic map game, in which imperial and horror scenarios underlie the gender domination:

So now you trace me
like a country's boundary
and I am fixed, stuck
down on the outspread map
of this room, of your mind's continent
(here and yet not here, like
the wardrobe and the mirrors
the voices through the wall
your body ignored on the bed),
transfixed
by your eyes'
cold blue thumbtacks

This mapped impalement follows both the Anglo-American Prufrock's fear of "the eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase" and A. M. Klein's Canadian idea of poet as landscape.

12.4 Metaphors in Her Poetry

For decades women have used literature as a way of expressing their feelings on the inequality and unfair expectations imposed on them by society. Through novels, essays, poems and other literary works, female writers were able to convey the sentiments of countless other women at a time when they were unable to voice their opinions. One such writer who found literature as an outlet to speak up for women's rights was Margaret Atwood. Atwood is a well-known novelist and poet whose writing explores women's issues as is clearly evident in her poem "Spelling." In "Spelling," Atwood describes the silencing of women in all walks of life. Her poem depicts the victimization and vulnerability of

women without language. Atwood's message is that words and language have the ability to empower women and she conveys this message through the use of certain poetic elements and properties. The poem "Spelling" begins with the speaker describing her daughter playing with letters and learning to spell. This image introduces the feminist theme and sets the tone for the remainder of the poem. Atwood then takes the reader through a history of persecution and helplessness with references to women being branded as witches and the tying of their legs to prevent childbirth. The solution she offers lies in the power of words and language. By expressing themselves through writing, women have a voice which cannot be suppressed.

In the eight stanzas of "Spelling," Atwood, as the speaker of the poem, successfully expresses her views on women's need for writing as a medium of making their opinions heard and to be treated equally. In the opening stanza Atwood writes, "learning how to spell /spelling / how to make spells." The use of the word 'spells' refers not only to making spells for mystical and supernatural purposes, but also the power that words can have. The ability to spell and to use the power of language was once denied to women because it was a common belief that they had no use for literacy. The technique of repetition was used in the first stanza to emphasize the different meanings of the word 'spell'.

In the next stanza she expresses her curiosity about the women who had to give up their roles as mothers so that they can write. "Closed themselves in rooms / drew curtains / so they could mainline words," she states. She creates the image of women having to hide in their homes to fulfill their desire to write. The word 'mainline' in the last line of the stanza is symbolic for writing. It suggests that writing is similar to an addiction to drugs. She then goes on to write, "A child is not a poem / a poem is not a child / there is no either/or." She claims that a woman who desires to write should not have to choose between her traditional role as a mother and that of a writer. She should be allowed to assume both roles. The stanza ends abruptly with the word "However," suggesting that this is not the case in reality. Historically, women have been forced into the roles of mother and wife and silenced by their male counterparts.

Atwood then provides examples of women who were silenced in the next two stanzas. Atwood refers to a witch whose mouth is covered to prevent her from speaking. This image draws on the opening stanza's reference to making spells and the figurative and literal meanings of it. She states, "Ancestress: the burning witch." According to a review of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, one of Atwood's ancestors by the name of Mary Webster was put on trial for being a witch. The first line in the fifth stanza is a clear allusion to her historical connection. In the last three lines of "Spelling" Atwood writes, "Your own name first / your first naming, your first name / your first word." Repetition was used once again to emphasize the importance for women, whom she is speaking to, to have their own identities. By giving a name to something we give it a certain individuality and distinctiveness. Similarly, a woman with her own identity means that she is not the possession of anyone. The power of her words gives her the ability to freely speak her mind.

Margaret Atwood's "Spelling" can be interpreted in different ways based on the reader's individual perspective. However, its theme of female empowerment through the use of words is definite and cannot be ignored. As Jonathan Culler wrote in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, "The interpretation of poems depends not just on the convention of unity but also on the convention of significance: the rule is that poems, however slight in appearance, are supposed to be about something important". Atwood's "Spelling" may seem simple and insignificant in appearance, but her feminist

message is of great importance. It is a message than transcends time and travels beyond the man-made barriers of race, religion and even gender.

12.5 This Is A Photograph Of Me

12.5.1 Introduction to the Poem

“This Is a Photograph of Me,” contains the elements of metamorphosis, verballity, confusions of tense, and duplicity of signification. In this text, a visual, iconic object, the photograph, is also a verbal, symbolic one, the poem. The “smeared / print” thus offers a double discourse in which words are part of a picture, and which strives to convey the presence of an absent subject. In addition, the temporal matrix is deliberately reversed or inverted:

(The photograph was taken
the day after I drowned....

The reader is made to question the temporal frame that permits the text to be spoken by an already drowned subject, who, invisible, invites the reader to find her in the scene described:

I am in the lake, in the center
of the picture, just under the surface
if you look long enough
eventually
you will be able to see me.)

Spatial concepts, too, are inverted: the lake, though “in the background,” is also “in the center/ of the picture,” just as the drowned speaker, centered by the poem, is virtually invisible in the described photograph . Caught in a temporal irony that makes a fact of the past (the drowning of the speaker) a fact also of the future (“you will be able to see me”), and therefore virtually indistinguishable from it, the drowned speaker of “This Is A Photograph of Me” encourages the reader to search an icon made of words for a true image of the subject.

The poem is divided into two parts. The second part is set off by brackets. In the beginning portion, the poet paints a vivid and beautiful image of a picture. The picture is old and smeared because it is somewhat old, but as one looks at it closer, the sheer beauty of the captured landscape is realized. There is a tree in the foreground. Halfway up a hill there is a small house. In the background are a lake and more gentle hills.

The second portion begins with the shocking revelation from the speaker. “The photograph was taken the day after I drowned.” The speaker informs the reader that she is in the center of the lake, just under the surface. The lake has now moved up from the background of the picture, to the center. This brings the reader closer to the lake, almost as if he has fallen into the picture. Being dragged into the picture gives the reader a different perspective and better understanding. He can now see the death in the picture, although it is still difficult. The effect of the water on light distorts the image. However, if the viewer looks hard enough and long enough, he can eventually see the speaker.

The poem is written just like a conversation. The speaker uses no verse or rhyme to describe the picture. This gives the poem a realistic, personal feeling, unlike a poem that is “;just a poem” after losing much of its emotional grip by alienating itself with strict formal rhythm and rhyme scheme. Just like a person who is overly formal and proper can seem cold and distant, so can a poem. This poem avoids that situation effectively.

Although this poem works beautifully as a literal poem by slightly unnerving the reader and pulling at his emotions, it does not have to be interpreted literally. It is a poem about anyone or anything that was ever overlooked or forgotten. The poem exhorts the reader to look again and closer to see what he has missed.

12.5.2 Feminism in the Poem

Margaret Atwood is known for her feminist views. This poem could very likely be a feminist view what happens to women under men. The poem was written in 1966, a time when social classes and ideas were being redefined. The blurriness of the picture and the water distorting and keeping us from seeing the speaker under the surface represent men, or the influence of men. Taken in an extreme feminist way, the poem suggests that when bound in marriage, a woman blends in behind her husband. The world sees the man, but not the woman behind the man. In a more general way, the poem speaks of how men are dominant and women don't have as much of a say. The reader is called to notice women.

12.5.3 Detailed Explanation

“This is a Photograph of Me” can be opened to many interpretations. A more close observation of the poem convinces the reader of a secret link dealing with the foetus in the mother's womb. The first verse: “It was taken some time ago. At first it seems to be a smeared print: blurred lines and grey flecks blended with the paper.” Here, this is the very beginning of the foetus. It is almost like a smeared print.

The second verse: - “Then, as you scan it, you see in the left-hand corner a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree (balsam or spruce) emerging and, to the right, halfway up what ought to be a gentle slope, a small frame house.” Here, scanning is done by the ultrasound machine, and the foetus is inside the placenta which appears like a branch. Also “a gentle slope” tells of the slowing rising of the abdomen of the mother and the “small frame house” means the womb of the mother.

The third and fourth verses: - In the background there is a lake, and beyond that, some low hills. (The photograph was taken the day after I drowned.” the lake and the low hills give a description of the area where the foetus is in the womb of the mother. And “The day after I drowned” simply means the day she (the foetus) became immersed in the amniotic fluid in the mother's womb.

Then: “ It is difficult to say where precisely, or to say how large or small I am: the effect of water on light is a distortion but if you look long enough, eventually you will be able to see me.)” The poet then says that it is difficult to get her precise location because the amniotic fluid is huge compared to her size, and it would even be difficult to say how large or small she really is. She then mentions another important point which shows that she is in the womb of her mother “water on light is a distortion.” This refers to the light rays from the ultrasound device, which is causing a distortion. “But if you look long enough, you will be able to see me” shows how carefully the viewer will have to look within the amniotic fluid to recognize the foetus.

12.5.4 Critical Analysis

The poem critiques the way society stereotypes women. Atwood's identity is "blurred" like the photo, suggesting that we need to look closer to see her true identity. The landscape described is domestic, thus emphasizing women's alienated and marginalized domestic sphere in society. The poem then becomes more assertive towards the end as Atwood describes the woman in a fixed place. Although her identity is "just under the surface" she stresses that if we look hard enough we will be able to see it.

12.5.5 Search for Identity

This poem is about Atwood's personal identity. Photographs usually capture one's identity, however, in this poem, Atwood writes about the loss of her original identity. She has literally drowned in her "new identity", and cannot quite locate her old one. The lake refers to her identity. Atwood refers to the fact that she is just below the surface, of the facade of her false identity, and concludes the poem with noting that it is impossible to see the "real her" while she is covered by her fake identity.

This poem is about how we read and interpret poems. It invites us to look deeper beneath the surface of what is being said in poetry. The poem begins with an objective description of a photo, apparently, which is seemingly 'smeared' and indistinct. The photo is of a natural scene. However, a posthumous, impossible speaker is introduced, giving us a privileged viewpoint allowing the reader to learn that there is more to the scene than meets the eye. Usually one thinks that the poem is actually the photo of the title.

"This Is a Photograph of Me," deceives the reader in the first glance. For the first fourteen lines it looks as if the poem is going to be about a happy memory that the narrator had. It paints a very serene picture in reader's mind if the reader imagines what is being said. Then, in lines fifteen through twenty-six one suddenly realizes that this is not a happy memory, but quite the opposite, because someone has died. This initial inference may seem shallow but after reading a section on "This Is a Photograph of Me" in *The Art of Margaret Atwood: Essays in Criticism* one can notice the different meaning. The poem is not only being told by one person as it seems it is upon scanning it, but is actually being told by two people. The first fourteen lines are being told by someone who is describing a photograph that they could possibly have in a photo album. The last twelve are being told by the person who has died in the lake the day before the photograph was taken. While this is a hard thing to discover upon first glance, it makes perfect sense.

12.5.6 The Poet Hidden Beneath the Work

Yet another meaning, interpreted by other critics is that Atwood wants the reader to "look deeper" than just what the poem has to say. There is the creator underneath the work just waiting to be realized for what they are, the creator of something unique, and their own. This is shown because the speaker is "hidden" beneath the surface of the lake, just as a poet, or any artist for that matter, is hidden beneath their words and works. The time that it takes the observer, or reader, to realize the author hidden beneath the work—before the end of the work—is perceptive of our failure at noticing details without knowing their meaning. The author of the work is actually the one who is guiding his/her perception into an accurate interpretation. This concludes to the fact that Atwood is commenting about

the tendency for the reader of a work to ignore what is really going on inside of it.

Thus one can conclude that Atwood is simply drawing a parallel between the way art (the photograph) and poetry is interpreted, concluding that the observer must “look deeper” to see what is really there. She wants the observer to see the importance of realizing the presence of the creator—the poet, the artist—in his work. The poem uses metaphorical techniques to show this idea, through both, the imagery and form of the poem. Just as the speaker is hidden beneath the surface of the lake, the poet is hidden beneath his words. The time it takes the observer to realize this—until the end of the poem—is reflective of the failure of our perception to notice details without explanation. The conclusion, then, is that the observer needs to realize the presence of the artist, who is beneath the work the entire time helping to guide his perception to an accurate interpretation. Atwood is commenting on the tendency to ignore what’s really going on in a work.

12.5.7 Symbolism

In her poems, Atwood uses photographs to explore identity, particularly the facades women adopt to conform (at least superficially) to society. “This is a photograph of me,” the first poem in her first collection, plays with the conventional equation of appearance and reality. The photograph obscures, rather than reveals, the speaker’s mysterious identity and history. Similarly, the speaker of “In the Tourist Centre in Boston” reflects on the perceived discrepancy between photographic images of Canada and her own memories of the place. The speaker’s “private mirage” takes precedence over the glossy colorized certainties depicted in the photographs. In the poem “Girl and Horse, 1928,” from *Procedures for Underground*, the speaker contemplates an old photograph of a girl, “someone I never knew,” and tries to imagine what the girl was thinking. In the end of the poem, the speaker turns over the photograph, whereupon the girl waves and rides “out of sight.” Thus photographs are no longer static recorders of a fixed history in which “nothing can change, grow older.” Instead, photographs represent the truths a viewer chooses to invent. More than a decade later, in “Postcards,” Atwood describes a photograph only to comment on its inability to capture the realities of a place.

12.6 *Progressive Insanities Of A Pioneer*

12.6.1 Introduction to the Poem

The Canadian land with all its regional diversity has been a binding force in the effort to forge a Canadian identity, while it has at the same time, been a hostile force so overwhelming in its implacability that some, at least, of Canadian literature has taken as its central theme what Margaret Atwood terms “Survival”. The Confederation poets, impelled by the desire to found a Canadian literature, resorted to landscape as a distinguishing feature. Yet the landscapes do not have an unmistakable Canadian quality; they could belong to any place. Besides, they stop short at description, accompanied by some kind of emotional response; the poet remains an observer. It is when landscape becomes mindscape, that we find a poetry with the pressure of individual, regional, and national experience. Landscape, seascape, sky scape, take on symbolic significance. While mountain prairie, ocean are powerfully evoked, place also becomes a trope for a mental experience, may be of wrong headed struggle and defeat or of the encounter with meaninglessness. Thus the land in Atwood’s “Progressive insanities of a pioneer”, besides being the actual wilderness that resists the pioneer’s efforts at imposing himself upon it, becomes a sentient space that inhabits the pioneer’s mind.

12.6.2 Theme of the Poem

The common characteristics between the two poems, “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” and “Further Arrivals,” by Margaret Atwood, are that of the self-adaptation and self-awareness to nature. In Canadian Literature in the era of the new land, there are poems about surviving in nature, about being uncivilized vs. being civilized, and about growing and developing. These two poems are tied together with a number of key images, ideas, and thoughts. Even though “Further Arrivals,” is one of a collection of poems taken from Atwood’s *The Journals of Susan Moodie*, both poems are very similar in their subject matter: “the close inter-weaving and inter-twining” of experiences with nature.

“Atwood based events in this and the other poems in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) on Mrs. Moodie’s accounts of her life in *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852) and *Life in the Clearings* (1853).” In a nut shell, Susan Moodie moved here from the old land to the new land and has to adjust to the wilderness in order to survive and find some connection to nature, where as, the man tries his best to separate himself and refuses nature.

And even as the Pioneer spins around in his own creation of insanity he still states that “The land is solid / and stamped,” then looks down and “watches his foot sink.” The Pioneer’s feeler are “dangling” and not trying to make sense of the “darkness,” as Moodie’s “tentacles,” have acknowledged. In Atwood’s “poetry, she often explores... dissecting the personal, psychological, cultural, political, and sexual ideas or myths confining the individual.

Moodie in “Further Arrivals” was willing to become more adapted and aware in regards to self and nature, and the Pioneer in “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer” was not willing to become more adapted or aware when it came to anything that was not in his mind structured and civilized. “ She realizes that in order to keep some sense of sanity or balance that she needs “wolf”’s eyes to see / the truth. The second and third stanza give us understanding of how ignorant, and even eluded, Moodie is towards the new world because “the immigrants threw off their clothes / and danced like sandflies,” having no clue of what awaits them. In this poem, unlike “Further Arrivals,” the Pioneer is not accepting nature but is trying to insert his own man-made civilized order.

From the first line in the first stanza the Pioneer starts in on his illusion by “proclaiming himself the centre,” of a nature that undoubtedly has no centre. “ In “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” the Pioneer tried to maintain his societal principles, which confines him, and leads him into insanity. His “great vision,” is not turning out to be the “great vision” he had hoped it to be. Finally, “the green vision, the unnamed / whale invaded,” and he is consumed by his self-inflicted nightmare. The reality of the situation begins to eat away at him and he is unable to stop “the idea of an animal,” pattering “across the roof,” “the swamp’s clamourings,” and “the outbursts of the rocks. In each of these poems it is found that , the individual thoughts on nature, the thoughts on how to survive, and the individual path, the individual actions resulted in his “eyes made ragged by his effort,” to bring human order, civilization, and light to nature.

12.6.3 Civilization vs. Wilderness

Atwood constantly pits civilization against the wilderness surrounding it and society against the savagery from which it arose. She considers these oppositions to be some of the defining principles of

Canadian literature. They also provide a metaphor for the divisions within the human personality. Society, civilization, and culture represent the rational, contained side of humanity, while the wild forest represents the very opposite: the irrational, primeval, and carnal impulses that exist in every living being. “In The Animals in That Country”, Atwood dramatizes the civilized urge to ignore the wildness lurking just over the horizon: in “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” she captures this theme with particular vividness: “In the darkness the fields”/defend themselves with fences / in vain: / everything / is getting in. Atwood elaborates on the uselessness of defending oneself against the wilderness in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, an account of a European immigrant’s struggles to navigate the wildernesses of Canada, her adopted home. Almost every poem deals with this tension in some form. In “This is a photograph of me,” the serene natural setting presents a startling contrast to the human tragedy it masks. The glossy “mountains and lakes and more lakes” depicted on the wall in “At the Tourist Centre in Boston” succeed only in reminding the viewer of the gritty reality beneath the pictures. In “Siren Song,” the jagged cliffs pulverize carefree sailors, who are in, but not fully of, nature. In “Postcards” and other poems of that era, cosmetic improvements to the natural world do little to mask the savagery that preceded human intervention. Landscapes in Atwood’s poems are harsh and brutal, wild and unconquerable, like the heart of darkness within all humans.

12.7 *My Beautiful Wooden Leader*

12.7.1 Introduction to the Poem

Margaret Atwood’s *Power Politics* first appeared in 1971, startling its audience with its vital dance of woman and man. Even now it startles, and is just as iconoclastic as ever. These poems occupy all at once the intimate, the political, and the mythic. Here Atwood makes us realize that we may think our own personal dichotomies are unique, but really they are multiple, universal. Clear, direct, wry, unrelenting with cleverness, playfulness, economy of words and one-liners; -Atwood’s poetic powers are honed to perfection in this important early work. It is a book of love poems, or, more correctly, a book of poetry on male-female relationships.

Power Politics is the violent excavation of a relationship that is falling apart. Very few of the poems have names. No names are given ... the other character in these poems, besides the first-person narrator is either “he” or “you”. The entire book reads like an indictment, and you can see why it really hit a nerve. As always, though, Atwood’s narrator does not spare herself. That’s one of the things one misses about Atwood’s more blatant feminist works - is that women are dealt with fairly, yes, but so are men. Men are isolated, too. Men want intimacy, reality - they don’t want “power politics” either. It is the death-grip of larger forces that impact personal relationships.

12.7.2 Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism has traditionally interpreted Margaret Atwood’s poetry collection *Power Politics* (1971) as an account of victimization of women by men, in spite of the author’s complaints about this limitation of the meaning of these texts. Rather than being victims, the subjects of these poems (‘you’/‘I’) constitute an inseparable dyad who inflict pain on each other while they are ineluctably dependent on each other.

12.7.3 Critical Appreciation

“My beautiful Wooden Leader” is one of the sequence poems of Atwood’s fifth and best collection, *Power Politics* which deals with the embattled relations of the sexes. *Politics*, would be representative of her feminist perspective. Atwood had titanic rage, naturally she did ... but her work is a bit more complex than she sometimes is given credit for. The first-person narrator in *Power Politics* is angry, passive, and depressive. The “power politics” of the title is one of the reasons that the book went off like such a bomb at the time it came out. It contains one of her most often quoted poems, the opening poem, which unequivocally sets the tone for the collection:

you fit into me
like a hook into an eye

a fish hook
an open eye

It stands out, not only for its shock value, but also as representative of Atwood’s writing, her literary moves and devices. Atwood was schooled in surrealism and neo-surrealism. Like Suzanna Moodie, her craft employs bizarre juxtapositions, and a defamiliarizing, a technique honed by the surrealists. She likes to shake the ground on which you stand. The opening stanza above is comfortable, Victorian, modest in its hook & eye allusion, a gentle simile for an intimate look at love; the second stanza shocks you from that comfort zone and into the surrealist moment, in this case, the hook of the male gaze. This poem uses two contrasting couplets. Its effect depends upon a surprising ironic shift in meaning from the gentle, cooperative hook and eye of a traditional piece of clothing to the politically charged fish hook/ open eye. Even in this tiny poem, we see Atwood’s favored devices and themes at work as Atwood uses the short lined, conversational, ironic form loved by many postmodern poets and readers.

These four terse lines turn domestic relations into an act of violence against women. Sexual relations, says Atwood, are permeated by myths and role playing in which the male lover is cast as a heroic military leader, simultaneously the woman’s rescuer and violater. In “My beautiful wooden leader” she addresses her lover as “general” and asserts”

You enlist
My body in your heroic
struggle to become real,

that is to say, he makes love to her in a way that will fulfill the stereotypical role of powerful male. It is because of this experience in “you are the sun” she says after their lovemaking:

I lie mutilated beside
You.....

And putting on her clothes again, is amazed that she can continue to think or eat. Yet the poem concludes with a confession: “Why did I create you” she asks acknowledging that as a woman she is

equally responsible for creating these roles. This complicity is reflected in the poem continuously.

The poem unfolds the fact that woman in the history has been seen waiting passively throughout while man are at war. The woman's guilt is described in lines that fuse public violence with the intimacy of sexual relations. In response to her sense of guilt, she suggests that

next time we commit
love we ought to
choose in advance what to kill.

The monotone the colourless language (few figures or modifiers), the intense self-consciousness and the mordant wit in the poem are all elements of a style Atwood has developed to strip away civilized surfaces, to expose the harsh, elemental realities beneath.

It is remarkable to note that the speaker asserts awareness of her victimization, but she also sees her lover and herself as "hostile nations". She says that

We should forgive each other
Instead we are opposite we
Touch as though attacking

The military metaphor extends beyond the relations of the sexes. *The Circle Game* sequence is often read, by Americans, as a miniature *Power Politics*, outlining, as it does, a power politics of female versus male. But for Atwood, one power game is like another. As explication and analysis of "Circle" 's concentric structure will show, this sequence enacts not only gender but also national power scenarios: its mirror and window sections dramatize Canadian versus American games; its children's-fortress sections replay Canada's garrison history; and, at its climactic center, national power games are revealed through a male-female horror scenario.. Atwood sees war nations as rooted in the same mythologizing of power and the same refusal of knowledge, understanding and forgiveness. *Power Politics* has nothing to do with Canada. It is a ruthless love poem, from beginning to end, but its relevance to the larger political issues of the day, the gender wars going on, women's rights, all that ... made her voice seem louder than others, and turned all eyes to Canada.

The use of rhetorical scheme in *Power Politics* is related to three main functions: definition, balance and reasoning. Through the rhetorical analysis of these functions, we find that the poems are written with the persuasive intention of undermining certain destructive myths which have prevailed in the relationships between men and women.

Suffering is common for the female characters in Atwood's poems, although they are never passive victims. In her later works, her characters take active measures to improve their situations. *West Coast Review* contributor Onley, maintained that Atwood's poems, concern "modern woman's anguish at finding herself isolated and exploited (although also exploiting) by the imposition of a sex role power structure." Atwood explained to Judy Klemesrud in the *New York Times* that her suffering characters come from real life: "My women suffer because most of the women I talk to seem to have suffered." Although she became a favorite of feminists, Atwood's popularity in the feminist community was unsought. "I began as a profoundly apolitical writer," she told Lindsay Van Gelder of *Ms.*, "but then I began to do what all novelists and some poets do: I began to describe the world around me."

During a time of great and extreme social upheaval Margaret Atwood served as an understated voice of change. While she remained firmly entrenched in feminist ideology, she offered fence-straddlers and extremists alike a warm invitation to explore feminism through her delicate and refined poetry. Her poetry's smooth story-like quality and subtle nuances in style all have an enormous impact on its readers. Moreover, Atwood's poetry, with its seemingly light-hearted themes drives its reader to strive for more than a superficial understanding of her works. Her understated technical skill constantly challenges her reader to actively uncover her intended meaning. Yet none of that could have been achieved without Atwood's narrator gaining the trust and confidence of the reader. Ultimately by befriending her reader with a combination of personal style of narration, warm tone, meaningful punctuation, and excellent word choice, Atwood is able to create a relationship of investigation with a reader in which they continually examine and re-examine her poetry in search of deeper meanings.

12.8 Let Us Sum Up

Atwood's work enables us to see how Atwood resolves the problems generated in her poetry by the dynamics of gender politics with which she is concerned. In the *Selected Poems* the theme is of the nature of culturally defined sexual roles, that operates also at other levels in the poems.

In each of these poems it is found that, the individual thoughts on nature, the thoughts on how to survive, and the individual path, the individual actions resulted in his "eyes made ragged by his effort," to bring human order, civilization, and light to nature.

The construction of most of her poems is free verse. It has no discernible rhyme scheme or meter. The most prominent literary device is enjambment. *Enjambment* is a term used to describe a line of poetry that does not end with a punctuation mark but instead flows into the next line.

Feminism is one of the most important themes during the 1970s. For centuries, women have been subjected to a male-dominated society.. As a female writer, Margaret Atwood develops the theme of feminism in her works.

The female body represents servitude and entrapment, victimization and imprisonment—otherness as defined by a men. The female body also demonstrates the unbreakable connection between the Earth and women, proof of a woman's vulnerability and mortality. The roles adopted by Atwood may be described as the positions of the victim, the victimizer, and the victor. The first two, victim and victimizer, are in Atwood's passive positions by which the female subject is locked into an unchanging and unchangeable role; the position of victor is by contrast an active one, permitting change, renewal, or termination of the role.

In the eight stanzas of "Spelling," Atwood, as the speaker of the poem, successfully expresses her views on women's need for writing as a medium of making their opinions heard and to be treated equally.

The poem, "This is a photograph of me" critiques the way society stereotypes women. Atwood's identity is "blurred" like the photo, suggesting that we need to look closer to see her true identity. The landscape described is domestic, thus emphasizing women's alienated and marginalized domestic sphere in society. The poem then becomes more assertive towards the end as Atwood describes the woman in a fixed place. Although her identity is "just under the surface" she stresses that if we look hard enough we will be able to see it. Yet another meaning, interpreted by other critics is that Atwood wants

the reader to “look deeper” than just what the poem has to say. There is the creator underneath the work just waiting to be realized for what they are, the creator of something unique, and their own.

Atwood dramatizes the civilized urge to ignore the wildness lurking just over the horizon: in “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” she captures this theme with particular vividness. From the first line in the first stanza the Pioneer starts in on his illusion by “proclaiming himself the centre,” of a nature that undoubtedly has no centre. “ In “Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,” the Pioneer tried to maintain his societal principles, which confines him, and leads him into insanity.

“My beautiful wooden leader” is one of the sequence poems of Atwood’s fifth and best collection, *Power Politics* which deals with the embattled relations of the sexes. It is a ruthless love poem, from beginning to end, but its relevance to the larger political issues of the day, the gender wars going on, women’s rights, all that ... made her voice seem louder than others, and turned all eyes to Canada.

12.9 Review Questions

1. Discuss Margaret Atwood as a feminist writer.
2. Margaret Atwood uses metaphors in her poems. Elucidate.
3. Critically analyse the poem “Progressive Insanities Of A Pioneer”.
4. Comment on the role of Role of victim, victimizer and victor in Margaret Atwood’s poems.
5. Write a note on civilization vs. wilderness in Margaret Atwood’s poems.
6. Give a critical estimate of Margaret Atwood as a poet.
7. Write a note on the style used by Margaret Atwood in her poems.
8. Attempt a critical appreciation of “My beautiful wooden leader”.
9. The poet indulges in a search for identity in “This Is A Photograph Of Me” .Elucidate.
10. Attempt an essay on the use of symbolism in Margaret Atwood’s poems.

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UNIT-13

MARGARET LAURENCE : *THE STONE ANGEL*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Life of Margaret Laurence
- 13.3 Works of Margaret Laurence
- 13.4 Analysis of the theme and its development
- 13.5 Laurence's art of characterization
- 13.6 Critical Responses to Margaret Laurence
- 13.7 Let Us Sum up
- 13.8 Review Questions
- 13.9 Bibliography

13.0 Objectives

This unit aims at helping the students to make an assessment of the following aspects of Margaret Laurence and her *The Stone Angel*

- Margaret Laurence as a novelist
- life and literary background of Margaret Laurence
- Creative Output by Margaret Laurence
- Margaret Laurence's place in literature
- Theme of *The Stone Angel*

13.1 Introduction

Recent two decades have witnessed a marvelous upsurge in Canadian Literature. Canada and India, both share a common history as being a part of British commonwealth. Due to common experiences of long suppression, Canada and India are linked together in a different way. Indians have natural inclination towards the country and its literature. Margaret Laurence is one of the major novelists who deals with problems of Canadian society. Her principal focal point is the place and status of women in contemporary male dominated Canadian society. Her motive is clearly reflected in almost all her fiction and non-fiction works. But beyond all this her characters have abundant zeal to survive in this hostile world and to prove their existence. It is her extra-ordinary characterization that makes Margaret Lawrence immortal in Canadian literature.

13.2 Life of Margaret Laurence

Margaret Lawrence was born on 18th July, 1926 in Neepawa, Manitoba. Her parents Robert and Verna Simpson Wemyss belong to a reputed family of lawyer, craftsmen and merchants originally hailing from Scotland and Ireland. Being a descendent of a respectable family, she inherits all the family traditions and traits. She writes in her memoir that her step-mother and her mother-in-law were very strong women and they “endured a lot and overcame a lot” and thus they provided her great courage and strength. She incorporate and introduces these strong characters in her writings. She had tough time in her childhood as both her parents died in her early age and she was raised by her maternal grandfather, John Sempson and by her aunt Margaret Sempson Wemyss. Lawrence’s Step mother Margaret Sempson, was a schoolteacher and librarian who had strong influence over Margaret Laurence. It was she, who sharpened her writing skills and encouraged her to read and write because at that time Canadian soil was not favourable enough to receive a female author. So it was very difficult for her to establish herself as writer in the canon of male dominance. Lawrence, at the initial stage of writing, published her works under the pseudonym of Steven Lancaster. It was during this period that she met Jack Lawrence, a civil engineer and they got married in 1948. Margaret Lawrence first proceeded to England then to Africa with her husband, where he worked as supervisor for the development of African people. Here Margaret Lawrence received her first hand experience of African culture, which she expresses in her novels. In Africa she takes her main project to study the oral tradition of Somali literature and to prepare a book of translation which was later published under the title *A Tree for Poverty* (1964). Laurence lived in the Gold Cost and Ghana and there she gave birth to two children, Joselyn (1952) and David (1955).

Laurence has different outlook toward African culture because she is much impressed by the this culture and she compiles her experiences which denote her deep understanding toward African people. These experiences in Africa helped her develop in full-fledged writer of her native culture.

Laurence feels comfortable to write about her own culture and to write about Canada, she feels the need to live in her own country, so in 1957 she moves to Vancouver. The pang of separation always remains in her mind. Her marriage broke up in 1962 and she decides to settle in England. In England, she stayed in Elm College in Buckinghamshire and here, she completely devotes herself to create a world of Manawaka, as she started this assignment with the frame work of *The Stone Angel*, which was published in 1964. Till 1964 she becomes a well known writer of Canada and her novels acclaim wide popularity to her which ultimately bestowed the Governor General Award to her. These novels enrich her reputation day by day and she becomes a Writer- in- Residence at Trent University, and University of Toronto and Western Ontario. Though till now she has written a lot but she feels the need to summarize her experiences as writer, so she comes to live in the cottage, which was situated on the bank of Otonabee River in Ontario, where she wrote most of the *The Diviner*, which also won the Governor General Award for her Pictorial writing. She was a writer as well as great thinker and she always speaks boldly on various social issues like nuclear disarmament, woman’s issues and on various problems of human beings. She has served Trent University as a Vice Chancellor in 1981. Margaret Laurence’s career as writer is not free from the struggle. She was severely criticized for some of her works and some critics have also gone to the extent of labeling them as immoral. Despite being a woman, she proved her presence in contemporary scenario, as a serious writer and as a social worker standing for the cause of nuclear disarmament. She herself accepted in her memoir “I hate the men who

make wars. I hate the old statesmen, the old politicians, the old military men, who talk of “mega deaths” and acceptable losses”. So it is not possible to demerit her importance as a liberated person, an intellectual, and a philanthropist. She is also recipient of Molson Prize for excellent service in Canadian literature, which boosts and acknowledges her active participation in various social issues. She is greatly concerned with the environment, literacy and other social issues. Margaret Laurence passed away on January 5, 1987. With the death of Laurence these works do not come to an end, as the organization like the *Margaret Laurence Fund* and the *Margaret Laurence Award for Excellence* continue to support such worthy cause started in her memory. Her literary accomplishments and her social services made her immortal in the Canadian history.

13.3 Works of Margaret Laurence

The Prophet's Camel Bell (1963).

A Tree for Poverty (1964)

This Side Jordan, 1963

The Stone Angel, (1964)

The Jest of God (1966)

A Bird in the House (1970),

The Fire Dwellers (1969),

Six Darn Cows (1979),

The Olden Days Coat (1979)

The Christmas Birthday Story (1980)

13.4 Analysis of the theme and its development

The Stone Angel, published in 1964, is a description of the narrative saga of ninety years old woman's struggle for her existence in male dominated world. All her actions, struggle and the defense undertaken by her, is an attempt to fulfill a sense of self existence. By using stream of consciousness technique Margaret Laurence explores the inner psyche of an old woman who is at final stage of her life. Laurence portrays Hagar's Journey for space and strength as a woman, who is struggling against the burden of patriarchy. It is not a struggle to fight at physical level rather than it is a struggle against the set up of Canadian society which considers woman as subordinate to man. Shirin Kudchekar expresses her views about it, “The woman's experience here is an experience she shares with her people. The relationship with the man is extremely important; she reveals the intensity of her physical need for him, the slight estrangement when he withdraws into himself and become unresponsive to her pleading, the memory of him dancing the weeding dance taking over as she witnesses his mangled corpse. The distance that has grown between them is bridged, not by her embracing patriarchy defined roles of womanly subservience, but her becoming one with the country and the cause as he has done.”

Hagar's life can be divided into three parts during which she confronts with the dominating and crushing impact of patriarchy. Laurence analyses the devastating impact of patriarchal power structure on her personality. Hagar Shipley is a daughter of Mr. Jason Currie, a well settled business man of

Manawaka. She has lost her mother in childhood; and being motherless child her only source of emotional support is, her care taker Aunt Doll who has been with her since her childhood. She is deprived of soft emotions and in the Manawaka cemetery, sees her mother's idol, imported by her father from Italy. To her, the memory of her mother is not token of love but it symbolizes suppressed femininity as she says : "I wonder if she stands there yet, in memory of her who relinquished her feeble ghost as I gained my stubborn one, my mother's angel that my father bought in pride to mark her bones and proclaim his dynasty,"

Since Hagar could not enjoy the company of her mother in her childhood so she inherits the fundamental personality traits of her self made father. Her father never considers it necessary to establish a healthy communication with Hagar, which is prime requisite for healthy development of a child. In school she was a bright student who learns each and everything easily and quickly but her father never utters a word in her praise to motivate her. Mr. Hagar was a typical patriarch, he is an idol of pride, who does not care for anyone. Hagar is victim of this dominating tendency of her father. At the time of her growth she needs emotional support to shape her personality but there is nobody to provide her emotional support and the motivation she needed most.

Mr. Jason Currie, who is head of the family and the only earning member has been portrayed as a heartless person, who does not care about the soft emotions of his children, nor does he establish any healthy relations with them. He neither loves the children nor appreciates them. His pride always forbids him to handle his daughter's emotions psychologically. Due to this fact, she always remains in search of a person who can provide peace to her painful soul. The domineering attitude of her father grips her feminine sensibility and she inherits the pride of her father as she "always identifies herself more with her brave father than with her meek mother." (Radha 20) This is an impact of her father that she does not love the image of her mother who has passed her life as progenitor for the dynasty of Jason Currie rather than that she wants to adopt indomitable will of her father, though he asserts her brutally whenever she commits any mistake. Due to the family pride and inheritance, she never cries because she thinks that being descendant of Currie's family it is great weakness to shed tears. Her father is more interested to bring her up in his own way, not because he has favourable attitude to girls but actually he does not find his son worthy for this purpose so he always increases masculine qualities in her.

The suppression of her emotions in her childhood slowly diminishes her feminine qualities. The absence of these qualities makes her a lady without mercy who does not have any feminine qualities. Her father's constant reminding to her of her gender and looking down on her due to this reason develops inferiority complex in her while he has a soft corner for his sons Mat and Dan. This fills her heart with agony and develops a kind of internal hatred in her heart, for her brothers. It is due to this reason that she does not possess motherly feelings for her siblings nor she helps her dying brother Dan who needs the tenderness of her mother at his death bed. Hagar has no guilt for this hard-heartedness because she has never experienced such emotional bondage, so she does not possess the intensity of attachment for sibling. Her unexpected behaviour shows her inability to connect with her blood relations because her heart is governed by masculine virtues that over shadows her femininity and the burden of pride and lack of intensity stops her to act as a mother. She expresses the inherent pain in her heart, to her brother in following words:

" all I could think of was that meek woman I'd never seen, the woman Dan was said to

resemble so much and from whom he'd inherited a frailty I could not help but detest, however much a part of me wanted to sympathize. To play at being her - It was beyond me"(25-26) .

After completion of her schooling at Manawaka her father sends her down town to learn the mannerism and dressing sense and he retains his son at home. He does not send her there to develop her qualities rather than he wants to make her presentable, so he does not send her to any good college to improve her skills rather than he prefers to send her to fashion school which is very common in Western country. It presents the contemporary Milieu in traditional Canadian society in which woman's right of education has no concern. Hagar is going through the same experience with her father; who does not have favourable notion regarding her education. Fashion designing course is not proper education to develop her skills but it is a medium to convert her into a homely girl. Mr. Jason Currie sends her to this school to enrich her femininity, so she could manage the house more skillfully than an uneducated girl. "Hagar's education is on the lines of a stereotyped woman in a phallogentric set up prescribed by Jason".(Sheshadri 135) Somehow this education helps her to develop her inner strength and it makes her struggle against patriarchy more strong. She recollects her strength and awareness from her education to revolt against imbalanced attitude of patriarchal setup. She returns after two years from school with her self identity and her soul struggles in the chains of patriarchy to revolt against dual frame work of society. Hagar realizes her qualities after education, though she never accepts it before, because of her father who never allows her to be a teacher. Her father's refusal to allow her to join teaching over shadows her desire as it is her first encounter with autocratic approach. As the result of this incident she withdraws her teaching notion and for many years she works for her father consoling her self that this is the best way to reimburse her father's money that he has spent over her education.

The constant repression of her natural desires creates psychological pressure on her mind. She decides to get married to Brampton Shipley who is uncouth, uncultured widower with little prospects of income and two married daughters. Hagar has no love for Brampton Shipley but she takes this drastic decision to marry him just to escape from the clutches of her father. She feels suffocated in the clutches of her father, his excessive control over her emotions makes her incapable to distinguish between right and wrong. She had to face the brunt of patriarchy in a different manner and the reality is totally different from her dreams. The harsh reality that she has to face is that Bram does not consider her as a life partner. He thinks that she is a woman who is bound to fulfill the needs of her husband, so he urges her for sex in the day light. Hagar realizes that all the men have same attitude toward women. She has to work like a slave because there is no one to help her in cleaning, washing, cooking etc. nor she gets any help from her husband who feels that it is quite unmanly to help his wife in domestic chores. She finds it irritating and the difference between her imagination and reality was vast and she expresses her disillusion "pleasure and pain were one to me, meaningless".(55) Hagar becomes emotionally tough against every kind of love and sympathy which she never gets in life. After getting married to Bram, her life becomes hell because Bram Shipley never tries to improve his mannerism and Hagar finds a sharp contrast between her and Bram Shipley. He is an uneducated, uncultured man who never learns the manner of civilized society. He is good looking, could easily be taken for a gentleman, only if he maintains his silence but due to lack of proper education and affinity with cultural society, he doesn't know when to speak and when to keep mum. After some time her father dies due to sudden heart attack and donates his property to town welfare. Hagar gets only some old furniture as the token of her father's memory.

Margaret Laurence describes that the financial position of contemporary Canadian women is not very sound. Hagar does not enjoy any financial power like man. She is Bram's life partner, so she should have all rights over her husband's property but she does not have any right to spend money according to her will.

Hagar gives birth to another son John who is her loving son because she feels that John has inherited the traits of her father Mr. Currie and he is fit to be called his grandson. She wants to provide him a better upbringing but does not have sufficient resources for this. Hagar, being decedent of an ancient family keeps managing her life with the things which she gets from her relatives as a part of sympathy. She is an educated girl who knows how to behave and maintain herself she starts selling eggs to earn some money though it is against her family tradition. The emotional upheaval leads her at the stage of dissatisfaction and so deprivation from love is the greatest obstacle she has to face in the process of her development of personality. The life of a human being depends on healthy relationship and in this regard family comes first and society later. Somehow man and woman are dependent on the emotional support that they get from each other. Hagar is victim of family deprivation that makes her a complex character and it affects her efficiency. She is toughened by passing time and her sense of insecurity and traditional bondage over her personality makes her a character, who is unable to express her deep attachment to filial ties. She is not inarticulate but mutual distance between their relations always restricts her to establish a rapport with her family members; her relation has lost warmth and she thinks that they are pretending to be close because the male members of her family always deceive her faith.

The struggle against patriarchy shall be fought at two levels on the one hand it is a fight against the patriarchal social set up and on the other hand it is fight to liberate the suppressed soul from the bondage of patriarchy where the other person (male) is always ready to remind her of her inferiority. Hagar's deep attachment with her second son John and her desire for his decent upbringing motivates her to leave her husband who has nothing to do with his family. Hagar leaves him for John's sake, Hagar's decision to leave her husband shows her inner strength and her desire to establish her individual identity. When she informs her husband about her departure, he does not utter a single word to stop her that indicates Brampton Shipley's cold and passionless attitude to Hagar. They have lost the charm of marriage, as he never tries to understand her feelings. He never asks her why she is leaving him or persuades her "to stay or showed a sign of caring about the matter one way or another".(153) Their marriage comes up to the point where nothing is left to say to each other and there is not even a single reason to stay at home, her illusion about liberty, self independence proved a nightmare and she finds it difficult to adjust with insincere husband who does not care for her nor gives her due respect . Though they are not separated officially but an invisible marital discord has taken place between them but still Hagar does not want to break the marriages. One day she gets the news of Bram Shipley's illness , and decides to go back to Manawaka to see her sick husband. He passes away after some time and the death of Bram closes another chapter of her life. Her wish for John's decent upbringing expresses her internal desire to establish her own identity through John. She wants that John should be identified as a son of Hagar because she has a sole desire that he should be recognized as heir of Currie family. Unfortunately, John is not a sincere boy, he does not respect and care about his mother's emotion. When Hagar is living in Mr. Otley's mansion she sends him to good school by her hard earned money, but in school he gets indulged in antisocial activities. He never tries to understand his mother's feelings, who sacrifices her life for his sake.

John is a typical product of patriarchy who does not have any respect for the love, emotions and feelings of a woman as he has inherited the trait from his father -to use woman for his own pleasure and to leave her on her fate. This degrading and outrageous attitude of John disturbs her. Her inner dilemma about her identity, leads her to the state of turmoil and its excess develops in her a sense of escapism from the physical world; she is losing interest in her duties as well as in herself and her family. Her tenderness and excessive love for John makes him careless and irresponsible and he starts taking her for granted. She is not in favour of John's marriage to his girl friend Arlene and creates scenes quite often. One day he meets with an accident and succumbs to his injuries.

Hagar's life long suffering and the death of her dearest son ceased her tears and transformed her into a stone. The night he died she was "transformed to stone and never wept at all". Her transformation into 'stone' shows her inner grief and fear, being a woman she has motherly emotions but she does not want to cry in crowd because she is afraid that the society might take her for a weak person. Being a marginalized woman she develops a kind of inarticulate nature that she thinks is necessary to guard her personal identity and her privacy as a woman. Margaret Laurence points out the importance of communication for balanced attitude towards life "in human relation when temperamental incompatibility becomes insurmountable it gives rise to inability to communicate with each other. Margaret Laurence believes that emotional lives of vast majority of mankind are made miserable because of a break down of verbal communication". Hagar Shipley is the true representative of Margaret Laurence's depiction of colonized woman who is struggling to connect with her roots, her past and impact of colonization on her future is resulted in a half build identity, who is still playing the role of stereotype woman with inner dissatisfaction "The bondage of subjection of woman, usually disguised in Western civilization, were pathetically, obvious to Laurence in 'Somali' primitive patriarchal culture of arranged marriage and sexual double standard" Through her works she, very boldly, narrates this loophole in social structure.

Hagar's psyche is responsible for her unstable mind and she has lost control over her sorrow. She is suffering from identity crisis which is the biggest problem of Canadian women and she experiences alienation in her own land. Pabby comments in this regard that "The identity crisis of the protagonists in Laurence's fiction is a microcosm of the problematic complex of Canadian identity at the national level". Hagar Shipley purchased a house in Vancouver to start a new of life with her only surviving son Marvin and his wife Doris. Her Old age is approaching but she remains unconquered till her end but in her old age all she needs is compassion from her family. Through her character Margaret Lawrence expresses the universal phenomenon that old people of any society deserve respect from young generation to pass their remaining life and their treatment should be fair and affectionate. Her emotional thrust remains unfulfilled till the end of her life that leads her towards alienation, and boredom as she is totally cut off from her family and does not receive that treatment which she requires in old age, just to cope with these things, out of boredom she acquires the habit of smoking during the last decade of her life. She needs privacy to console her painful heart but they are not ready to provide her any privacy. The suppression of natural desire makes her attitude bitter towards people.

Marvin suggests her to sell her house because her health is not good and there is no one to live in four bedroom. She vehemently protests against the idea of selling the house. For her the house is a symbol of her individual identity. Her life long struggle for identity has resulted in the form of a house. The house serves as metaphor for her identity and she has deep emotional affinity with it. She feels that nobody can claim over it "You will never sell this house, Marvin. It's my house. It's my house", .

The word 'my' displays the confidence of self made woman who is somehow happy with this identity. The strength, which she posses unveils Margaret Laurence's views regarding women.

In this novel, Margaret Laurence has depicted the condition of old people in contemporary Canadian society is not satisfactory, they live in isolation with nothing creative to do. Laurence's portrayal of Hagar propounds her desire to raise the problems of old people in advanced society. The lack of psychological communication always creates a gap between her family and she suffers due to her inarticulate nature. Marvin and Doris have failed to establish an emotional ties with their mother and they were always engaged in heated argument. The life long struggle makes Hagar a fighter. The excess of fighting spirit creates a gap between two generations. There is clash of two ideologies as Doris is a typical house wife and Hagar is a symbol of eternal struggler. Marvin suggests her to go to old age home because she needs professional care due to her weak health and Doris is not well to give her proper care. Hagar is not ready to leave her home and wants to maintain her individual existence but Marvin is not ready to tolerate her in her old days. Doris takes her to 'Silver Thread' an old care home. They pass some time in 'Silver Thread' Hagar tells another resident of this old age home Mrs. Steiner that she will not stay here and when she asks her that where would she go. The question strikes her like a hammer and she feels the need to reconsider her options: "It is then that the notion first strikes me. I must find some place to go". Margaret Lawrence has used Hagar's fear for a place, as a symbol which indicates women's place in society. She has her own house yet she is afraid like a homeless bird. She is bold lady and can cope up the situation but the factor of male dominance and injustice panics her very much.

Hagar leaves her house without informing anybody about it and moves to Shadow Points, a place she had been earlier for picnic. She lodges successfully in old fish cannery near Shadow Point and passes whole night on the dusty carpet. She mourns over careless attitude of her family. Fish cannery is deserted as well as vacant place, still it provides consolation to her deprived soul because the artificial life of advanced society frightens her and she is running for lonely places to hide her anxiety; in the morning she feels the pang of separation from her dearest home. It illuminates how Canadian woman remains trapped within the conventional gender stereotype. The moments she breaks are few, which compels her to admit the need of someone who can support her for emotional as well as spiritual upliftment. Her loneliness has been compared with Albatross, which has been used as symbol to propagate Laurence's philosophy of life that a human being can not survive in loneliness because he or she needs some one to communicate, to understand and to share pain and pleasures of life. Hagar's predicament is that she feels lonely in crowd as if she cannot connect with her filial ties.

Here Hagar meets a stranger who introduces himself as Murry F. Lee and they tell each other that they have come here to find peace of mind. Mr. Lee acts as sincere comrade to his old companion and proves a true friend to her over burdened heart though she never enjoys the favour of man but Mr. Lee's unconditional support soothes her like a drop of water on her burning soul and fills her emotional gap. Her recycling process of dead emotions begins with Mr. Lee's efforts. Hagar is passing through the process of psychological purification and she tells him, how she has lost her dearest son John and how his death changes the whole scenario of her life. For the first time she takes the responsibility of her son's death and repents on her over possessive attitude for John. The softness in Mr. Lee's words evokes her sensibility and she develops a deep attachment for him. She breaks down completely in his presence and opens the hard layer of heart. She enjoys his company as his soothing voice is intoxicating her emotionally and she finds the sound of his voice comforting. Her interaction with Murry F. Lee has

great significance for her self exiled world, it is he, who helps her to come out from her pride and after going through the process of purgation, he helps her to attain the peak of self development. Hagar's weeping is a process to develop human weakness in her as her tears washes away the misery of life. They are sudden outburst of life long suppression. She feels relaxed after shedding tears, in truth this is the first time, she has experienced emotional intimacy with anybody.

Her conversation with Lees expresses her desire to come out from the clutches of her pride and shows her ability to accept her weakness. This is the first time when stone angel cries and sheds tears. Her confession of guilt in the presence of Mr. Lee generates her faith in God He leaves her with the promises to come back. His soft and loving behaviour leaves great impacts on her mind so she sleeps well that night. Mr Lees comes back but not alone, he comes with Marvin and Doris to take her home. Hagar becomes angry with him and feels that she is again deceived by a patriarch who could not bear the independence of woman but her converted behaviour inclined her to forgive him. She feels the sense of loss because she finds only one real follow in life that can understand her misery. When he goes, she feels, "even though this gain is mingled mysteriously with the sense of loss which I felt happier this morning".(276) Her sense of loss has great significance in her life because Marvin and Doris takes her to hospital due to some health problems and she gets admitted to public ward which provides her a new experience of communion with others. She becomes friendly with her fellow patients and It proves as one more step in her socialization because when she feels the misery of common women, it provides her a sense of community life. Her experience teaches her a concept of sisterhood with other women.

Hagar's condition is getting worse day by day so the nurse becomes more and more soft. Here Laurence describes her process of rediscovery of the female qualities of Hagar. Her enriched experiences help her to attain the highest peak of self liberty. Hagar has developed a sense of satisfaction to overcome her pride.

She confesses her life long weakness" as Pride was my wilderness and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never any thing else, and never free; for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched". Her sincere confession shows how a trapped and marginalized woman can change into sincere person if she gets in touch with humanistic treatment. Doris now becomes ready to meet her with Mr. Troy (the priest). Hagar talks to him confidently and politely, she regains her faith and does not consider God as her opponent. Following day she has another visitor, her grand son Steven who revives her old memory. The sense of boredom is still in her heart but this time she wants to share her feeling with somebody. When Steven comes to meet her, she visualizes the image of her dead son John and she feels the need of intense communication to melt the freeze agony. She shares all the turmoil , tention and guilt with him, which she did not share with dying son John. He provides great solace to his dying grand mother, who loves him more than Marvin and finally she rushes to her final destination as a completely new person having compassion, forgiveness and love in her heart.

13.5 Laurence's Art of Characterization

Margaret Laurence has a natural inclination towards feminism and many researchers have analyzed her mastery in depicting female characters. She presents very strong characters but they are deprived of practical approach Her characters are common human being ; they do not posses any

heroic qualities, but they become extraordinary due to their struggle against the adverse circumstances of life. They begin as ordinary women but in the process of growing up, become conscious of the gender discrimination quite early in their life, refuse to surrender and determined to create a niche for themselves; her characters fight their lone battle. In case of Hager, the heroine in *The Stone Angel* sense of escapism is dominant in her personality because she does not want to face the difficulties of life. She faces lack of coordination between her mind and body that makes her over sensitive and skeptic of people and relations and her over sensitivity gets reflected in the form of anger.

Life is a continuous struggle for her, and with her surviving instinct she continues her struggle till the end. *The Stone Angel* depicts Journey of an old woman who does not loose her spirit and pride despite all odds in her life. Hagar Shipley is the motivating figure of *The Stone Angel*, though she is an ordinary woman but due to her indomitable will and courage to face life, she stands as unparalleled in the entire Canadian fiction. Margaret Laurence never confirms to be a feminist ; despite her refusal to be a feminist many researchers have analysed her sympathy for female characters ; her characters are common human being ; they do not passes any heroic qualities. . She changes completely at the end, that generates a possibility that it was possible to change her attitude even in her childhood had anyone treated her with balanced approach. After long analyses, it can be stated that she was not born proud but this is the structure of society, the kind of upbringing, lack of parental love and support that made her the stubborn person she was. Thus, Margaret Laurence has remarkable skill of creating round characters who grow, develop and become mature in the process of development.

13.6 Critical Responses to *The Stone Angel*

The Stone Angel was published after *This Side Jordan* which received mix response from the critics and it won *Sigma Phi Award* for the best novel by a Canadian writer. After the completion of *This Side Jordan*, Margaret Laurence decides to write about her own soil and she framed a novel named *The Stone Angel*, which has a complete Canadian setting. Malshri Lal finds that *The Stone Angel* is the first novel in which she depicts women's struggles for "equality and self determination"(Lal 224) while trying to analyze the theme, Sheshadri comments that "The stone Angel's derelict state perhaps is a material signifier of the "space" of woman in phallogentric world. Life treats Hagar roughly and the stone angel to revive its portion of humiliation"(Sheshadri 148). D.K.Pabby finds that *The Stone Angel* is a masterpiece as the identity crisis of the protagonists in Laurence's fiction is a microcosm of the problematic complex of Canadian identity at the national level. The tremendous success of this novel was repeated by *The Fire Dwellers* (1969), which deals with unidentified struggle of woman for self identity.

13.7 Let Us Sum Up

Margaret Laurence is one of the most prominent Canadian novelists who primarily focus on the problems of existence encountered by women in contemporary Canadian society. She presents a very realistic picture of search for inner space and identity crisis of women in a patriarchal society governed by dual value system. *The Stone Angel* deals with the struggle of its heroine Hager, a ninety year old woman who has never experienced real love, affection and compassion in her life. Deprivation of all these human emotions has made her hard hearted and detached. Her life has been a lone battle to establish her identity in the society and to live on her own terms. It is only in last few days of her life, that she realizes that her pride was the greatest obstacle in her redemption and peace. This realization

makes her reconcile with life and she gets eternal peace, finally.

Prime feature of Laurence's work, that clearly separates her from her other fellow novelists, is her special fascination for portrayal of characters with loopholes, fears and trepidations which are characteristics of human nature. The situations and events, these characters encounter with, seem very natural and leave no scope for any disbelief. Laurence's art of characterization is extraordinary and she delineates special attention to bring out the mental struggle and psychological turmoil of her characters, particularly heroines. Through stream of consciousness technique, she unravels the complexes and hidden fears of her characters, which otherwise, would have remained unexpressed due to taciturn nature of her heroines. Undoubtedly, through the production of *The Stone Angel* Laurence has secured her place among great fiction writers.

13.8 Review Questions

1. Describe the theme of *The Stone Angel*.
2. Express your views on Margaret Laurence's art of characterization with special focus on the character of Hager Shipley.
3. Comment on father-daughter relationship in *The Stone Angel*.
4. Do you think Marvin was justified in treating his mother the way he did in the novel ?
5. Compare and contrast women's place in Canadian society(as depicted in the novel) with that of in Indian society.

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UNIT-14

MARGARET LAURENCE : *THE FIRE DWELLERS*

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Theme of Margaret Laurence's *The Fire Dwellers*
- 14.3 Critical Analysis
 - 14.3.1 Development and Analysis of the theme
 - 14.3.2 Husband Wife Relationship
 - 14.3.3 Social Element
 - 14.3.4 Psychological Element
- 14.4 Let Us Sum up
- 14.5 Review Questions
- 14.6 Bibliography

14.0 Objectives

This unit aims at helping the students to make an assessment of the following aspects of Margaret Laurence and her *The Fire dwellers*

- Margaret Laurence as novelist
- life and literary background of Margaret Laurence
- Creative Output by Margaret Laurence
- Margaret Laurence's place in literature
- Theme of *The Fire Dwellers*

14.1 Introduction

Margaret Laurence is known for sincere and candid portrayal of Canadian society and its social and family structure. Her prime concern is the place and status of women in contemporary Canadian society and the problems they have to encounter with, in the effort to establish their individual identity. Her motive is clearly reflected in almost all her fiction and non-fiction works. But beyond all this her characters have abundant zeal to survive in this hostile world and to prove their existence. It is her extra-ordinary characterization that makes Margaret Lawrence immortal in Canadian literature.

14.2 The Theme of Margaret Laurence's *The Fire Dwellers*: Umbilical bondage

The Fire Dwellers is the documentation of the confrontation of a middle aged married woman with various problem of her life. Laurence also makes a parallel study of the impact of war and advanced technology over the fragile psyche of younger generation- women torn between the war to establish their own identity, the struggle for space and the desire to live a happy marital life. In *The Fire Dwellers* Laurence encapsulates philosophy of Stacey MacAindra - a thirty-nine years old house wife with four children who is almost on the verge of breakdown due to an incommunicative and reticent husband who neither shares any of her problems nor understands her need for individuality. The epigraph and title of the novel delineates the gist of novel that woman needs a spark to sustain her identity but being a woman she can not escape from a common destiny and she is bound to bear the torture somehow. Stacey is in same condition who is fluttering like a bird in the cage; some times she tries to break those chains for good but due to lack of courage she remains passive sufferer.

Margaret Laurence portrays Stacey as a typical Canadian woman who is aware of her desire for individual existence, and it exasperates her to come out from the chaos of the family. By the use of stream of consciousness technique, Laurence has fragmented her past at various places quite often she narrates her past through interior monologues. Stacey is the daughter of Nial Comerson and the sister of 'Rachel' the heroine of *Jest of God*. She does not want to live like a typical woman rather than she wants to adopt modern as well as liberal out look for better living. Her life is a struggle against the dominance of social set up. She develops lack of confidence in her personality in her persona because her circumstances have deprived her from university education and it restricts her to get a good job in her early age. Lack of proper education becomes her life long craving. The universal dilemma of Stacey is that she is not able to come out from her self exiled world ; her capricious nature is destroying her peace of mind. The only misery in her life is the lack of confidence and the problem is aggravating day by day. She leaves Manawaka for Vancouver in search for better living, and gets temporary peace of mind only when she gets married to Macindra at the age of twenty three, to live under the shadow of man. Her fate does not support her **notion of space** as she finds an incommunicative husband who increases her frustration. Mac has authority to execute her life according to his will but being a house wife Stacy is only associated with sexiest biased culture of society who only has deep faith in her husband's authority. She is living in chaos so she gets annoyed over each and every action of her family and her relation with Mac has lost warmth. She believes that being a woman she should look beautiful and glamorous to be acceptable in sexiest culture. As she repents :

Everything would be all right if only I was better educated. I mean, if I were or if I were beautiful. Okay, that's asking too much. Let's say if I took off ten or so pounds. Listen, Stacey, at thirty nine, after four kids, you can't expect to look like a nymph. Maybe not, but for hips like mine there's no excuse. I wish I lived in some country where broad-beamed women were fashionable. Every thing will be all right when the kids are older. I'll be more free. Free for what. (8)

Though she is struggling against her own desires, yet her struggle for space never takes solid shape, it rather remains as a burden on her mind. She feels unable to articulate her misery as well as her deep- rooted desire to get recognition in society. Her every attempt of self realization evokes her sense of guilt and she finds that she has only single identity of a mother of four children — as someone who

always waits for arrival of her children at home. She is behaving like a caged bird who has lost all her will power to execute her life; the sense of fear and insecurity is the predominant feature in her personality which always targets her power of judgment and she is afraid to face the society. Her interpersonal communication with God shows her social phobia and her inability to cope up with the mandatory advancement of society, the pressure to achieve perfection is alienating her from her real self. Her conversation with God delineates her trauma :

At the day of judgment, God will say Stacey MacAindra, what have you done with your life? And I'll say, well let's see sir, I think. I loved my kids. And he'll say. Are you certain of that? And I'll say, God, I'm not certain about anything anymore. So he'll say To hell with you, then. We're all positive thinker up here. Then again, may be he wouldn't. May be He'd say, Don't worry, Stacey. I'm not all that certain, either. Sometime I wonder if I even exist. And I'd say, I know what I mean, Lord. I have some trouble with myself(14).

The norms and standards of society does not provide any solace to her burning heart. It rather increases her dissatisfaction. Her apprehension to judge herself on the parameters of superior culture are the prime reason for disintegration of her personality and her fear of being marginalized due to lack of beauty is haunting her, so she always compares herself with the younger generation. Her notion to compete with young girls is brooding her jealousy for her daughter Katie. Her concern to look beautiful wrecks her strength and makes her skeptical about her existence. The impact of media and advanced culture makes her a split personality who is not sure of herself. The only things which can help her is the warmth of relation but she does not have such emotional bondage. Her mind and body do not work in harmony. She is torn between the urges of body and absent-mindedness as her mind is occupied in negative thoughts but the roots of dissatisfaction are very deep. The cold behaviour of Mac affects the psyche of Stacey who needs someone to share her misery. Being a part of community, a human being can not survive in self exiled world. Stacey is completely deprived of social interaction as well as her husband's emotional communion, the lack of these fundamental traits distracts her way. Whenever Stacey enquires something about him, he reacts violently. Stacey's acts of justification shows their temperamental polarities. Mac's bad behaviour freezes her voice and demoralizes her. She is suffering like anything over her pathetic situation. Being a patriarch and insensitive person her husband does not consider about the soft emotions of his wife rather than he believes in suppressing them with his silence. The constant suppression of natural voice restricts her to express herself, Morley Patricia expresses her views in this regard "one of Stacey's chief fear is of being unable to communicate, or remaining trapped in her skull. The difficulty of peaceful communication, the alternative to violence, becomes a dominant theme." Egoism of Mac forces her to find out some one to denote her frustration so she starts communicating with God.

This is the dilemma of the characters of Margaret Laurence that they all have dwindling faith in God. Due to advancement of science and technology, religion is losing its control over mankind and the faith is replaced by atheism but still God is the only medium for Stacey to sort out her problems and to move out from her trauma. She has apprehensions that in the party she will face criticism from her fellow inmates. This is not only a social phobia which mutes her, Mac is also responsible for her inarticulate nature. Mac's silence and his dominance leaves deep impact on her persona and her way of thinking that she starts dissembling her sentiments. She is unwilling to disclose her sentiments even to her husband. Mac and Stacey's conversation always turns into an argument and that creates a complexity in her behaviour. She always indulges in personal communication with God. Stacey's inability to hold

herself shows the gap between human and social set up and the severe verbal breakdown is destroying her family life and she is torn between mind and body who never permits her to act with confidence in any situation. Stacey, being a sincere mother is unable to convince her eldest daughter Katie to stop her for an adult movie, when Katie is angry over her decision then she starts questioning her own decision, it is clear indication of lack of self esteem and it also presents the glimpse of a broken woman. Sumita Roy writes about it “They can be considered as one more pathetic attempt on her part to satisfy the craving for self-expression. But the attempt is thwarted because she is haunted throughout by a monumental sense of guilt for violating the norm laid down by society”. Fear of death, failure and lack of beauty is her greatest enemy due to these fears she restricts herself to establish healthy relation with anyone.

Male chauvinism is diminishing her strength and arousing guilt conscious in her. She has never lived her life as Stacey rather than that she always lives under the shadow of some ‘surname’ and four walls become her ultimate destination. As she says “My boundaries are four walls. Whose fault? Okay, mine. By the time the day ends, I’m too beat to seek rich culture experiences, what ever that may mean. That babe in varying view of urban life”. Fast city life is haunting her like anything and she is feeling unfit to match her rhythm with them but she does not complain anybody. She does not find God fit for this disclosure because she thinks that God has sick sense of humour and he is patriarch and not a humble parent, so it will be great mistake to reveal her personal problems to God for mockery. When Jen her youngest daughter starts humming, it surprises her a lot but she feels that it can be offensive to God who is taking advantage of her misery Morley. Patricia writes in this regard, “God is connective with the destructive aspects of time passing. Contemplating her present shape, Stacey decides that God has a sick sense of humour. Her conversation shows the influence on her psyche; the patriarchal figure of god is really terrifying her for the security of children. Mac’s hard labour and mocking behaviour is also a great cause for her anxiety. In these circumstances ‘sorry’ becomes her pet word to hide her for her confusion and chaos. Mac is working on his report for presentation and Stacey has so many things to share with him but his rudeness does not allow her to open her mouth, so she strangles her voice in her heart. The process of being dissembler damages her sensibility and gives birth to self-exile and nostalgia.

Another female character Tess is suffering from serious verbal breakdown but her husband is a radio Jockey who is fond of talking on verbal breakdown, communication and semantics while his wife is on the verge of communication breakdown. Laurence here shows difference between reality and pretension, the professionalism and dominance of man is ruling over fragile psyche of woman. Nowadays communication becomes the issue of discussion on Radio and T.V. but the lack of fundamental grounding forces lead Tess to attempt suicide, luckily she gets another opportunity to survive but her attempt increases fear of Stacey. Usha Pathania very aptly says, “Laurence’s protagonists strive to achieve harmony and tranquility by alienating themselves, by escaping from the demands and expectation inherent in humanities”. Her self indulgence is a form of negativity and she is initiating to cover up emotional gap through her unstable desires. She never steps forward to come out from chaos but starts visualizing her self image through other’s point of view, and in this process she is not conscious about her dignity. It shows that she has colonized mentality. She is always indulged in the exercise of self-pity and has no sense of belongingness with her family and consequently she is all alone to fight with her inner as well as outer turmoil. Stacey’s chief fear and pain is that she has no individual identity and she is always either identified as wife of Mac or the mother of four children, there is to call her by her

personal name Stacey.

She finds that the party has nothing for female as they are here just to accompany their husbands so they are wandering aimlessly and looking for someone to talk to. It shows that the individual identity is still a day dream for Canadian woman. Mac leaves her alone in party and talks to other women and his behaviour annoys her a lot. She is all alone in Party and to avoid this loneliness she over drinks, under the influence of alcohol she does not keep hold over her behaviour and behaves awkwardly in party which becomes humiliating for both of them. Later in the morning she regrets over her behaviour in the party, but being a patriarch he takes it as a crime than a mistake and rebukes her badly. Now, all alone in the house, she starts talking to herself and mourns over the mistake she committed at the party. The fear and guilt conscious is a universal feelings but her repentance is meaningful as it puts pressure over her mind. Her mind is filled with odd thought, disturbing her peace of mind. When she broods in her guilt; at a time broken image of world and advancement of science and technology is taking away the serenity of her life. Margaret Laurence has narrated beautifully that how the fear of death rules over human life. The dominating nature which Mac inherits from his father poses problems for his family. Stacey burst out pathetically over Mac's suppressive approach but she does not take any action. Stacey's mind becomes a battle field for her inner battle, Mac's silence is digging a ditch between their relation. Her requests "Mac, talk to me" has no meaning for him. He is trying to maintain distance from her even in bed. Mac's strange behaviour has become great trauma for her, ultimately Mac abruptly makes love to her which satisfied her body but not to the soul. The growing tiredness becomes a disease for their.

Her love for individual identity is still dormant in her subconscious and under this strong impulse, she plays her old record of music and dances heartily. This is her first time when she enjoys her individual liberty at her home. This dance is not only an expression of freedom but it soothes her as an act that pacifies her soul and works as a medicine to revive her dying courage. She feels intoxicated and motivated to live a daring life once again. The dance connects her with her roots and provides her momentary pleasure and delight. She forgets her present for a moment but her social condition does not allow this and once again she is caged in her duties. Time and again she repents for the moments of personal happiness and feels the pressure of strict bondage spoiling her liberty. She is still craving for communication and both husband and wife are detached them from each other. One day Stacey is all alone at home so she decides to drop a letter to her husband. On the way she meets Buckle Fenick who asks her to accompany him, which she accepts. Stacey sees the impulses of sex in his eyes but she controls her feelings. When her husband Mac returns home at night, he labels allegation over her character that she has gone to bed with Buckle but as this was totally false she burst out completely but these false charges hurt her soul badly. Mac, a patriarch, who is sincere but reticent who does not consider it necessary to confirm with his life partner. He could find out the truth by mutual understanding; but these false charges break her completely. Stacey is not hurt by Buckle's act but her real pain is that Mac, her husband does not believe her. She tries a lot to defend herself but her defense has no appeal for the god of patriarchy who thinks that woman is his property by right and deeds "What d'you mean, what have I got to say? Who're you? God? You don't own me. You believed Buckle, didn't you? It is a lie. I never did any such thing" Buckle and Mac's irresponsible behaviour delineates the attitude of men for women how they are always ready to put her reputation at stake and just like a proper sadist, they derive pleasure in woman's suffering. Buckle is a close friend of Mac who does not only betray Stacey but he betrays the whole female community. Her relation with Mac starts tearing her into pieces

and her house becomes a burning hell for her. Hind-Smith states in this regard “One of the universal truth in *The Fire Dwellers* is the starvation of human relationship when there is no communication.”(44) Stacey cries a lot to calm herself down, she wants Mac to discontinue his relations with Thor’s secretary. It infuriates his anger and he says “yet, it is different, if you really want to know. It’s not what you’re obviously thinking”. It shows the privilege of man to execute his life. He thinks that he has a right to do what he wants so he acts like a bold man in crucial situation. Buckle’s allegation becomes a life long torment for her. Mac, who has interest in Thor’s secretary wants that his wife should be faithful to him “I won’t have anybody else touching you, see”. Mac does not come out from narrow vision and expresses his dissatisfaction not in words but in physical violence in bed “That night in bed he makes hate with her, his hands clenched around her collarbone and her throat” until she is able to release herself. Mac’s violence is the symbol of man’s dominance over woman as he does not try to understand mental trauma of his wife to whom it is great shock, for her life long loyalty.

Stacey’s condition is a living testimony of the condition of a married woman that how an imposed guilt becomes a permanent spot on her reputation. Her life is full of passivity and has no significant development, so she always has to struggle to come out from the sense of guilt which actually has not been committed by her. Mac is making situation complicated for both and killing her positive outlook toward life. Mac, who is doing very well in his job, has a very poor family relation who behaves like a conventional man who can not think of anything beyond the necessity of chastity for woman. Chastity is an issue that is invested by the patriarchal set up on woman. Virginia Wolf expresses her views in this regard “Chastity may be a fetish invented by certain societies for unknown reasons - but were nonethe less inevitable.” Time and again Mac attempts to torture her mentally on the issue of her intimacy with Buckle and it raises her anger and she finds herself unable to bear the torment any more. She steps out on unknown journey, that night she really doesn’t know, where she has to go. Margaret Laurence projects her as a weak female character who is very close to a stereotype woman. Though she tries to attain self-fulfillment but her struggle does not bring results. Stacey’s case is also the same, who believes in escapism rather than facing the situation boldly.. “This attempt at resistance i.e. to deviate from the phallocratic norms, no doubt puts the individual into conflict with the existing convention of the dominant class (patriarchy) simultaneously, this conflict enables the individual to come to terms with self or persona”. She is working like a domestic servant who has no right to execute her life to get the peace of mind, as it is clear by her statement “I m on duty from seven thirty in the morning until ten thirty at night”. Stacey’s condition is no better than a typical house wife’s who always cares for others and keeps herself occupied in serving the family.. She is wife and mother but does not know the actual nature of her real problem. Laurence presents her as a woman who is not wise enough to use full potentiality, so she always waits for instruction from her husband.

She meets Luke Venture who touches her heart and then she unveils her wounds to Luke and confesses everything to him. Her encounter with Luke brings unexpected change in her behaviour and she starts realizing her individual existence. The silence is chief factor in house and she comprehends that Mac and she have different temperamental polarities as they are like two parallel lines which can move in parallel but can never meet. Usha Pathania, writes in this regard, “The temperamental polarities force them to adopt different ways of life and even cultivate extra-marital relationship.” The character of Luke Venture who works as confessor to Stacey for her emotional support and who provides solace to her troubling soul clearly manifests Margaret Laurence’s views about women. It also gives a clue regarding her approach towards the problems women have to encounter.

Her sexual encounter with Luke Venture somehow completes her physically and emotionally and it also ignites a great desire in her heart to move out from the humdrum of life to simple knowledge of survival. Her frequent visits to Luke Venture provokes his male sensibility and he starts considering her as a weak woman and then he takes her for granted. She realizes that all men have the same views about woman because they take her as a slave rather than as a lover. Mac tells her that Buckle has passed away in a road accident. The death of Buckle gives a sense of relief to Stacey whose life has taken the wrong turn due to the allegation of Buckle and his death changes her whole life. Mac accepts her justification in the absence of Buckle and it provides a sense of relief to Stacey. Stacey is the victim of Mac's autocratic approach. Mac does not want to impose the decorum on her but patriarchal culture remains dominant in his decision, which forces him to make distance from her. Mac is very careful about feelings of others but he never thinks about his own wife. He is behaving like a conventional man. Stacey has always suffered for no fault of her own, and the burden over Mac's shoulder always reprimands her to act as a free human being. She never gets a chance to act as a responsible person and she always remains a mother who only knows how to take care of her children. Mac gets job as a manager in 'Rich life' and her relationship with Jen becomes better, these incidents provide her temporary relief, but her mind remains vacant till the end.

14.3 Critical Analysis

14.3.1 Development and Analysis of Theme

Taken into account the character and role played by Stacey, Laurence projects that a woman can achieve self fulfillment only if she has some male by her side to support her. She can not think for a better solution than keeping woman under the supremacy of man. Stacey's weak personality and her intense sexual instincts and Mac's treatment to her as if she is a dependent being with no personality of her own is the result of Laurence's weak presentation of woman's character and sensibility. Stacey's unsuccessful attempt to break off from her husband shows woman's lack of confidence and her inability to adhere to her decisions.. She wants to start a new life for her own sake but being a woman she cannot escape from the social structure and she is bound to follow the strict norms of patriarchal set up. Laurence portrays that due to the inheritance of these cultural customs, a conflict between self and social consciousness always torments woman and in this confused state of mind she is not able to distinguish between right and wrong. Morley Patricia writes in this regard "On the pages we encounter Stacey's existential alienation that she projects on to the city. What she sees is a group of broken image reflecting her guilt, anxiety and dread (again recalling T.S. Eliot and Dante's Inferno)". It shows that even Laurence is not free from the conventional set up of patriarchal social structure, which provokes Laurence to delimit Stacey's struggle for space who is on an unknown journey to calm down her inner fire. Mac's irresponsible behaviour and his extra marital relationship are prominent causes for Stacey's downfall, he does not feel guilty about it. It shows that Margaret Laurence could not come out from the influence of patriarchal culture, which is always governing her mind to defend the acts of male. Laurence's characters do not represent liberal view of life and *The Fire Dweller* presents a living testimony for it.

14.3.2 Husband Wife Relationship

The Fire Dweller depicts dwindling family relationship and the devastating impact of communication gap between husband and wife. Stacey is confined inside the precincts of four walls of her house and she craves for communication but both husband and wife are detached from each

other. The extreme communication gap is that though Stacey and her husband live in the same house but one day she decides to drop a letter to her husband. Whenever Stacey enquires something about him, he reacts violently. Stacey's acts of justification shows their temperamental polarities. Mac's bad behaviour freezes her voice and demoralizes her. She is suffering like anything over her pathetic situation. Being a patriarch and insensitive person her husband does not consider about the soft emotions of his wife rather than he believes in suppressing them with his silence.

14.3.3 Social Element

Being a feminist Margaret Laurence expresses frustration of a married woman who is trapped in four walls of her house and struggling to find out her social voice. Stacey's social phobia grips her and she is afraid to move to public places as she is losing her confidence due to lack of perfect figure. Mac, her husband treats her as her personal object and he can not think of anything beyond the necessity of chastity for woman. Chastity is an issue that is invested by the patriarchal set up on woman. As Gerald M. Phillips and Julia T. Woads points out the need of social interaction for being a social being "Our participation in social systems shapes the public part of our identity. They both shape our public social activity and provides us with people from whom we can choose our private relationships".

14.3.4 Psychological Element

The constant suppression of natural voice restricts her to express herself, Morley Patricia expresses her views in this regard "one of Stacey's chief fear is of being unable to communicate, or remaining trapped in her skull. The difficulty of peaceful communication, the alternative to violence, becomes a dominant theme." Egoism of Mac forces her to find out some one to denote her frustration so she starts developing traces of strange behaviour i.e. communication with God. When both of them visit the insurance agent, Mac asks her to fill up her personal detail in the form but she is unable to disclose it to others because she thinks that he would not be able to understand her psychology. Stacey gets frightened in asserting her individual right of equality and liberty and she finds that her silence is her only liberty. The sense of fear and insecurity is the predominant feature in her personality which always targets her power of judgment and she is afraid to face the society. Her interpersonal communication with God shows her social phobia and her inability to cope up with the advanced society,

Her self indulgence is a form of negativity and she is initiating to cover up emotional gap through her unstable desires. She never steps forward to come out from chaos but starts visualizing her self image through other's point of view, but never cares about her dignity. It shows her colonized mentality. She always indulges in self-pity and has no sense of belongingness with her family ; they all have different tuning of life she is all alone to fight with her inner as well as outer turmoil.

14.4 Let Us Sum Up

Margaret Laurance is a liberal feminist who does not believe in revolutionary changes in woman's life. Stacey's life-long struggle doesn't bring complete upheaval in her life, but it is just a typical and temporary solution to a severe problem. *The Fire Dwellers* ends with a happy note, as Mac starts talking to his wife and they make love compassionately. Stacey is a representative of middle class house wife who is experiencing lack of connection with society as well as with her family and her

struggle is not only against the nature of patriarchy but she is undergoing constant struggle against her own narrow vision of life, which she has inherited due to her traditional upbringing. She grows up in male dominated society so it is natural that man's supremacy over woman restricts her growth; she cannot think of any future beyond the shelter of man.

To conclude, it can be said that Margaret Laurence does not envision woman's future without the support of man. She is better referred to as a humanist than a feminist as her women always adhere to a social system, its norms and conventions and she tries to find out the solution of marital problems within the social structure. But her chief protagonists, in almost all his novels, stand firmly what they believe in, all of them have an ardent desire to have their own space in the scheme of things, all of them have a sense of self-identity as they want to be recognized by their names, not by their relation to any man, be it father, husband or son. Above all it is their self-realization as a human being, that makes them a complete person and Margaret Laurence deserves accolades and appreciation for creating such characters.

14.5 Review Questions

1. Express your views about the theme of *The Fire Dwellers*.
2. Describe the narrative technique of Margret Laurence with special reference to the novel you have read(*The Fire Dwellers*)
3. Mention the social element in *The Fire Dwellers*.
4. Healthy communication plays a great role in mental and psychological well being of an individual. Mention the significance of same in case of Stacy MacAindra.
5. Write a note on Margret Laurence's art of mixing themes and sub- themes.
6. Discuss the mental and emotional conflict of Stacy MacAindra in detail.

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UNIT-15

ALICE MUNRO: WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE (I)

Structure:

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction : Life of Alice Munro
- 15.2 Career of Alice Munro
- 15.3 Works and Awards
- 15.4 Works of Munro
- 15.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.6 Review Questions
- 15.7 Bibliography

15.0 Objectives

This unit aims at helping the students to know:

- Alice Munro as a novelist
- life of Alice Munro
- works of Alice Munro
- Alice Munro’s place in literature

15.1 Introduction: Life of Alice Munro

Alice Ann Munro, born Alice Ann Laidlaw on 10 July 1931, is a Canadian novelist and short-story writer, is the winner of the 2009 Man Booker International Prize for her lifetime body of work, and three-time winner of Canada’s Governor General’s Award for fiction. Generally regarded to be one of the world’s foremost writers of fiction, her stories focus on the human condition and relationships through the lens of daily life. While the locus of Munro’s fiction is Southwestern Ontario, her reputation as a short-story writer is international. Her “accessible, moving stories” explore human complexities in a seemingly effortless style. Munro’s writing has established her as “one of our greatest contemporary writers of fiction,” or, as Cynthia Ozick puts it, “our Chekhov.” (Courtesy Wikipaedia)

Munro was born in the town of Wingham, a rural community not far from Lake Huron, Ontario into a family of silver fox and poultry farmers. Her father was Robert Eric Laidlaw and her mother, a school teacher, was Anne Clarke Laidlaw, and her mother fought a losing battle with Parkinson’s disease. She began writing as a teenager and published her first story, “The Dimensions of a Shadow,” while a student at the University of Western Ontario in 1950. During this period she worked as a waitress, tobacco picker and library clerk. In 1951, she left the university, in which she had been majoring in English since 1949, to marry James Munro and move to Vancouver, British Columbia. Her

daughters Sheila, Catherine, and Jenny were born in 1953, 1955, and 1957 respectively; Catherine died 15 hours after birth. In 1963, the Munros moved to Victoria where they opened Munro's Books. In 1966, their daughter Andrea was born.

She attended the University of Western Ontario for two years, then married and moved with her husband to British Columbia, where the latter worked first for the T. Eaton Company in Vancouver then later opened a successful bookstore in Victoria. She had begun writing and publishing short stories at the university, but while she raised a family of three daughters, her work progressed very slowly, stories appearing occasionally in *Canadian Forum*, *Chatelaine*, and the *Tamarack Review*. She drew very little public attention, and even when her first collection of stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), won the Governor General's Award, she remained an obscure figure in the Canadian literary scene. However, when her second book, *Lives of Girls and Women*, was published in 1971, the literary climate had changed, and although she had been publishing fiction for nearly twenty years, Alice Munro was hailed an important new talent. Another collection of stories, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*, appeared in 1974, and a series of connected stories titled *Who Do You Think You Are?* was published in 1978, winning the author another Governor General's Award. A second marriage took Alice Munro back to southwestern Ontario, to write and publish in such prestigious and fashionable magazines as the *New Yorker*, *Ms.*, and *Redbook*.

One reason for the slow recognition of Alice Munro's work is that she is essentially a short story writer. Although *Lives of Girls and Women* was published as a novel, it was first written and submitted to McGraw-Hill Ryerson as a series of stories which the author later revised in the form of a *Bildungsroman*, a loosely patterned autobiographical novel. *Who Do You Think You Are?* has a similar structure. Alice Munro does not find large narrative structures congenial to her talent; she is the master rather of the compressed tale, the short story interconnected but each a specific in telling the tale of a particular character in relation to the general topography of scene, setting, characters and history.

15.2 Career of Alice Munro

Munro began her writing career in rural Ontario. She was a slow but meticulous craftsman who took her time in creating chronicles of that familiar Canadian conflict between the smart and talented sensitive adolescent and a rigid, uncompromising self-limiting society. Her first published work was in 1950 to be followed ten years later in the publication of "The Red Dress, 1946", wherein she found her real voice. Her first collection of stories came out in 1968, entitled *Dance of the Happy Shades*. The book won her the Governor General's Award for fiction and signaled her as a new and worthy short story writer on the Canadian literary canvas. Munro received her second Governor General's Award in 1978 for her signature novel *Who Do You Think You Are* which is linked in story sequence to her other work *Lives of Girls and Women* published earlier in 1971, a series of short stories, like *Dance of the Happy Shades*, that share a common setting and narrator. Her second collection of short fiction, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974) was followed by *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982).

While dealing with the conflict between and within generations Munro displays no resentment, rage or rancour, or even hostility or indignation towards the protestant ethics. On the other hand "her dominant attitudes are astonishment and compassion – astonishment at the lengths to which a small

town goes to deny to its inhabitants joy and creativity, and compassion for those thus robbed and maimed” (Frank Davey, 201). Bennett and Brown speak of how Munro’s narrative structures are “frequently developed through the use of oppositions, which may take the form of contrasting characters, the balancing of the ‘female’ world against the ‘male’, or the playing off of the *then* against *now* (300).” This sense of unraveling oppositions, which is predominant in Munro’s works, gives her stories a shift (back and forth) across time that “reproduces the movement of the mind in its act of recovering and reassessing the past” (300). To Munro, fiction is a means of existence as well as the essence of life. It is a space wherein she roams and also rests. Speaking of how she reads a story, she says, “I can start reading anywhere; from beginning to end, from end to beginning, from any point in between in either direction. So obviously I don’t take up a story and follow it as if it were a road, taking me somewhere, with views and neat directions along the way. I go into it, and move back and forth and settle here and there, and stay in it for a while. It’s more like a house” (John Metcalf).

Munro’s fictional “houses” are built and furnished meticulously. Her stories are set in small-town Ontario, but beneath the ordinary world she creates are hidden dangers of life and disasters unconsciously longed for; many secrets are glimpsed but remain untold. *Lives of Girls and Women* is a remarkable example of the kind of apprentice novel the short story writer can construct wherein the plot of each chapter is self contained and no incident develops further in the ensuing chapters. The uniqueness of its narrative strength is in the perceptual qualities of its young narrator, Del Jordan, and from the chronological arrangement of incidents. Most of Munro’s short stories are narrated by what appears to be the same young girl who narrates the story. Her name may be Helen instead of Del. The sensitivities and mindscapes of both girls are similar. Both are precociously perceptive introspective girls who are intensely analytical towards their experiences. Both feel strangely divorced from their families and their society. They are out of place amidst what they feel to be an alien race and an eccentric society. The beauty of these two women is that they can stand back even from their own intense feelings in order to make frank and dispassionate judgments on their experiences. The fact that these narrators view themselves as outsiders in a bizarre world contributes to the extreme richness of physical detail that is characteristic of Munro’s writing. Helen and Del report their experiences with the precision of explorers. They find the texture of curtains, the shape and feel of an old woman’s knuckles, the smell of gasoline or an automobile fascinating and significant. To them the world defines itself in its shapes, colours, sounds and odours. Theirs is a sensitizing experience of sensory perceptions, otherwise called “felt experience”. People in Munro’s novels define themselves by the peculiar objects they like or collect or by their gestures or body language they habitually repeat/perform. Even though this small world is narrow, puritanical and mechanical its textures and motions make it appear beautiful to them in a way that few of their pragmatic friends and relatives can perceive. This sense of eccentric beauty dispassionately perceived, coupled with the 1940’s setting of rural Ontario, give both novels a curious tone of alienation and nostalgia.

To Munro, “the whole act of writing is more an attempt at recognition than of understanding, because I don’t understand many things. I feel a kind of satisfaction in just approaching something that is mysterious and important . . . I believe that we don’t solve these things – in fact our explanations take us further away” (Jill Gardiner’s interview with the author).

Carl F. Klinck, in his *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English* (1965) provides a brief but searching scrutiny into the author and her works. He says that emerging from the

cultural landscape of rural Ontario, the work of Alice Munro contemplates on the restrictions imposed by gender in modern society. While her individual short stories in *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) probe into the states of mind that both trigger and participate in the events of daily life, *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) confirmed her as one of the most gifted of modern Canadian prose writers. She is deceptively casual in her individual observations while building wholesome and substantial portraits of complicated human beings whose relation with their particular society is more than casual capturing the reader's emotions in its narrative flow. This kind of gender oppression and the female "rebel" countering the family expectations that reinforce traditional roles for boys and girls. It specifies the process by which a girl comes not to rebel against them but to question the freedom that she thought she always possessed. Such manipulations of logical perceptives are typical of Munro's work.

Her accessible, moving stories are set in her native Canada, in small, provincial towns like the one in which she grew up, and explore human relationships through ordinary everyday events. Although not necessarily directly autobiographical, they reflect the author's own life experiences, are concerned with women's lives and are 'probably unrivalled in their fullness' (Washington Post 1998)

15.3 Works and Awards

- *Dance of the Happy Shades* – 1968 (winner of the 1968 Governor General's Award for Fiction)
- *Lives of Girls and Women* – 1971 (Canadian Books Sellers' Award)
- *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* – 1974
- *Who Do You Think You Are?* – 1978 (winner of the 1978 Governor General's Award for Fiction)
- *The Moons of Jupiter* – 1982 (nominated for a Governor General's Award)
- *The Progress of Love* – 1986 (winner of the 1986 Governor General's Award for Fiction)
- Marian Engel Award (1986)
- *Friend of My Youth* – 1990 (winner of the Trillium Book Award)
- *Open Secrets* – 1994 (nominated for a Governor General's Award - W.H. Smith Literary Award (1995, UK)
- *Selected Stories* – 1996
- PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in Short Fiction (1997)
- The 'Man Booker Prize' award (1980) for *The Beggar Maid* (The Canadian *Who Do You Think You Are?*)
- *The Love of a Good Woman* – 1998 (winner of the 1998 Giller Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award (1998, U.S.))
- Rea Award for the Short Story (2001) given to a living American or Canadian author.
- *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* – 2001

- *No Love Lost* – 2003
- *Vintage Munro* – 2004
- *Runaway* – 2004 (winner of the 2004 Giller Prize)
- *The View from Castle Rock* – 2006
- *Too Much Happiness* – 2009

Honours

- Governor General’s Award for English-language Fiction (Canada) - 1968, 1978, 1986
- Short listed for the annual (UK) Booker Prize for Fiction (now
- Regional Award for Canada and the Caribbean.
- Trillium Book Award (1990)
- WH Smith Literary Award (1995)
- O. Henry Award for Continuing Achievement in Short Fiction in the U.S. (2004) For *Passion* first published in *The New Yorker*, March 22, 2004 and *What Do You Want To Know For* Published in *The American Scholar* (2008)
- Man Booker International Prize (2009, UK)
- Royal Society of Canada’s Lorne Pierce Medal (1993)
- Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1992)
- Medal of Honor for Literature from the U.S. National Arts Club (2005) Alice Munro

15.4 Works of Alice Munro

Alice Munro’s first collection of stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), was highly acclaimed and won that year’s Governor General’s Award, Canada’s highest literary prize. This success was followed by *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), a collection of interlinked stories that was published as a novel. Alice and James Munro were divorced in 1972. She returned to Ontario to become Writer-in-Residence at the University of Western Ontario. In 1976 she married Gerald Fremlin, a geographer. The couple moved to a farm outside Clinton, Ontario. They have since moved from the farm to a house in the town of Clinton.

In 1978, Munro’s collection of interlinked stories, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, was published (titled *The Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose* in the United States). This book earned Munro the Governor General’s Literary Award for a second time. From 1979 to 1982, she toured Australia, China and Scandinavia. In 1980 Munro held the position of Writer-in-Residence at both the University of British Columbia and the University of Queensland. Through the 1980s and 1990s, Munro published a short-story collection about once every four years to increasing acclaim, winning both national and international awards.

In 2002, her daughter Sheila Munro published a childhood memoir, *Lives of Mothers and Daughters: Growing up with Alice Munro*.

Alice Munro's stories frequently appear in publications such as *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Grand Street*, *Mademoiselle*, and *The Paris Review*. In interviews to promote her 2006 collection *The View from Castle Rock*, Munro suggested that she would, perhaps, not publish any further collections. She has since recanted and published further work. Her latest collection, *Too Much Happiness*, was published in August 2009.

Her story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" has been adapted for the screen and directed by Sarah Polley as the film *Away from Her*, starring Julie Christie and Gordon Pinsent. It successfully debuted at the 2006 Toronto International Film Festival. Polley's adaptation was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay, but lost to *No Country for Old Men*.

In the 1970s all areas of Canadian writing were stimulated by a renaissance of interest in literature and culture, but probably the greatest amount of attention in this decade was focused on Canada's women writers, a conjunction of feminist literary interest and the intriguing fact that a disproportionately large number of Canada's best writers have from the outset been women. Such accomplished writers as Dorothy Livesay, Margaret Laurence, and Gabrielle Roy enjoyed a high profile. To their ranks were added Margaret Atwood, who in both verse and fiction documents the power struggle between the sexes; Marian Engel, whose *Bea* probes the physical nature of female sexuality; Joan Barfoot, whose studies of alienated women are almost clinical; and Jane Rule who describes relationships between women with great sensitivity. But of the many women writers who emerged in the 1970s Alice Munro has perhaps enjoyed most consistently a high degree of both popular and critical success. Her reputation as one of Canada's best writers was not easily achieved. She was born Alice Laidlaw in 1931 and brought up near Wingham, Ontario, a rural community not far from Lake Huron. Her childhood was spent in an impoverished farm, where her father raised silver foxes and her mother fought a losing battle with Parkinson's disease. She attended the University of Western Ontario for two years, then married and moved with her husband to British Columbia, where the latter worked first for the T. Eaton Company in Vancouver then later opened a successful bookstore in Victoria. She had begun writing and publishing short stories at the university, but while she raised a family of three daughters, her work progressed very slowly, stories appearing occasionally in *Canadian Forum*, *Chatelaine*, and the *Tamarack Review*. She drew very little public attention, and even when her first collection of stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968), won the Governor General's Award, she remained an obscure figure in the Canadian literary scene. However, when her second book, *Lives of Girls and Women*, was published in 1971, the literary climate had changed, and although she had been publishing fiction for nearly twenty years, Alice Munro was hailed an important new talent. Another collection of stories, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*, appeared in 1974, and a series of connected stories titled *Who Do You Think You Are?* was published in 1978, winning the author another Governor General's Award. A second marriage took Alice Munro back to southwestern Ontario, to write and publish in such prestigious and fashionable magazines as the *New Yorker*, *Ms.*, and *Redbook*.

Lives of Girls and Women (1971)

Lives of Girls and Women (1973) was intended as a novel, and published as one, but is in fact a collection of interlinked stories. In this book, the narrator Del Jordan explains what she hopes to achieve in writing a work of fiction about small-town life in Ontario. It won a Canadian Booksellers Association Award. *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978) chronicles the life of a young woman, Rose,

growing up in rural Ontario, the theme of identity being central to the book, and was shortlisted for the 1980 Booker Prize for Fiction.

Lives of Girls and Women confirmed Munro as one of the most gifted of modern Canadian writers. The tile characters of this work include Del Jordan, the young narrator, whose sardonic and sensitive recollections of her childhood and adolescence in te small town of Jubilee comprise the story: her mother is a self-reliant and forthright woman; her aunts, whose home became a place of its own customs and language; her neighbours , teachers and friends are people with whom Del is distant in the beginning but then becomes intimate and then distanced again as she grows into her own world. The novel exposes the town’s social hierarchies, and dispassionately observes the religious conventions that underlie the structure of hierarchies, the sexual needs and embarrassments of an age are recorded. Time passes and Del Jordan understands through her experiences the difficulty of communicating the realities she has lived. Seen from outside, distanced from her self, they become artificial and a language that others cannot be expected to know. As Klinck puts it, “language and life become for Munro, as for many of her contemporaries, subtle antagonists in a game of understanding” (271).

The work is a poignant portrayal of a young girl’s youth in a Canadian town and her awakening to womanhood. church or the library or home — home at the end of the Flats Road where Del Jordan’s father raised silver foxes. The story has an ongoing continuity as different people appear, sometimes reappear: earlier on Uncle Benny and his unfortunate correspondence-bride; or Uncle Craig who died playing cards so there was the unforgettable imprimatur of his funeral (she left hers too — biting Mary Agnes Oliphant when an attempt was made to coerce her into viewing the body); or her mother, from early poor, rural beginnings cleaning chamber pots — certainly Del with her intelligence would go further; or their boarder Fern Dogherty and her prurient lapsed lover; or her friend Naomi who decides to get on with Real Life or sex. Throughout biological destiny versus a possible emancipation from it (her mother’s hopes for her — she will get that University scholarship) makes itself felt in all these lives of girls and women and Del is seen, with some humor, making her normal transition from fascinatedly curious about sex to “”morosely submissive”” and finally to passionately cooperative. . . . Miss Munro has been compared, in her favor, to Margaret Laurence and there is much in this very representational portrait of small town and domestic life to justify it. A very likable book — a very real book — virtues not to be underestimated or overlooked.

LessPeople’s lives, in Jubilee as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable — deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum.”” It’s just these familiar and unremarkable particulars which give a very ordinary but special quality to Munro’s story of growing up and beyond Jubilee, a small town in Ontario, Canada. She makes the reading and living so real that one might have lived there or in a place just like that — going to school or ...

More church or the library or home — home at the end of the Flats Road where Del Jordan’s father raised silver foxes. The story has an ongoing continuity as different people appear, sometimes reappear: earlier on Uncle Benny and his unfortunate correspondence-bride; or Uncle Craig who died playing cards so there was the unforgettable imprimatur of his funeral (she left hers too — biting Mary Agnes Oliphant when an attempt was made to coerce her into viewing the body); or her mother, from early poor, rural beginnings cleaning chamber pots — certainly Del with her intelligence would go further; or their boarder Fern Dogherty and her prurient lapsed lover; or her friend Naomi who decides to get on with Real Life or sex. Throughout biological destiny versus a possible emancipation from it

(her mother's hopes for her — she will get that University scholarship) makes itself felt in all these lives of girls and women and Del is seen, with some humor, making her normal transition from the fascinated and curious about sex to “morosely submissive” and finally to passionately cooperative. Munro can be compared, in her favor, to Margaret Laurence and there is much in this very representational portrait of small town and domestic life to justify it.

Alice Munro writes stories that may be called “well-made.” They have catchy starts like in *Who do you think* beginning thus: “Royal Beating; that was Flo’s promise. You are going to get a Royal Beating”. Her’s is a volume of stories delivered with thrilling economy, the poetry which makes the form so valuable. Alice Munro’s subject matter is ordinariness—disappointment, the passage of time—but she doesn’t bring to her stories extraordinary language but a mind in love with the everyday realities of life and able to exalt it so that we feel the magic in what is usual and meaning in what is unusual. Most of her stories concern the past, hidden from others but told to us. For example, the ending of “How I Met My Husband,” a story in which the innocent farm girl, waiting for a barnstorming pilot to write to her, and never hearing from him again, married the mailman who comes every day without the letter she wants: a variation of Melville’s “Agatha” story. The last sentence is about the husband’s stories: “He always tells the children the story of how I went after him by sitting by the mailbox every day, and naturally I laugh and let him, because I like for people to think what pleases them and makes them happy.” But that is not why. It’s why a confection would keep her silence. This character keeps quiet because the experience is hers, not his or the children’s. That the author can provoke anger by betraying her character is evidence that she can make characters. The reason given (and there are too many reasons given in this book, too few admissions that a character may be reined in close to the page, yet dance beyond the author’s logic) is an effort on the part of the narrative voice to be well-liked; the tone is sycophantic.

The View from Castle Rock (2006)

Ten collections of stories and one novel have made Alice Munro one of the most praised fiction writers of our time. In *The View from Castle Rock* her full range of gifts is on display: indelible characters, deep insights about human behavior and relationships, vibrant prose, and seductive, suspenseful storytelling. Munro, in a foreword, tells how, a decade ago, she began looking into her family ...

More history, going all the way back to 18th-century Scotland. This material eventually became the stories presented here in part 1, “No Advantages.” Munro also worked on “a special set of stories,” none of which she included in previous collections, because they were “rather more personal than the other stories I had written.” They now appear here in part 2, “Home.” With both parts, Munro says, she has had a free hand with invention. Munro has used personal material in her fiction before, but at 75, she has given us something much closer to autobiography. Much of the book concerns people who have died, and places and ways of life that no longer exist or have been completely transformed, and though Munro is temperamentally unsentimental the mood is often elegiac. One difficulty that can arise with this kind of hybrid work is that the reader is likely to be distracted by the itch to know whether an event really occurred, or how much has been made up or embellished. In the title story, the reader is explicitly told that almost everything has been invented, and this enthralling multilayered narrative about an early 19th-century Scottish family’s voyage to the New World is the high point of the collection. On the other hand, “What Do You Want to Know For?” at the heart of

which is an account of a cancer scare Munro experienced, reads like pure memoir and seems not only thin by comparison but insufficiently imagined as a short story. Perhaps none of the stories here is quite up to the mastery of earlier Munro stories such as “The Beggar Maid” or “The Albanian Virgin.” But getting this close to the core of the girl who would become the master is a privilege and a pleasure not to be missed. And reliably as ever when the subject is human experience, Munro’s stories—whatever the proportions of fiction and fact—always bring us the truth.

The Love of a Good Woman

Alice Munro’s collection *The Love of a Good Woman* containing eight stories, a master of the form extends and magnifies her great themes—the vagaries of love, the passion that leads down unexpected paths, the chaos hovering just under the surface of things, and the strange, often comical desires of the human heart.

Time stretches out in some of the stories: a man and a woman look back forty years to the summer they met—the summer, as it turns out, that the true nature of their lives was revealed. In others time is telescoped: a young girl finds in the course of an evening that the mother she adores, and whose fluttery sexuality she hopes to emulate, will not sustain her—she must count on herself. Some choices are made—in a will, in a decision to leave home—with irrevocable and surprising consequences. At other times disaster is courted or barely skirted: when a mother has a startling dream about her baby; when a woman, driving her grandchildren to visit the lakeside haunts of her youth, starts a game that could have dangerous consequences. Large, moving, profound—these beautifully told stories reveal life’s rich layers and subtle implications, and in the process, expand the limits of fiction.

15.5 Let Us Sum Up

Born in 1931 to a farming family, Alice Munro won a scholarship to the University of Western Ontario, where she studied from 1949-1951, but left before graduating, and moved to Vancouver. From 1963 she ran a bookshop in Victoria, British Columbia for several years, before returning to Ontario in 1972. She now lives in Comox, British Columbia and Clinton, Ontario.

Her first short story was published in *Folio*, a student literary magazine, in 1950. During the 1950s and ’60s her stories were also accepted for broadcast by CBC and for publication in various journals. Since then, many more short stories have been published regularly in prestigious periodicals such as *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and *Atlantic Monthly*. Fifteen of her earliest stories, many of which have autobiographical elements, were collected in her book, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1974). It was first published in Canada and won the 1968 Governor General’s Literary Award for Fiction, a success she later repeated with further collections, *Who Do You think You Are?* (1978) and *The Progress of Love* (1986).

During 1977-1981, Alice Munro travelled widely, visiting Australia and China. In 1983, *The Moons of Jupiter* was published, containing stories also set in Australia and New Brunswick. This was followed by *Friend of My Youth* (1990), which has an interest in adultery and relationships, and *Open Secrets: Stories* (1994), winner of the 1995 WH Smith Literary Award, which contains longer stories, as does *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998).

Alice Munro has also written television scripts. A *Selected Stories* appeared in 1996. Recent collections are *Runaway* (2005), which won the 2005 Commonwealth Writers Prize (Africa Region,

Best Book), and *The View from Castle Rock* (2006). A further selection of her short stories, *Carried Away*, was also published in 2006. Her latest book is *Away From Her* (2007). She was awarded the Man Booker International Prize in 2009.

15.6 Review Questions

1. Discuss Alice Munro as a novelist.
 2. Discuss How Alice Munro characterizes the Canadian character experience.
 3. Write a note on the contribution of Alice Munro to Canadian Literature.
 4. Discuss the critical responses of critics towards Alice Munro.
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UNIT- 16

ALICE MUNRO'S *WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE* (II)

Structure:

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Canadian Features in Fiction
- 16.3 Introduction to the Novel
- 16.4 Analysis of the Story
- 16.5 Aids for analysis
- 16.6 Munro's Writing Style
- 16.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.8 Review Questions
- 16.9 Bibliography

16.0 Objectives

- This unit aims at helping the students to know what Canadian Literature is and its unique place in the realm of what once was referred to as Commonwealth Literature but now referred to as New Literatures.
- The unit also aims at helping students to make an assessment of the following aspects of Alice Munro's novel, *Who do you think you are?*:
 - Alice Munro as a Novelist
 - life of Alice Munro
 - works of Alice Munro
 - Alice Munro's place in literature
 - theme of *Who do you think you are?*

16.1 Introduction

What is Canadian writing or Canadian Literature? There was a time when popular and renowned critics on Commonwealth literature bluntly echoed the views of British opinion that there was nothing called Canadian literature and if so, there was nothing exclusively Canadian about it. This statement may have been partially true considering the fact that early Canadian literary output was one that either toed the line of their British literary counterparts (like echoes of Romanticism or making Nature the center of Canadian literary context) or were unable to voice their unique predicament of a much volatile history or much expansive and ambivalent geography. It took the turn of the century and,

especially the post world war aftermath to truly recognize the essence that was Canada in all its multiplicities and pluralities of existence in a fast changing socio-political and multicultural context. Margaret Atwood's *Survival* came to be the pioneer work in identifying and establishing Canadian traits peculiar and unique in the evolution and the writing of a New Literature that was Canadian.

16.1 Canadian Features in Fiction

Ca-na-da, which in Amerindian language means "No-where-land, has had a shorter history, and possesses a larger geography than that of India. But in that short period of birth and existence, a little more than a century the literature has come to acquire a respectable place for itself, in world literatures, like the other writings once read under the Commonwealth umbrella. Being an English speaking nation, unlike the other commonwealth nations, other than Australia and New Zealand, Canadian writing had to struggle to exist, overcome and survive its British masters and hence the general temper of writing, once toeing the line and glorifying authority, became one of de-crowning order and authority. The fundamental tension in Canadian life has been bilingual and bicultural split between French and English Canada; between Francophone favourites and Anglophone authoritarians. This concept of two nations within one marks the fundamental difference between the American and Canadian contexts of life and literature. Northrop Frye, the premier Canadian critic, brings out the British and American artistic pretensions as against the Canadian more realistic presentation of nature and nurture. The Canadian settler is seen in line with an epic hero "carving out a living space for himself, digging in" (44), surviving against odds, and not making a hue and cry about it like his fellow commonwealth protagonists. From Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) to the writers of the mid and late 20th century, like Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, David Williams, Robert Kroetch, and many others the central metaphor is one of coming to terms with a past that is both threatening and comforting, ludicrous and dignified, hypocritical yet human, romantic hopes and disillusioning reality. Margaret Atwood calls it "paranoid schizophrenia" in her "Afterword" to *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*.

"Double vision" or "paradoxical dualities" or "Canadian pattern of opposites" is another Canadian literary trait that is seen in the works of Munro too. It is the "dichotomy of view point" making the tone of the text ambiguous, unresolved and unreliable. Elizabeth Waterston, in her *Short History of Canadian Literature; A Survey* (1973), says: "Twentieth century reality in Canada, as every where in the West, included economic troubles and financial scandals, Natural disasters harvest years,

Canadian fiction of the 1960s and 70s brought forth writers like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Robert Kroetsch, Rudy Wiebe, Matt Cohen and Alice Munro, who have produced some intellectually sharp and emotionally stirring novels and short stories of stylistic adeptness in the mid 20th century. They have produced witty, wry, laconic, and passionately earnest, ethically committed stories that have used sociological functions of art and myth; but each has a unique voice of his/her own. They shared a concern for language and form that changed the literary climate in Canada. The conventions of realism were replaced by a new art of post-realism; the biases of traditional social structures were exposed and challenged; the need for cultural independence was emphasized and this was the time that Canadian books found a larger reading public. In short, it was a period of transformation of a new way of writing and telling stories akin to avant garde fictions. Writers developed a literature which neither ignored nor apologized for its regional roots but made artistic use of them.

The serious writer, according to H.W. New, is committed both to the realities of the world he

creates within his book and to taking his readers into that world; on the contrary the popular fiction writer relies on confirming his readers' minds the beliefs and attitudes they already possessed. The Canadian fiction of the 1960s and 70s demonstrated a narrative that artistically indulged in the continuity with the past. Concerned with the "feelings of the mind" it either affirmed or rejected values per se, and characters questioned their own and their society's failings. W. H. New writes of how "the landscape, as in early Canadian fictions, continued to play a judicial role of being a friend and a foe to the plot and characters. The style of the period was typically Canadian in its conscious parody, laconic understatements, wry reflections and bitter wit. The chief enemy of the fictions of the 60s was bureaucratic authority. This rebelling against authority, political or social, marks the typical Canadian sentiment of decrowning authority in order to establish individual, regional or, in the larger sense, a national Canadian identity. The typical fictions of the period were the rise of bildungsroman which traced the growth of the protagonist from childhood to adult stage wherein intellectual discoveries are made along with sexual experiences.

There have been more women writers than men in the Canadian scene and probably this has resulted in presenting and engaging in family ties as the central interest of these novels. To these women writers family ties are both bondage as well as an opportunity for creation. But unfortunately this interest in house and family evinced by women writers seems to have been a "reserve" allowed to them by male sanction, where the male inevitably is the "head". It confines them to the "attic"- metaphoric of the male margins against women. Such writing and conflict is presented by Margaret Laurence in her *Bird in the House*.

In the 1975 all areas of Canadian writing were stimulated by a renaissance of interest in literature and culture, but probably the greatest amount of attention in this decade was focused on Canada's women writers, a conjunction of feminist literary interest and the intriguing fact that a disproportionately large number of Canada's best writers have from the outset been women. Such accomplished writers as Dorothy Livesay, Margaret Laurence, and Gabrielle Roy enjoyed a high profile. To their ranks were added Margaret Atwood, who in both verse and fiction documents the power struggle between the sexes; Marian Engel, whose *Bea* probes the physical nature of female sexuality; Joan Barfoot, who studies of alienated women are almost clinical; and Jane Rule who describes relationships between women with great sensitivity. But of the many women writers who emerged in the 1970 Alice Munro has perhaps enjoyed most consistently a high degree of both popular and critical success. Her reputation as one Canada's best writers was not easily achieved.

16.3 Introduction to the Novel

Who Do You Think You Are? is also an autobiographical novel. The focus here falls, not on a girl growing up, although that is part of the narrative, but on a woman's married life, her love affairs, divorce, and career. Munro's vision of human experience here is much darker, more sordid, tempered perhaps by the disaffections of middle age. Much of this book concerns the heroine as a married woman living in British Columbia. Although Munro is an astute observer of human behavior, her descriptions of life in British Columbia do not have the same depth or resonance as her fiction set in Ontario. But there is also a weakness in the early Ontario section of the book where the heroine's mother dies and she is raised from infancy by a stepmother. Munro's fiction depends so heavily on a quasi-documentary transcription of reality that the heroine's childhood with a stepmother seems contrived, lacking in the emotional exactness that characterizes the best of Munro's work. Alice Munro's

father did eventually remarry after his wife's death, when the author was herself a grown woman, and it is those later scenes in *Who Do You Think You Are?* when the heroine returns to Ontario which are artistically the most authentic and effective.

16.4 Analysis of the Story

Who Do You Think You Are? is the story of Rose and her stepmother Flo (Florence) who come complement each other. David Williams, the writer-critic of the prairies, considers the autobiographical elements of *Who do you think you are?* as “confessional mode that in no way destroys either the realism of ‘fiction’ behind the telling of Rose’s stories or the factuality of history of place and time of action of the fiction. In fact, in his very analytical and highly scholarly book *Confessional Fictions: A Portrait of the Artist in the Canadian Novel* he analysis the works of Alice Munro, exclusively, in a chapter titled “Beyond Photography: Parody as Metafiction in the Novels of Alice Munro”.

Confessional fictions, according to Williams, is the study of the *Kunsterroman* – the artist-novel – evolved in Canada from early followers of the mode like Wilde, Proust and Joyce “transforming the British and American models to offer a uniquely Canadian portrait of the artist. In this he refers to the novels of Munro as “eccentric camera for capturing the modern experience.

16.5 Aids for analysis

1. How do the many women Munro writes about respond to sex, marriage, and motherhood? Can these women, different as they are, be said to hold certain characteristics in common? Which marriages—or sexual relationships—in her stories might be considered successful? What tends to happen to marriages over the course of decades? How do women’s ideas about love and family change as they age?
2. Munro has said that she has always been interested in “the way women circumvented the rules,” and most of the women in these stories function within limits posed by convention, class, and gender—even unconventional women like Eve and Sophie. To what degree do these limits determine their various lives? What emotional price does the flouting of these limits exact? When Munro’s women take risks, do they tend to be rewarded for them?
3. What techniques does Munro use to get across the feeling of time passing, of life changing and moving on, of people aging? Why do you think Munro so often chooses to show her characters’ entire life spans, rather than using the “slice of life” technique so many authors favor? How would you compare Munro’s use of time with that of other short story writers you are familiar with?
4. What sort of characters does she choose to best represent various communities? What do we learn about the lives, expectations, and values of these towns? How do Munro’s techniques resemble (or differ from) those of other authors who have given us such group portraits; for example, Eudora Welty with *The Golden Apples*, James Joyce with *Dubliners*, or Sherwood Anderson with *Winesburg, Ohio*?

16.6 Munro's Writing Style

Many of Munro's work is set in Huron County, Ontario. Her strong regional focus is one of the features of her fiction. Another is the all-knowing omniscient narrator who serves to make sense of the world with all its limitations. As in the works of the Americans William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, her characters often confront deep-rooted customs and traditions. However, the reaction of Munro's characters is less intense than their Southern counterparts'. Thus, particularly with respect to her male characters, she may be said to capture the essence of everyman. Her female characters, though, are more complex.

Munro's work is often compared with the great short story writers. For example, the American writer Cynthia Ozick called Munro "our Chekhov." In the stories of Munro, as in Chekhov's, plot is secondary and "little happens." As with Chekhov, Garan Holcombe notes: "All is based on the epiphanic moment, the sudden enlightenment, the concise, subtle, revelatory detail." Munro's work deals with "love and work, and the failings of both. She shares Chekhov's obsession with time and our much-lamented inability to delay or prevent its relentless movement forward." A frequent theme of her work—particularly evident in her early stories—has been the dilemmas of a girl coming of age and coming to terms with her family and the small town she grew up in. In recent work such as *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001) and *Runaway* (2004), she has shifted her focus to the travails of middle age, of women alone and of the elderly. It is a mark of her style for characters to experience a revelation that sheds light on, and gives meaning to, an event.

Munro's spare and lucid language and command of detail gives her fiction a "remarkable precision," as Helen Hoy observes. Munro's prose reveals the ambiguities of life: "ironic and serious at the same time," "mottoes of godliness and honor and flaming bigotry," "special, useless knowledge," "tones of shrill and happy outrage," "the bad taste, the heartlessness, the joy of it." Her style places the fantastic next to the ordinary with each undercutting the other in ways that simply, and effortlessly, evoke life. As Robert Thacker notes: "Munro's writing creates ... an empathetic union among readers, critics most apparent among them. We are drawn to her writing by its verisimilitude—not of mimesis, so-called and... 'realism'—but rather the feeling of being itself... of just being a human being." Many critics have asserted that Munro's stories often have the emotional and literary depth of novels.

16.7 Let Us Sum Up

Alice Munro has enjoyed most consistently a high degree of both popular and critical success. Her reputation as one Canada's best writers was not easily achieved. Munro's spare and lucid language and command of detail gives her fiction a "remarkable precision. Munro's fiction reveals the ambiguities of life: "ironic and serious at the same time," "mottoes of godliness and honor and flaming bigotry," "special, useless knowledge," "tones of shrill and happy outrage," "the bad taste, the heartlessness, the joy of it." Her style places the fantastic next to the ordinary with each undercutting the other in ways that simply, and effortlessly, evoke life. She has produced some intellectually sharp and emotionally stirring novels and short stories of stylistic adeptness in the mid 20th century. She has produced witty, wry, laconic, and passionately earnest, ethically committed stories that have used sociological functions of art and myth. She shared a concern for language and form that changed the literary climate in Canada.

16.8 Review Questions

1. Discuss Alice Munro as a novelist with special reference to her novel *Who Do You Think You Are?*.
2. Discuss the theme of Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?*.
3. Discuss Alice Munro as a novelist characterizing the Canadian character of parody with special reference to her novel *Who Do You Think You Are?*.
4. Write a detailed note on the style of Alice Munro.
5. Write a note on the art of characterization with special reference to her novel *Who Do You Think You Are?*.
6. Munro has always been interested in "the way women circumvented the rules," and most of the women in these stories function within limits posed by convention, class, and gender—even unconventional women." Illustrate.

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UNIT-17

MARGARET ATWOOD: *SURFACING* (I)

Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 About the Author and her works
- 17.2 Historical Context
- 17.3 Analysis of the Novel
- 17.4 Chapterwise Summary
 - Part - I
 - Part - II
 - Part - III
- 17.5 Let us Sum Up
- 17.6 Review Questions
- 17.7 Bibliography

17.0 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to know:

1. about the author and her works,
2. about the historical context of the novel,
3. textual analysis of the novel,
4. chapterwise story of the novel.

17.1 About The Author And Her Works

Margaret Atwood was born in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada on Nov.18,1939. Her father, Carl Atwood, was a forest entomologist, whose work, studying insects, kept the family in the forests of Ontario for much of her childhood. In her seventh year, her family moved to Toronoto. She attended the University of Toronoto, majoring in English, with minors in Philosophy and French. She received her BA with honors in 1961, after which she went on to get her master's degree from Radeliffe College in Massachussets, in 1962. She did two two-year periods of study at Harvard for her Ph.D., but writing was paramount, and she never finished.

Margaret Atwood self-published her first collection of poems, *Double Persephone*, in 1961. *The Circle Game* was published by Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1964 and won the governor general's award for poetry. Since then, over 15 collections of her poetry have been published, many running several editions, and individual poems have appeared in magazines and journals too numerous

to mention.

In 1967, Atwood married Jim Polk, a fellow writer, but the couple drifted apart after a few years and separated. Atwood's first novel, *The Edible Woman*, was published in 1969. The story about a woman who cannot eat and feels as if she herself is being eaten, was well ahead of its time. Around the time of her second novel, *Surfacing* (1972), Atwood married Graeme Gibson and moved to the small community of Alliston, Ontario with Gibson and his two young sons. In 1976, the couple welcomed their daughter, Jess Atwood Gibson. The couple remain happily married to this day.

Her next books, *Lady Oracle* (1977), *Life Before Man* (1979), and the profoundly disquieting *Bodily Harm* (1981) gained her further critical acclaim. In 1982, her first collection of short stories, *Dancing Girls and Other Stories* was published. Her best-known work the world over, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), got Atwood short-listed for the Booker Prize. A novel about a futuristic dystopia, where women are dehumanized into mindless wombs, it also garnered millions of new readers worldwide, and a fervently loyal readership. The wonderful book was later turned by Hollywood into a lump of a movie.

The Handmaid's Tale was followed by *Cat's Eye* (1989), about bullying among schoolgirls; it, too was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Next came *The Robber Bride* (1993), about the mysterious meanness of women toward women, and *Alias Grace* (1996), the story of a woman convicted of murder, who claims to have amnesia; and again Atwood was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. The elusive prize was won by *The Blind Assassin*, in 2000. Her most recent works of fiction are *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Penelopiad* (2005), *The Tent* (2006), and *Moral Disorder* (2006).

Atwood is also a beloved children's book author. Her first children's book was *Up In The Tree* (1978), which she herself illustrated in charming, naive two-color pictures. It was followed by *Anna's Pet* (1980) and *For the Birds* (1990), and the delightfully illustrated *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut* (1995). Her latest children's books are *Rude Ramsay and the Roaring Radishes* (2003) and *Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda* (2004).

With all these works to her credit, Atwood also excels in the field of non-fiction. These writings include literary criticism, studies, autobiographical essays, book reviews, political essays, eulogies, ecological writings, and other journalism and essays. Written with her energetic style, keen intellect and dry wit, these collections of her non-fiction further affirm Margaret Atwood as one of the most noteworthy writers of our time.

17.2 Historical Context

Women's struggle for equal rights in the Western world gained slow momentum during the middle decades of the twentieth century. During World War II, women were encouraged to enter the workplace where they enjoyed a measure of independence and responsibility. After the war, they were expected (and required) to give up their jobs to the returning male troops. Hundreds of thousands of women were laid off and expected to resume their place in the home.

Training began at an early age to ensure that girls would conform to the feminine ideal - the perfect wife and mother. Women who tried to gain self-fulfillment through a career were criticized and deemed dangerous to the stability of the family. They were pressed to find fulfillment exclusively through their support of a successful husband. Television shows (for example *Ozzie and Harriet*,

Father Knows Best), popular magazines (*GoodHousekeeping*), and advertisements all encouraged the image of woman-as-housewife throughout the 1950s. The small number of women who did work outside the home often suffered discrimination and exploitation as they were relegated to low-paying clerical, service, or assembly-line positions. Women would have to wait until the 1960s and 1970s to gain meaningful social and economic advancement.

In the 1960s, the Women's Movement reemerged and gained most of its strength in the United States. The National Organization for Women (NOW), formed in 1966, and other groups like the National Women's Political Caucus gained support for abortion reform, federally supported child care centers, equal pay for women, and the removal of educational, political, and social barriers to women. Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and others helped influence Congress to pass the Equal Rights Amendment bill in 1972 that banned sex discrimination at the national level though the bill was never ratified.

17.3 Analysis of the Novel

Surfacing is Margaret Atwood's second novel, which was published in 1972, only three years after her first novel *The Edible Woman* was published. Though one of Atwood's early novels, *Surfacing* is not one of Atwood's earliest publications. By the time *Surfacing* was published, she had already published several books of poetry. Atwood's writing has been published in more than thirty languages.

Surfacing takes place in Quebec, and the unique identity of Quebec's population comes into play in the novel. Quebec is the only Canadian province populated by residents of French (rather than British) descent. Atwood wrote *Surfacing* at a time when the cultural differences between Quebec and the rest of Canada were manifesting themselves in terms of rising Quebec nationalism. The 1960s saw the Quiet Revolution in Quebec: a series of economic and educational reforms coupled with a secularization of society. The Quiet Revolution afforded Quebec greater political and economic autonomy giving Quebec's French citizens a sense of nationalism and a desire to separate from Canada. Atwood marks this political change in *Surfacing*.

Surfacing is a postcolonial novel, though not in the traditional sense. Most postcolonial novels are written by authors from countries that have gained bloody independence from empires such as Britain, France, Spain or America. These novels usually mark the effects of upheaval and bloody revolution, documenting a search for an independent national identity coupled with a reaction to the political scarring left by imperialism. Since Canadian independence from Britain occurred so gradually, *Surfacing* does not fall into the traditional postcolonial categorization. *Surfacing* does, however, explore an emerging Canadian national identity Atwood includes a passage about the Canadian national flag, which had only been adopted in 1965. More important, *Surfacing* exists as a postcolonial novel in its consideration of Americans and the way that America exerts its cultural influence over Canada. Atwood claims that America's subtle cultural infiltration of Canada is actually a form of colonialism.

Through *Surfacing*, Atwood questions a woman's conventional social and sexual role. *Surfacing* touches on the health risks associated with hormonal contraception the idea of contraception as a male invention, the power inherent in pregnancy, the social implications of makeup, the potentially false ideal of marriage, the notion of a natural woman, and the psychological mechanisms that men use

to exert control over women. Atwood creates a narrator who feels alienated by social pressures that cast her in a specific gender role, and the narrator's response to those pressures is complete withdrawal. As such, Atwood presents a frank condemnation of the sexual and social norms forced upon women. *Surfacing* can therefore be seen as a proto-feminist novel.

Surfacing marks a social period of growing secularization and of widening generational gaps. Atwood deems religion as more of a social regulatory force than a truth. For example, the town priest abuses his religious authority on the village by enforcing a strict dress code for women. The narrator also labels Christianity as a social control mechanism that is learned at a young age and stays potent throughout adulthood. Religion in *Surfacing* becomes a false ideal and Atwood's condemnation of Christianity marks a larger social tendency toward secularization. At the same time, Atwood explores a growing rift between generations. The narrator of the book casts the older generation as crippled by a rigid sense of morality in this way. Atwood documents a split between the conservative older generation and the liberal younger generation.

A minor undercurrent in *Surfacing* is the novel's existence as a post-World War II novel. The narrator recalls growing up in the wake of World War II and documents small effects of the war on her childhood. She believes that the war served as an outlet for men's inherent violence, and she tries to trace the effects of pent-up violence in a society devoid of war. The narrator sees the American infiltration of Canada as a direct result of American restlessness during the post-war period. *Surfacing* examines the ambiguous moral landscape left in the wake of World War II. The narrator's childhood recollection of Hitler as the embodiment of all evil depicts the World War II era as morally simplistic. The post-war world is more ambiguous and the narrator challenges herself to discover the roots of evil now that humans no longer have a single scapegoat.

Surfacing predates the environmentalist movement but the narrator's reverence for the Canadian wilderness is a pro-environmentalist one. The narrator feels protective of nature and reacts with hostility to the American tourists who overfish, kill for sport, and litter the ground. *Surfacing* is full of tourists, urban outgrowth, and technology that directly encroach upon the unspoiled land. These environmental concerns still resonate today given continuing trends toward overconsumption and the prevalence of technology that relies upon natural resources.

17.4 Chapterwise Summary

Part I

Surfacing opens with the unnamed narrator exclaiming, "I can't believe I'm on this road again." She is traveling with married friends, David and Anna, and her lover, Joe, to a remote island on a lake in Northern Quebec, where she spent much of her childhood, to search for her missing father. As they travel, Joe and David shoot a film that they will call "Random Samples," a compilation of shots "of things they come across." The narrator admits that she doesn't actually want to see her father; she just wants to make sure he is safe. She explains that she has had a strained relationship with him since her parents never forgave her for her hasty marriage, her subsequent divorce, and her abandonment of her child.

Anna confesses to the narrator that her marriage to David is troubled, which prompts the narrator to question her own relationship with Joe. She acknowledges, "I'm trying to decide whether or not I love him. I sum him up, dividing him into categories. I'm fond of him, I'd rather have him

around than not; though it would be nice if he meant something more to me. The fact that he doesn't makes me sad; no one has since my husband. A divorce is like an amputation, you survive but there's less of you. She notes that she has never told Anna or Joe about her baby, explaining,

I have to behave as though it doesn't exist, because for me it can't, it was taken away from me, exported, deported. A section of my own life, sliced off from me like a Siamese twin, my own flesh canceled. Lapse, relapse, I have to forget.

Suddenly she becomes furious with her father for vanishing "unresolved, leaving [her] with no answers to give them when they ask."

One day, while looking through the cabin where she lived with her family, she comes across some unintelligible drawings her father made and concludes, "this is the forgotten possibility: he might have gone insane and if insane, perhaps not dead." Later, David catches a fish and when it is killed, the narrator notes, "I feel a little sick, it's because I've killed something, made it dead; but I know that's irrational, killing certain things is all right, food and enemies."

Without consulting the women, David and Joe decide to stay on the island for another week. When the narrator becomes confused about what she remembers of the past, she decides, I have to be more careful about my memories. I have to be sure they're my own and not the memories of other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said: if the events are wrong the feelings I remember about them will be wrong too, I'll start inventing them and there will be no way of correcting it. To have the past but not the present, that means you're going senile.

She admits her brother did not really drown; her mother saved him at the last minute.

Part II

When Joe tells her, "we should get married," she notes, "I wanted to laugh. He'd got the order wrong, he'd never asked whether I loved him, that was supposed to come first." She tells him, "I've been married before and it didn't work out. I had a baby too. I don't want to go through that again." Disregarding what she said about the baby, Joe responds, "it would be different with us." When she does not agree, Joe turns angrily away from her. She thinks back to the day she and the father of her child got married, but the memory is distorted by the truth. She had never married, but the memory is distorted by the truth. She had never married and on that day, she had an abortion.

Later, she looks through a family scrapbook, explaining, "I searched through it carefully, looking for something I could recognize as myself, where I had come from or gone wrong." She finds her scrapbook filled with pictures of housewives and models, what she had wanted to be when she grew up. She also finds a picture of rabbits and thinks, "perhaps it was a vision of Heaven."

That night Anna admits that David has been frequently unfaithful to her and concludes that he behaves this way to prove "she can't stop him." The next day the narrator finds letters that show her father had not lost his reason, that the disturbing drawings he had made were copies, not originals, or primitive paintings he found on the island. Now she acknowledges, "I had the proof indisputable, of sanity and therefore of death. Relief, grief, I must have felt one or the other. A blank, a disappointment." She determines to find one of the paintings and "verify, match the drawing with reality." As the four of them look for the paintings, they come across a dead heron that someone has hung upside down and tied to a tree branch. David and Joe film the scene.

That night Joe tells her, “Okay I give up, you win. We’ll forget everything I said and do it like you want, back to the way it was before, “but she feels that it is too late to reconcile and tells him no. She feels as if she has “already moved out.” Joe seems as if he is going to hit her, but he turns away.

On their sixth day on the island, David browbeats Anna into taking her clothes off for the camera. The narrator sets out on her own to look for the painting. After she dives into the water, sure she will see it on a submerged ledge, she sees her father’s dead body but confuses it with a vision of her aborted child. Later, David tries to seduce her, but she refuses, telling him she would get pregnant. David tells her Anna is having sex with Joe.

When David tells her they have found her father’s body in the lake, she thinks he and Anna are making it up to get back at her for the sexual incident with David. She finds what she considers to be her mother’s gift to her, a picture the narrator had drawn of both her mother and of herself as a baby inside her mother’s womb. She decides that the pictures she finds are her “guides.”

Part III

That night she and Joe make love out of doors, and she hopes he will impregnate her. She decides she will stay on the island alone and so escapes in a canoe when the others come to tell her it is time to leave. After the others leave, she goes back to the cabin and thinks she sees her mother feeding the birds. However, the vision quickly disappears. After she enters the cabin, she smashes everything she can and tears her clothes and linens, determined to live outside of civilization. The next day she sees a vision of her father, but when she gains a closer look, she concludes “he was not my father. It is what my father saw, the thing you meet when you’ve stayed here too long alone. I see now that although it isn’t my father it is what my father has become. I knew he wasn’t dead.”

She begins to understand that she is losing touch with reality and acknowledges, “that is the real danger now, the hospital or the zoo, where we are put when we can no longer cope.” Yet she determines that she will never be a victim again. Thinking of the welfare of her unborn child, she dresses and decides, “I reenter my own time.” Soon Joe and Paul come to the island, looking for her. She watches from a distance as Joe calls for her, and acknowledges that “he won’t wait much longer.”

17.5 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we see that *Surfacing* is a part detective novel, part psychological thriller. It is the story of a talented woman artist who goes in search of her missing father on a remote island in northern Quebec. Setting out with her lover and another young couple, she soon finds herself captivated by the isolated setting, where a marriage begins to fall apart, violence and death lurk just beneath the surface, and sex becomes a catalyst for conflict and dangerous choices. *Surfacing* is a work permeated with an aura of suspense, complex with layered meanings, and written in brilliant, diamond-sharp prose. We have a rich mine of ideas from an extraordinary writer, families and marriage, and about women fragmented and becoming whole.

17.6 Review Questions

1. Discuss the life and works of Margeret Atwood.
2. Discuss the historical context of the novel, ‘*Surfacing*’.

3. Analysis the text of the novel, '*Surfacing*'.
4. Discuss the plot of the novel, '*Surfacing*'.
5. Discuss the chapterwise story of the novel, '*Surfacing*'.
6. Comment on the text of the novel, '*Surfacing*'.

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UNIT-18

MARGARET ATWOOD : *SURFACING* (II)

Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Plot Overview
- 18.2 Characterisation
- 18.3 Themes of the Novel
- 18.4 Critical Overview
- 18.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.6 Review Questions
- 18.7 Bibliography

18.0 Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to know:

1. plot of the novel,
2. different characters of the novel,
3. various themes of the novel,
4. critical views above the novel.

18.1 Plot Overview

The unnamed narrator returns to Quebec after years of absence to search for her missing father. She brings her boyfriend, Joe, and a married couple, Anna and David. On the way to a village near her father's island, the narrator visits her father's friend Paul. Paul can provide no new information on how to locate the narrator's father. A guide named Evans takes the narrator and her companions to her father's island. Where the narrator searches for clues regarding her father's disappearance. She becomes convinced that her father has gone mad and is still alive.

The narrator works in spurts on her freelance job illustrating a book of fairy tales, but her worries prevent her from accomplishing any real work. David proposes staying on the island for a week. The narrator agrees, though she secretly fears her crazed father's reemergence. During their stay, David launches constant insults at Anna, couching them as jokes. Anna confesses to the narrator that David is a womanizer. She complains that David constantly demands that Anna wear makeup. The four go on a blueberry-picking expedition. They canoe to a nearby island, where Joe unexpectedly proposes to the narrator. The narrator refuses Joe, telling him how she left her last husband and child.

Back on the island, Paul arrives with an American named Malmstrom. Malmstrom claims to

be from a Detroit wildlife agency. He offers to purchase the island, but the narrator refuses. She pulls Paul aside and tells him that her father is still alive. Paul seems skeptical. After the visitors leave, David offhandedly accuses Malmstrom of being a C.I.A. operative who is organizing an American invasion of Canada. The narrator looks through her father's records and consequently believes that he is likely dead. She sees that he had been researching Indian wall paintings and that he had marked several sites on a map. She decides to visit a site.

The narrator convinces her friends to accompany her on a camping trip to see the wall paintings. On their way to the campsite, they see a decomposing blue heron that has been hanged from a tree. David insists on filming the dead heron for a movie he is making called *Random Samples*. The heron's death haunts the narrator. She sees evidence of two campers entering the area beforehand, and she quickly assumes that they are Americans and to blame for the crime. Meanwhile, the four companions set up camp. Anna tells the narrator she has forgotten her makeup and David will punish her.

The narrator goes fishing with David and Joe. They encounter the Americans, and the narrator notices an American flag on their boat. The narrator brings her companions to a site from her father's map, but there are no wall paintings. Frustrated and confused, they return to camp. On the way, they again encounter the American campers. The narrator is surprised to discover that the campers are actually Canadian: what she had thought was an American flag is actually a sticker. However, the narrator claims the campers are still Americans because their slaughter of the heron is a distinctly American action.

The four return to the cabin. The narrator locates another site on her father's map but realizes that the government has raised the water level in this part of the lake. She will have to dive to see the paintings. Outside, the narrator observes David tormenting Anna by insisting she take off her clothes for *Random samples*. Anna eventually relents but then feels humiliated. The narrator asks David why he tortures Anna and David claims he does so because Anna cheats on him. The narrator canoes to a site from her father's map. She dives repeatedly in search of the paintings. On a particularly deep dive, she sees a disturbing object and screams and swims for the surface. Joe has followed her onto the lake and demands to know what she's doing. She ignores Joe and realizes that what she saw was a dead child. She believes it to be her aborted baby. She changes her story from leaving her husband and child to having an affair with her art professor and being forced to abort their baby.

The narrator's vision throws her into a psychosis. She believes that her father had found sacred Indian sites and resolves to thank the gods for granting her the power. Joe tries to speak to the narrator, but she remains impenetrable. He tries to rape her, but he leaves her alone once she warns him that she will get pregnant. Later David tries to seduce the narrator, telling her that Joe and Anna are having sex. The narrator nevertheless resists David's advances. A police boat comes to the island, and David tells the narrator that the police have found her father's body. Deep in her madness, the narrator refuses to believe David. That night, she seduces Joe so she can get pregnant. She feels that a new child will replace her lost baby. Joe falsely believes that the narrator has forgiven him for cheating on her.

On their last day on the island, the narrator abandons her friends. She destroys David's film and escapes in a canoe. The narrator's companions search in vain for her, eventually leaving the

island. Alone on the island, the narrator falls deeper into madness. She destroys the art from her job and nearly everything inside the cabin. She becomes an animal, running around naked, eating unwashed plants, and living in a burrow. She imagines raising her baby outdoors and never teaching it language. She also has visions of her parents. Eventually, hunger and exhaustion bring the narrator to sanity. She looks at herself in the mirror and sees just a natural woman. She resolves not to feel powerless anymore. Paul arrives at the island with Joe. The narrator realizes she loves Joe and resolves to reunite with him. She pauses in the cabin, looking out at Joe, waiting.

18.2 Characterisation

Anna

Anna is David's wife and the narrator's "best woman friend" for the past two months. Although she appears "always cheerful," Anna was desperate, her body, her only weapon and she was fighting for her life. She was fighting [David] because if she ever surrendered, the balance of power would be broken and he would go elsewhere. To continue the war. Her battles with her husband have prompted her feelings of both love and hate toward him. She continually complains to the narrator about his efforts to humiliate her, but when he propositions her friend, she forms a temporary alliance with him. She also shows little regard for her friend when she has sex with Joe to get back at David. The narrator explains another possible motivation for her behaviour: she concludes that Anna thinks, "by screwing Joe she's brought us back together. Saving the world, everyone wants to; men think they can do it with guns, women with their bodies."

David

David is Anna's husband. David teaches communications classes in an adult education program with Joe. Although he tries to pass himself off as a "man of the people," the narrator eventually sees through him. He is a misogynist (one who dislikes women) who torments his wife by continually trying to humiliate her. He tells his wife about his various affairs with other women to prove to her that she cannot control him. When the narrator confronts David after he has just propositioned her, he claims that Anna's own infidelities have forced him to be unfaithful to her. He insists that he is "for the equality of women," but then concludes that Anna "just doesn't happen to be equal." David tries to humiliate his wife when he shames her into taking off her clothes for the camera.

David's cruelty and manipulative nature emerge in the strict set of rules he forces Anna to follow. One rule is that Anna must always wear makeup. Anna explains to the narrator, "he wants me to look like a young chick all the time, if I don't he gets mad." She also admits that if she breaks any of his rules he'll get me for it. If I break one of them I get punished, except he keeps changing them so I'm never sure. He's crazy, there's something missing in him. He likes to make me cry because he can't do it himself.

When the narrator exclaims that she cannot believe David would be so demanding about makeup, Anna agrees, concluding, "it's something for him to use. He watches me all the time, he waits for excuses." Anna tells the narrator that sometimes she thinks he wants her to leave, "It used to be good," she notes, "then I started to really love him and he can't stand that, he can't stand having me love him. Sometimes I think he'd like me to die."

Father

The narrator's father is dead at the beginning of the novel, but she strongly feels his influence throughout her time on the island. She admits both of her parents were innocent who had cut themselves off from reality. She notes, "they were from another age, prehistoric, when everyone got married and had a family." As a result, she never told them the truth about her affair with a married man or her abortion.

She describes her father, "islanding his life, protecting both us and himself, in the midst of war and in a poor country, the effort it must have taken to sustain his illusions of reason and benevolent order, and perhaps he didn't." Her father's devotion to logic and reason emerged in his belief that "with the proper guidebooks you could do everything yourself" and in his admiration for "what he called the eighteenth-century rationalists."

Joe

Joe is the narrator's often untalkative lover. She admits that "speech to him was a task, a battle, words mustered behind his beard and issued one at a time, heavy and square like tanks." In *her* *Introducing Margaret Atwood's Surfacing*, critic George Woodcock characterizes Joe as "the most enigmatic character in the book" and wonders, "is he deep or is he just dumb?" Henry C. Phelps in his article on the novel in the *Explicator* concludes that Joe exhibits "a seeming solicitude toward women that masks a more fundamental antipathy." Phelps notes that Joe's behavior reveals a "blend of overt concern and strained hostility toward women." For example, "relief gleams through his beard" when Joe does not accept the narrator's offer to search for her father. He also appears relieved when she does not have an emotional response to her inability to find her father: he asks her about her search "in a neutral mumble that signals he'd prefer it if I [the narrator] kept from showing any reaction, no matter what has happened."

He reveals his own lack of emotion when he asks the narrator to marry him. "We should get married," he remarks. "I think we should we might as well." When she refuses, he becomes hostile. Later, when she continues to rebuff his attempts to reconcile, he seems as if he is about to hit her. Phelps notes, though, that Joe is the only one of the group who comes back to the island to find her. Yet, his antipathy again surfaces at this point in the novel as the narrator notes his "annoyed" voice and acknowledges that he will not wait very long for her to appear.

The narrator offers an explanation for his animosity toward women when she describes Joe as having the defiant but insane look of a species once dominant, now threatened with extinction. That's how he thinks of himself, too: deposed, unjustly. Secretly he would like them to set up a kind of park for him, like a bird sanctuary. She concludes, "he didn't love me, it was an idea of himself he loved and he wanted someone to join him." Marriage, to him, would have been a kind of "victory."

Mother

The narrator's mother is also dead when the novel begins. Her influence in her daughter's life becomes evident as the narrator begins her withdrawal from civilization. The narrator's mother was a selfless woman who concealed her cancer pain until it became unbearable. She adapted her exterior and interior life to that of her husband's, as evidenced by the diary that she kept every year, in which she would only record the weather and the work done on that day, "no reflections, no emotion." The narrator concludes, "my father explained everything but my mother never did, which only convinced

me that she had the answers but wouldn't tell." Quietly supportive but finally enigmatic, her mother spent her time collecting the seasons and the weather and her children's faces, the meticulous records that allowed her to admit the other things, the pain and isolation and whatever it was she was fighting against, something in a vanished history.

Narrator

The narrator is the novel's main character, a young woman returning to the remote island on a lake in Northern Quebec, where she spent much of her childhood, to search for her missing father. The abortion she reluctantly agreed to, coupled with the loss of both of her parents, has caused her to suppress her emotions and shut herself off from her world. At one point in the novel, she admits, "I realized I didn't feel much of anything, I hadn't for a long time. Perhaps I'd been like that all my life, just as some babies are born deaf or without a sense of touch." When she looks at the pictures she had made as a child, searching for some answers to her present condition, she finds no hints or facts, I didn't know when it had happened; I must have been all right then: but after that I'd allowed myself to be cut in two. There had been an accident and I came apart. The other half, the one locked away, was the only one that could live; I was the wrong half, detached, terminal numb.

She acknowledges that she "rehearses" emotions, "naming them: joy, peace, guilt, release, love and hate, react, relate, what to feel was like what to wear, you watched the others and memorized it." She suggests, "in a way it was a relief, to be exempt from feeling."

The narrator explains that as a youth, she memorized survival manuals, realizing "that it was possible to lose your way." She has tried to form a relationship with her lover Joe, but only halfheartedly. When he asks her if she loves him, she responds, "I want to. I do in a way," but ultimately, she can not give him what he needs, a confirmation of himself. She concludes, "David is like me. We are the ones that don't know how to love, there is something essential missing in us atrophy of the heart. Joe and Anna are lucky, they do it badly and suffer because of it, or perhaps we are normal and the ones who can love are freaks."

Towards the end of the novel, she suffers a breakdown and tries to strip off all the trappings of civilization that she blames for her despondency. Yet when she realizes she must care for the unborn child she believes she is carrying, she pulls herself back to reality and finds the strength to insist, "this above all, to refuse to be a victim. I have to recant, give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone."

Paul

Paul, the narrator's father's friend, is reserved, like her father and "saves everything useful." He is kind to her when she comes to the island looking for her father. Her father trusted him, and admired the fact that he could "build anything and fix anything."

18.3 Themes of the Novel

Appearances and Reality

One of the novel's main themes involves the tension between what appears to be and what is closely related to that is the theme of deception. The truth about the narrator's past emerges slowly because she has avoided much of the pain she experienced during an abortion she had a few years

ago. The pain has been so great that she has deceived herself and others into thinking that she had been married and that she gave birth to a child who she subsequently gave up to her husband. A hint of the truth emerges when she notes that she has never told Anna or Joe about her baby, explaining

I have to behave as though it doesn't exist, because for me it can't; it was taken away from me, exported, deported. A section of my own life, sliced off from me like a Siamese twin, my own flesh canceled. Lapse, relapse, I have to forget.

The narrator never provides an adequate rationale for giving up her baby, revealing her inability to face reality.

Memory and Reminiscence

As the novel progresses, another theme, memory and reminiscence, emerges in Atwood's characterization of the narrator. After she returns to the island where she grew up, the narrator begins to allow memories of her past to emerge. She acknowledges, though, that her memory is fuzzy:

I have to be more careful about my memories. I have to be sure they're my own and not the memories of other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said: if the events are wrong the feelings I remember about them will be wrong too, I'll start inventing them and there will be no way of correcting it."

Her confusion about her past stems from her suppression of her abortion and the painful relationship she had with the man she refers to as her husband.

Apathy and Passivity

For the narrator to successfully suppress her memories, she must maintain a passive state. She has not allowed herself to form any close personal relationships with others. Anna, the narrator insists, is her "best friend," but she admits that she has only known her for a few months, and she continually holds Joe at arm's length. For most of the novel, she refuses to define her feelings about him, and when he tries to get too close by asking her to get married, she rejects him and decides she will move out.

Identity/Search for Self

When her suppressed memories begin to emerge and she struggles with the truth of her past, the narrator embarks on a journey of self-discovery. For most of her adult life, she has blocked important information about her family and herself to avoid the painful realities of her experience. However, when she is confronted with the loss of her father, and Joe pressures her to redefine and strengthen their relationship, she is forced to begin to face her emotionally traumatic past. Her subsequent search for herself will involve questions of sanity and insanity and will eventually lead to change and transformation.

Sanity and Insanity

When the narrator questions the sanity of her father, she foreshadows her own struggle to preserve her mental stability. When she finds strange pictures drawn by her father, she uses the possibility of his descent into insanity as evidence that he might still be alive and so be able to help her with her own search for self. However, when she discovers that the paintings are copies of wall paintings on the island, she realizes that he is dead, which triggers her own mental decline. She decides

to stay on the island alone after the others leave to strip off all of the trappings of civilization that she feels have corrupted her. After seeing visions of her dead parents, however, she begins to understand that she is losing touch with reality and acknowledges, “that is the real danger now, the hospital or the zoo, where we are put when we can no longer cope.”

Change and Transformation

The narrator’s painful process of reminiscence, which requires that she face the traumatic experience of the abortion, helps her to change and ultimately discover some sense of herself. Her conclusion that she has become pregnant with Joe’s child and that she must survive for the child to survive, pulls her back into reality and to a reestablishment of her ties with civilization. By the end of the novel, her future with Joe is uncertain, but she has made one significant change: she insists that she will never be victim again.

Separation

Separation is a major theme of *Surfacing*. This is established in the first chapter, when the narrator is shown to be politically dispossessed as an English-speaker in Quebec, at a time in which Quebec was aspiring to become an independent French-speaking nation. The narrator also feels disconnected from the people around her, equating human interaction with that of animals. For example, while overhearing David and Anna make love, the narrator thinks “of an animal at the moment the trap closes”.

Madness

Another theme is madness. The protagonist’s mental reasoning deteriorates sharply, as the story unfolds from initial signs of mental health issues to a full-blown psychosis. Because Atwood has written in the first person, we are told much of the narrative through monologues, and experience events through the thoughts of the protagonist. This allows for a very detailed and personal portrayal of a mind ‘undoing itself. Although there are nuances in the protagonist’s thoughts that suggest mental problems in early chapters, the narrative takes a decisive plunge on page 67. At this point we learn that the protagonist has had a severe trauma in her early adult life, as she sits trying to piece together her past: “then static, like a jumped track”. This discovery that she is unable to identify any strong narrative themes in her own memories causes her substantial worry. She finds that she cannot trust her own thoughts, for instance she interrupts her own thinking with a retort: “That’s a lie...” This inability to ‘know which is the right thought’ is profoundly psychotic and from that point on the narrative and the thought processes of the protagonist become disturbingly uncoordinated. She has false memories of her father as a werewolf and her mother feeding jays” the intersection of fairy tales with daily life demonstrate the fragmentation of the narrator’s mind.

18.4 Critical Overview

When *Surfacing*, was published in 1972, it earned recognition in Canada and in the United States from scholars and from the general public. Most critics applauded the novel’s style, characterizations, and themes. Edward Weeks, in a review for *Atlantic*, writes that Atwood’s “sense of the place, of the lake in its various moods, or the animal life retreating before the intruder, is beautifully conveyed. There are passages of fine writing in this book and scenes of considerable power, such as the diving under the cliff and the discovery of the dead heron.” Paul Delany, in the *New York Times*

Book Review, determines that at a time when many novelists restrict themselves to a single mode of expression, such as documentary realism or unrestrained fantasy, Miss Atwood has undertaken a more serious and complex task. Denying Emerson's maxim that the true art of life is to skate well on surfaces, she shows the depths that must be explored if one attempts to live an examined life today. Barbara Godart in her piece on Atwood for *Feminist Writers*, asserts that the novel exhibits equally complex irony as it explores, through the narrative of a canoe journey into northern Quebec, the convoluted power relations between Anglophobe and Francophone Canadians in an era of intense Quebec separatist activity and between descendants of European immigrants and the culture of the aboriginal inhabitants they have displaced, both complicated by the invasion of American technology.

Praising her characterizations in the novel in her review for *Canadian Forum*, Ellen Godfrey comments that Atwood's "frightened and deadened characters are extremely interesting" and concludes that "she reveals them with skill and wit." Henry C. Phelps in his article on the novel for the *Explicator* argues, "Atwood's skillful embodiment" in Joe of the "perniciousness" of the cultural changes that took place in the 1960s "both displays an unexpected facility for implied social commentary and offers a new perspective for examining her already intriguing narratives."

Tom Marshall, in "Atwood Under and Above Water," in *This Harsh and Lovely Land: The Major Canadian Poets and the Making of a Canadian Tradition*, finds "a certain shallowness of characterization." He adds,

"Everything must be filtered through the mind of the Atwood protagonist, who is usually supposed to be both shrewd and confused, a combination that is possible but which tends in certain cases to put some strain on the reader's credulity."

Marshall does, however, commend the author for her "evocative description." He concludes that the problematic characterizations do not interfere "with the powerful flow of the novel as one reads it."

Focusing on the novel's themes, Sherrill Grace, in *Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood*, praises the novel's complexity, arguing that Atwood is "constantly aware of opposites self/other, subject/object, male/female, nature/man and of the need to accept and work within them." Margaret Wimsatt in an article for *Commonweal* echoes this assessment when she writes, "The novel picks up themes brooded over in the poetry, and knits them together coherently."

Marshall, however, finds fault with Atwood's thematic development in some parts of the novel. He asserts the repeated imagery of bottled, trapped and murdered animals builds powerfully to the key scene in which the father's corpse and the aborted foetus are encountered. It is just that all of this seems too intellectually worked out, too far removed from any very deeply felt or imagined experience of the kind that stood in, so to speak, for any very searching exploration of human character. Though a serious emotional resonance seems quite clearly intended, it is not achieved, mainly because recurrent poetic imagery is finally no substitute for depth of characterization. This is the major limitation of Atwood the novelist. Also, the reader may suspect that Atwood is indulging herself a little in this book, even to the extent of succumbing somewhat to the old-style woman's fiction she parodies.

Weeks criticizes the novel's conclusion, commenting, "I think it a pity that at the end, when she hides and strips herself for a fresh start, the heroine's behavior and her future with Joe are so hard to believe."

Most critics and readers found much to praise in *Surfacing*, which helped cement Atwood's reputation as one of Canada's best writers.

18.5 Let Us Sum Up

The book *Surfacing* is short. It is disengaged in tone. However it does not mean it is straight forward to study because it is also, in effect, prose poetry. And if there's one thing we should know about poetic language is that there are always layers of meaning. Thus the novel itself is multi-layered. An exploration of its language should turn up ideas about womanhood, religion, landscape, birth, animals and modern society, and many other themes, all together. What we have got to decipher is how the language conveys these things.

18.6 Review Questions

1. Discuss the plot of Atwood's novel, *Surfacing*.
2. Discuss the chief characters of Atwood's novel, *Surfacing*.
3. What are the major themes of the novel, *Surfacing*.
4. View critical analysis of Atwood's novel, *Surfacing*.

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UNIT-19

ROHINTON MISTRY : *SUCH A LONG JOURNEY* (I)

Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Life of Rohinton Mistry
- 19.3 Works of Rohinton Mistry
- 19.4 *Such a Long Journey*
 - 19.4.1 Analysis of the story
 - 19.4.2 Development of the theme
- 19.5 Critical Responses to Mistry
- 19.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.7 Review Questions
- 19.8 Bibliography

19.0 Objectives

This unit aims at helping the students to make an assessment of the following aspects of Rohinton Mistry and his novel, *Such a Long Journey*:

- Rohinton Mistry as novelist
- life of Rohinton Mistry
- works of Rohinton Mistry
- Rohinton Mistry's place in literature
- theme of *Such a Long Journey*

19.1 Introduction

Today there are a large number of educated Indians who use the English language as a medium of the creative exploration and expression of their experience of life. Indians have not only received recognition in India but also in other countries such as America, England, Africa, Australia and Canada as well. Indo-Canadian writings denote the writings of the Canadians who trace their origins from India and who have migrated to Canada either directly from India or indirectly from erstwhile British colonies i.e. East or South Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands. The Indo-Canadian community started around the beginning of the twentieth century. Indo-Canadian writers are producing literatures in all major genres. Of the main genres, writers have been most prolific in poetry. In Canada the fiction is coming into its own only very recently.

Perhaps the most important point to make about Mistry's overwhelming success, though, is that it has allowed him to mediate Parsi culture and represent the Parsi dilemma to an international readership in a way that might not have been possible, had he stayed in Bombay where following his creative inclinations would have been more difficult. Depending on one's perspective, the trajectory of Mistry's life and his art can be seen either as reflecting that decline or as countering it. Mistry grew up in a Parsi Baag in Bombay (now Mumbai). The Parsi Baag or colony is a distinctive feature of the Bombay cityscape, an apartment complex, usually with a community courtyard, that signals the cultural and religious affiliations its inhabitants, at once unifying and isolating, as Mistry's fiction attests.

19.2 Life of Rohinton Mistry

Rohinton Mistry was born in Bombay on July 3, 1952 to Behram Mistry and Freny Jhaveri Mistry and migrated to Canada in 1975. Growing up in Bombay, he had many opportunities to observe the kind of Parsi enclaves. He has evoked so powerfully in his four published works of fiction: *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987) *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A fine Balance* (1995), and *Family Matters* (2002). He attended the Villa Theresa Primary School and St. Xavier High School, before finishing a bachelor's degree in science at St. Xavier's College, University of Bombay in 1974. Upon leaving the university, he married Freny Elavia, and soon after their arrival in Toronto in 1975, he started working as a clerk at the Imperial Bank of Commerce. He studied English and Philosophy part time at the University of Toronto and completed B.A. there in 1982. In 1983, he wrote his first short story, 'One Sunday', which won the Hart House Prize that year in 1984, this time for 'Auspicious Occasion', in 1985, the year in which he won the Annual Contributors Prize from the Canadian Fiction magazine. Mistry gave up his bank job to devote himself full time to writing. He sometimes tells curiously about his last name that it means 'Craftsman' or 'Artisan' in India. The short stories he published in various Canadian magazines were well-received by many reviewers, including the Toronto Star critic Ken Adachi, who wrote most enthusiastically about the then unknown writer. In 1987 his collection of short stories *Tales from Firozhsa Baag*, was published by Penguin Canada and has since reappeared in Great Britain and the United States under the new title *Swimming Lessons and other Stories from Firozsha Baag*. The book was very well reviewed in British and North American Journals and was short listed for Canada's Governor-Generals Award.

Mistry and his wife have lived in and around Toronto since their arrival there in 1975. But during 1986-87, they spent one year in long Beach, California, where she taught high school in a racially mixed, middle class neighbourhood. The gang violence they witnessed there has coloured Mistry's views of American life in general. "I think I prefer the Canadian Multiculturalism to the direct racism of the American Melting Pot because I'd rather be alive and face the subtle discrimination. The overt racism of the Melting Pot often leads to a violent end." So, Mistry likes it in Canada, and lives there in an unliterary, uninspiring, Brampton "a wasteland of Subdivisions, shopping malls, light and heavy industry, and miles of franchise glitter." According to Hancock, he likes living in Brampton on a quiet street where he practices his craft most of the day in an almost vacant house, while his wife teaches in a local high school.

In 1991, Mistry's first novel, *Such a Long Journey* was nominated for Britain's prestigious Booker Prize and won the Governor-General's Literary Award for English-language fiction to general critical acclaim. At the post awards luncheon in Toronto in December 1991, the grave and soft spoken author dealt most patiently with long lines of admirers and told reporters that he had no special celebratory

plans. “As soon as this is over, I’m going home to Brampton to write basically,” he said. (Lobe and Mail, December 4, 1991, 18) In March 1992, *Such a Long Journey* also received the Smith Book/Books in Canada First Novel Award. His second novel ‘*A Fine Balance* (1995) won Canada’s Giller Prize, The common wealth writers’ award and the Los Angeles Times Book Award. It was nominated for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and was in final list for the Booker Prize. *Family Matters* (2002) won the Kiriyam Pacific Rim Book Prize for Fiction, The Canadian Authors Associations MOSAID Technologies Inc, Award for Fiction and the Regional Commonwealth Writer Prize for Best Book. It was nominated for the Booker Prize and short-listed for the international IMPAC Dublin Literary Award.

According to an interview he gave to Vol Ross, Mistry “Begins work each day at 8:30 or 9 a.m., Although he loves classical music, he works in silence he drinks tea before, but not while he sits at his computer. He breaks for lunch at noon – ‘bread and cold cuts, Canadian food’ – reads magazines for half an hour, and then works through the afternoon. He wrote his first novel in three drafts.” He and his wife enjoy gardening and have a special interest in growing roses. He reads middle- brow magazines, *Times* and *MacLean’s*. He does not want to talk about what he does not read. “I must be careful, this is how one makes enemies,” he laughs gently. He speaks Gujrati, Hindi and a bit of Marathi, but as he says “English is technically my mother tongue.” After telling the interviewer that his next book too will be set in Bombay, Mistry, now a Canadian citizen adds, “I’ll write a novel set in Canada if it comes to me. I have no policies on this.” According to Mistry, his parents – father works in advertising and mother is a housewife – were “thrilled when I said I’d become a writer – they’ve always loved the arts.” He immigrated to Canada, because his wife had family there also, in 1975, “Australia was racist, America was not too inviting with Vietnam and all that rubbish and England wasn’t England any more.” The interview found Mistry “The soul of gravity,” nothing that it was “both improbable and inevitable [that] a rich novel with all its despairing revolting and glorious passage should have been written by such a quiet gentleman.”

19.3 Works of Rohinton Mistry

Rohinton Mistry’s *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), *Such a Long Journey* (1991), *A Fine Balance* (1995) and *Family Matters* (2002) are widely acclaimed. In this sub unit we are giving a short summary of all his works which will help to enhance the better understanding of his fiction.

Tales from Firozsha Baag: Mistry’s works, which include short stories and novels, describe the middle-class Parsi life how it struggles between modernity and tradition. His *Tales from Firozsha Baag*, a collection of short stories, consisting of eleven intersecting stories, has portraits of the lives of the members of the fictitious residential block Firozsha Baag. Here the characters represent Parsis at odds with their religious beliefs and the larger community. They also convey the common human issues of spiritual questions, alienation, fear of death, family problems, and economic hardships. In short, the stories give an account of painful family dynamics. His ‘Auspicious Occasion’ is an expression of an unmatched relationship. In the story, Mehroo, who is on her prime, is a thirty years old woman while Rustomji, her husband is fifty. She was married off to this thirty-six-year old Bombay lawyer while she was a mere girl of sixteen, before completing her final high school year examination. Then Rustomji was considered to be a fine match by Mehroo’s parents. But after the due course of time, now the things are reversed. He treats his wife like a *gunga* or servant. He shouts at her for petty things. Even when he needs his newspaper, he shouts “You are deaf or what? Must I scream till my lungs burst?”

(*Tales from Firozsha Baag*, 4) No mention is ever made of love between Rustomji and Mehroo. Mehroo treats his husband as if he were her father or her brother. She hunts out his newspaper, cooks and prepares drinks for him; a fraternal affection links them together. They lead a monotonous existence; each day is no different to the next. Thus Mistry underlines the completeness of the incompatibility between this couple.

The story also depicts another aspect of man- woman relationship in which a woman is treated as an object of sex. This can be exemplified through the first encounter of Rustomji with Gajra, his new maid servant. When Rustomji first sees her, he visually indulges himself. This old toothless man fantasises about her naked body and pays very close attention to her 'independent' breasts that are ill-contained by a flimsy sari blouse. In the society, a woman like Gajra is an ideal woman for a man like Rustomji as she is socially inferior. He watches her lustfully and secretly dreams of seducing her. Rustomji watches the Gunga's voluptuous body, wanting to see her nipples, her breasts in their entirety. "Dada Ormuzd, just once let me see them, only once." His depravity is equaled only by the Parsi priest, Dhunjisha, who excels at sordidness and licentiousness. Mistry, by dint of his highly comic digressions which act like theatrical asides, reveals the real deceptive nature of what are believed to be chaste holy men, "known to exchange lewd remarks between lines of prayer: Ashem Vahoo, See the tits on that chickie-boo..."

Mistry's another short story '*The Ghost of Firozsha Baag*' is an expression of otherness. In the story one says "I always believed in ghosts." By the end of the tale, the actual *bhoot* has made several appearances, but only the reader is aware of this, and only then if we choose to believe his narrative. In a way, it presents a precursor of more deep-seated ideas of otherness. Jaakaylee is a Catholic, "with very dark skin" amongst the Parsis; that, in fact, is how her name is bastardised from Jacqueline. "Easy chair was igeechur, French beans was ferach beech... Later I found out that all Parsis did this, it was like they made their own private language." It is another, impenetrable system, through which perhaps the earlier Parsis have sought to align themselves with the ruling British, that remains closed to Jaakaylee. Her re-naming, her *bastardisation* is important. Names have become the anchor of existence, small signs that pinpoint identity; the acquisition of language and the attainment of the patriarchal order and social and personal identity.

In denying her name, Jaakaylee is reduced at times even to the inhuman Jaakayl, phonetically similar to Jackal. In "Forgetting my name, language, my songs," Jaakaylee is herself forgotten. "Ayah means living close to the floor," and it is as *Ayah* that Jaakaylee is known. She lives close to the floor, and sleeps beyond the door, working like an automaton without recognition. She states that *bai* and *seth* are wealthy, but they will not spend money on an automatic grinder; they choose to see their servant as the automatic grinder, performing at the snap of their fingers.

Jaakaylee's story ends with one final supernatural occurrence, and given her fright, this manifestation perhaps holds more weight than the sexual projection of the narrative. Moreover, it is through this final of the ghosts of Firozsha Baag that something is redeemed in the relationship between Parsi/pseudo-British ruler and the dark, Catholic, Goan ayah. Two women, otherwise separated by their respective social positions of *ayah* and *bai* are able to share first the knowledge of the ghost, and second something almost akin to sisterhood.

'*The Collectors*' is another important story of Mistry in which deals with painful dynamics between father-son. It so happens in the story that Dr. Burjor Mody is transferred from Mysore to

assume the principalship of the Bombay Veterinary College, he moves into Firozsha Baag with his wife and son Pesi. They occupy a flat in C Block. Soon Dr. Burjor Mody becomes the leading personality of C Block. Dr. Burjor Mody is very fond of stamp collecting. But Pesi does not take interest in this hobby. Pesi becomes the point of despair wherever they go. Over the years Dr. Mody finds himself inured to the initial embarrassment in each new place they move to.

Dr. Burjor Mody was very ambitious about his son. He has decided that his son will play violin, acquire the best from the cultures of East and west and he will introduce him to his dearest activity, stamp collection. Dr. Burjor Mody talks about stamp collecting. "Pesi laughed and mocked his beloved hobby. This was the point at which, hurt and confused, he surrendered his son to whatever destiny was in store." This is not all. Every thing that the son does upsets the father. "Dr. Mody's constant sorrow and despair (which he had tried so hard to keep private all along, and had succeeded, but was now visible for all to see.)" The kind of relationship between father and son embitters the former so much so that he dies of heart attack. Thus the relationship between father and son had been ended in despair.

Mistry's '*Condolence Visit*' is a painful story of a wife whose husband has died. It paints Daulat's grief over her husband Minocher's death after a prolonged illness. Born and brought up in Firozsha Baag, Daulat and Minocher were the only childhood sweethearts who had got married; all the others had gone their separate ways. But as the title suggests in story, Daulat is awaiting for the visitors who would come to offer their condolence, share her grief and Minocher's with a thousand questions. After a long and troubled illness, Daulat's husband, Minocher had died. Minocher Mirza had been well known in the Parsi community of Bombay. So the condolence visitors would come like swarms. Daulat had prepared herself to face the situation. But she wanted to escape. "The only way out was to lock up the flat and leave Firozsha Baag, live elsewhere for the next few weeks."

No one can understand the problems of Daulat and each visitor asks silly question about the illness, about doctors and hospitals, about nurses and medicines and Daulat repeats answers. Daulat now remember her nephew Sarosh whom she did not let her use her tape recorder, saying "Poor Minocher sick in bed, and I listen to music? never!" In arming herself for the expected stream of condoling friends and relatives, she wishes now that she had accepted the gift of a cassette player from her nephew, Sid-Sarosh, and enjoys imagining the answers she would have recorded for them. She would tape her voice and suffering in tape recorder and proffer it to the condolence visitors:

You have come to ask about my life, my suffering, my sorrow? Here, take and listen. Listen on the machine, everything is on tape. How my Minocher fell sick, where it started to pain, how much it hurt, what doctor said, what specialist said, what happened in hospital.

It is upsetting for the wife to face the responses of the visitors. Her neighbour Najamai, the only resident of the Baag who have fridge, gave her counseling service to Daulat for completion of the Death Rituals. She also offered cold-drink bottles of Limca and Goldspot for visitors coming after Minocher's *dusmoo*. But Daulat thought "What does she think, I'm giving a party the day after *dusmoo*?" In the old days when Daulat's grandmother had died music is strictly prohibited there. The radio, gramophone and tape recorder was not allowed in the house for three months. Even all the residents of Firozsha Baag could not play music for one month. The boys of Firozsha Baag could not play their games for one month. It is because of this month several boys get the membership in Cawasji Framji Memorial Library and converted themselves to reading. But now the condolence visitors come to

perform their duties. Even they do “not knowing whether to laugh or keep the condolence visit grimness upon their faces.”

Daulat’s experience with her cousin, Moti, is worth noting. She all the time remains busy in her own world other than that of condolence. She had her two grandsons on this visit. She had instructed them not to drink all cold drink but leave some in glass. If you will drink it all, you will get punishment. After asking some questions about Minocher’s death, she narrates the events of lively nature with no sign of condolence.

You know, I was reading in the Indian Express last week that doctors in China were able to make”- here, Moti lowered her voice in case the grandsons were listening, shielded her mouth with one hand, and pointed to her lap with the other - “a man’s part. His girlfriend ran off with another man and he was very upset. So he chopped off” – in a whisper –” her own part, in frustration, and flushed it down the toilet. Later in hospital, he regretted doing it, and God knows how, but the doctors made for him” – in a whisper again – “a New Part, out of his own skin and all. They say it works and everything. Isn’t that amazing?

Thus ‘*In Condolence Visit*’ Mistry expresses such type of dynamics which becomes painful because of formal behaviour. It is because of this behaviour that Daulat, against the pious objections of a distant visiting cousin and her prying neighbour Nijamai, gives the *pugree* to a Parsi young man who expects to have a traditional wedding soon. This action of hers privileges her desire to deal with her grief in her own way and not according to societal rules.

The short story, ‘*The Exercisers*’, is an example of a degenerated relationship between a mother and her son. Mrs. Bulsara is the castrating mother per excellence. She manages to ruin the innocent love between her son, Jehangir and his girl friend Behroze. This she does through emotional blackmail, trenchant sarcasm and a mystical subterfuge: she hires the services of a guru to make Jehangir believe that Behroze is trying to trap him through seduction, and that Behroze will thwart his ambitions. To her, the girl friend of his son is nothing but a whore. She says: “That his girl friend, as far as she could see, was nothing but a slut.” Thus Mrs. Bulsara’s obsession kills a completely innocent love. It so happens that Mrs. Bulsara becomes pathologically jealous of Behroze. Her behaviour is that of a mentally unstable woman as she is always concerned with the sexual life of her son. The mother’s obsession culminates when Jehangir surprises her examining the gusset of his trousers: “Mother was...sniffing, scrutinising the gusset under the light...” She is caught unaware, looking for powdery stains which might attest to the sexual relations between Jehangir and his girl friend. Even at this point, such is the hold his mother has upon him that Jehangir does not violently confront her, choosing only mild lily-livered sarcasm as a riposte. How could Jehangir defy the woman who gave up so much in order to enable her son to enjoy the spoils of her sacrifices?

A *Fine Balance*: *A Fine Balance* is concerned with life worlds deprived of meaning. In two ways can *A Fine Balance* be said to present a departure from the agenda of Mistry’s debut novel. First of all, Mistry’s second novel is narrated in a more traditional way. If *Such a Long Journey* displays elements of magic realism, *A Fine Balance* is a traditional realist novel. Secondly, the scope of Mistry’s second novel is broader. While his debut is in the main concerned with the Parsis of Bombay, *A Fine Balance* transcends the narrow confines of the Parsi community and features Parsis, Hindus, Muslims as well as Sikhs. Finally, while *A Fine Balance* underlines the central importance of tolerance and solidarity, thereby echoing *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry’s second novel enacts

transculturalism and intercultural understanding as ways of constructing an identity and as remedies against a reality that is felt to be deprived of meaning.

How social conditions affect the middle class and the marginalized community is highlighted in a realistic manner. The lives of four main characters namely, Dina Dalal, Ishvar Darji, Omprakash Darji and Maneck Kohlah, are interwoven, who try to overcome their hurdles but fail to maintain a fine balance. It is a conscious effort to embrace more of the social reality of India:

Holding this book in your hand, sinking back in your soft armchairs, you will say to yourself: perhaps it will amuse me. And after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well, blaming the author for your own insensitivity, accusing him of wild exaggeration and flights of fancy. But be assured: this tragedy is not fiction. All is true.

The Hindus Omprakash and Ishvar Darji occupy prominent positions in *A Fine Balance* insofar as both are crucial in illustrating the novel's central concern of how to make life livable under unfavourable conditions and adverse circumstances. Apart from the fatal impact of political forces during the Emergency, one aspect is of particular importance in this context: India's cruellest social constraint caste.

The Hindu family saga of *A Fine Balance* originates with Dukhi Mochi, Ishvar's father and Omprakash's grandfather. Dukhi Mochi belongs to the Chamaar caste of tanners and leather-workers. Together with the other chamaars in the village, Dukhi lives on the carcasses of dead animals, the hides of which he receives in order to produce sandals and harnesses. His social status is that of an untouchable. As such, he does not formally belong to any of "the four main castes of Hindu society, i.e. Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders and peasants) and Shudras (craftsmen and servants)." Untouchability is a stigma; other castes avoid contact with Dukhi because he is deemed impure.

Hinduism explains caste by recourse to the concept of karma while the Hindu believes that his position within the caste system is determined by his behaviour in a previous incarnation. A reincarnation as a Brahmin, for instance, is taken as a sign that one has acted in accordance with his duties as representative of his respective caste. The system of caste postpones social mobility to a future incarnation. A future incarnation, however, will only bring about a rise to another stratum if the individual conforms to his present caste status. Thus the social status quo is not to be questioned; paradoxically, it better be affirmed if the individual wants to improve his standing in life.

It is crucial to realise that Mistry's portrayal of Hindu culture is not an impartial ethnographic account of Indian society. He suggests that stark injustices are inherent in the practice of caste. The inhumanity of untouchability is severely criticized as a contributing to an erosion of meaning in the lives of Dukhi, Narayan, Ishvar and Om. An example for the cruelty and arbitrariness that characterises their treatment by their betters is illustrated in the following way:

For walking on the upper-caste side of the street, Sita was stoned, though not to death – the stones had ceased at first blood. Gambhir was less fortunate; he had molten lead poured into his ears because he ventured within hearing range of the temple while prayers were in progress. Dayaram, reneging on an agreement to plough a landlord's field, had been forced to eat the landlord's excrement in the village square. Dhiraj tried to negotiate in advance with Pandit Ghanshyam the wages for chopping wood, instead of settling for the few sticks he could expect at the end of the day; the Pandit got upset, accused Dhiraj of poisoning his cows, and had him hanged.

The novel repeatedly unfolds the cruelty shown to the outcaste people. As a result, they feel that their fate is to bear injustice. The children of outcaste people are beaten for no valid reason. For example, they are beaten up for entering the village school. Though it is said that “even an untouchable could receive justice at his hands” but it is a just a façade. Dukhi, an outcaste, realizes that justice is a concept which an untouchable does not have a claim to. Being outside society, Dukhi is also considered outside the scope of justice. Mistry’s portrayal satirises Pandit Lalluram as an unmannered, gluttonous reactionary who is not interested in justice for all:

Relying on this legendary reputation for justice, Dukhi sat at Pandit Lalluram’s feet and told him about the beating of Ishvar and Narayan. The learned man was resting in an armchair, having just finished his dinner, and belched loudly several times during his visitor’s narration. Dukhi paused politely at each eructation, while Pandit Lalluram murmured ‘Hai Ram’ in thanks for an alimentary tract blessed with such energetic powers of digestion.

The injustice done to Ishvar and Narayan and their futile appeal to justice deprive Dukhi of satisfaction with the life he leads as an untouchable. Because the system disregards his hope of transcending himself in his children, Dukhi, for the first time in his life, questions his identification with the order of caste. He revolts, and eventually transgresses the restrictions of caste, a reaction that becomes manifest in the decision to remove his sons from the immediate impact of discrimination.

The outcaste people try to fight this injustice. While his father opposed occupational restrictions based on caste, Narayan fights for the constitutionally guaranteed political participation of untouchables in the election process. Although his father warns him that he will risk his life, Narayan complains about a life not worth living. He testifies to an erosion of meaning when he laments that “life without dignity is worthless.” By taking on the fight against the corruption and the nepotism of the parliamentary elections, Narayan takes on the fight against an existence deprived of dignity. Narayan’s failure and his tragic death in the course of a futile attempt to fight the caste system and its political practice are foreshadowed in an early passage: “By and by she [Radha, Narayan’s wife] brought a lamp to the porch. Within seconds it attracted a cluster of midges. Then a brown moth arrived to keep its assignation with the light. Dukhi watched it try to beat its fragile wings through the lamp glass.” Here the moth’s futile attempt to reach the light is symbolic of Narayan’s endeavour to break with traditional caste regulations. Narayan disregards the invisible boundaries of caste in a way resembling the moth that does not realise that there is a boundary between itself and the light.

Farokh Kohlah’s life is again a tale of sufferings caused by the so called advancement of life. He owns a shop in the mountains of North India. Maneck, his son, attends the local school and helps his father in the evenings. He identifies with the rural area and his father’s job and wants to continue his father’s business after his retirement. Initially, his wish is not met with impediments, for Farokh agrees that “nowhere else can Maneck have better expectations for his future.” However, he sends his son out from the village for education. Although Farokh Kohlah only wants the best for his son, i.e. a better education than the village school can offer, his decision to send him to a boarding school is a catastrophe for Maneck, as the following quote illustrates:

The boarding school they selected was eight hours away by bus. Maneck detested the decision. The thought of leaving the hill-station – his entire universe – brought him to a state of panic. “I like my school here,” he pleaded. “And how will I work in the shop in the evening if you send me away?”

Maneck feels an ache of betrayal when he learns of his father’s plans for him. He feels cheated

by a father assumed to be reliable and loving. His father's breach of faith, as well as the loss of satisfaction hitherto gained from working in the shop, contributes to the collapse of the ordered universe of his childhood. As a consequence, Maneck is faced with despair, rejection and loneliness all of which result in an alienation from his family.

As far as the ambience of Farokh's world is concerned, it is abruptly changed, too, by the intrusion of multinational companies. The ensuing competition with foreign products destroys his soft-drink business; eventually, Kohlah's cola cannot prevail over Coca-Cola's marketing strategy. Moreover, the growing industrialisation leads to the ecological denudation of the Himalayas and destroys the pastoral nature of the hillsides. Farokh is confirmed in his belief that there is no future for his son in the mountains, either: "The slow coach gets left behind," he answered. "And I don't want the same thing to happen to Maneck." Consequently, he does not want his son to return to the village after secondary school but is determined to send Maneck even further away. While Farokh is afraid that Maneck could become a 'slow coach,' Maneck eventually ends his life by throwing himself in front of a train, thereby testifying that Farokh has tragically misjudged his son and his needs.

There is also an important character, in *A Fine Balance*, Dina Dalal. The death of, Dina's father, Dr. Shroff by a cobra's bite intensifies the theme of the novel. His death symbolizes the death of idealism. It becomes more painful when we are encountered with his son, Nusswan. After his death, Nusswan presides over the household, whose personality represents the antithesis to his father's character. Whereas Dr. Shroff's actions are motivated by idealism and altruism, Nusswan has internalised a businessman's pragmatism together with an obsession for power and control. His sister, Dina, becomes the victim of his obsession for power and control. She has to discontinue her school as she is overburdened with the entire household work. Nusswan's attempts to conform to the role of a pater familias severely affect his sister's peace of mind. The effect of the misery suffered under her brother's guardianship is that Dina becomes obsessed with the idea of personal freedom. She says "No need now to visit her brother and beg for next month's rent. She took a deep breath. Once again, her fragile independence was preserved."

This is not all as far as Dina's life is concerned. She becomes all the more tragic after the death of her husband, Rustom. Now her fears of dependence and of loneliness are anchored in this second traumatic experience i.e. the loss of her husband. Rustom's death haunts Dina's mind, and it seems that it cannot be compensated. His demise confronts Dina with isolation and loneliness, concomitant: "When the human weight did not materialize, she awakened to emptiness, relearning the loss in the darkness before sunrise."

Dina Shroff has two conflicting impulses, i.e. her fear of isolation and her misgivings about dependence. While both impulses pose a threat to the source of meaning in her life, fighting one necessarily favours the other. By fighting isolation, i.e. by investing into social contacts, Dina has to make a commitment which will affect her independence. Fighting dependence, i.e. maintaining absolute personal independence, on the other hand, might very well thwart any hope of finding soulmates. In the course of the novel, Mistry emphasizes human company as the overriding necessity. Dina longs for a social life because the effects of isolation and loneliness threaten her with disintegration. This is seen in her strong reaction against those who have harmonious relationships. She reacts with jealousy to the gradually developing friendship between Maneck and Om because she herself is longing for company. The evenings become the time when "the emptiness of her own life appeared starkest." She feels

lonely when Om and Ishvar have left the flat: “Soon the evening gloom would materialize, infect the fibre-filled air, drape itself over her bed, depress her from now till morning.”

Family Matters: Set in Bombay in the mid-1990s, *Family Matters* (2002) tells a story of familial love and obligation, of personal and political corruption, of the demands of tradition and the possibilities for compassion. Nariman Vakeel, the widowed patriarch of an extended family lives with his stepdaughter Coomy and stepson Jal in a large flat in politically corrupted city Bombay. His gradually debilitating Parkinson’s disease and a broken ankle cause him to need Coomy and Jal’s help for nearly everything. Nariman Vakeel, the widowed patriarch of an extended family, lives with his stepdaughter and stepson in a large flat in politically corrupt Bombay (Mumbai) in the 1990s. His gradually debilitating Parkinson’s disease and a broken ankle cause him to need Coomy and Jal’s help for nearly everything. Coomy bathes her stepfather begrudgingly twice a week and grimaces when the old man humbly asks for the simplest of human needs; Jal goes along with what his bossy sister thinks is best. Meanwhile, Coomy and Jal’s half-sister - Nariman’s biological daughter, Roxana - lives with her husband and two sons in the two rooms flat Nariman purchased as Roxana’s dowry. Nariman Vakeel is celebrating his seventy-nine birthday. Yezad and Roxana bought a walking stick as a gift on the seventy-nine birthday of Nariman. Coomy says that the walking stick is a sign of how inconsiderable you are. “Never were you like this, not till you got married and left. Now you have no concern for how we live or die. And that hurts me!”

Nariman complains to Coomy, “In my youth, my parents controlled me and destroyed those years. Thanks to them, I married your mother and wrecked my middle years. Now you want to torment my old age. I won’t allow it.” Nariman, in his youth, loved a Christian girl called Lucy. But due to Parsi religion they could not marry. About eleven years Nariman and Lucy had planned to create a world for themselves. Lucy called it Cocoon. “A cocoon was what they needed, she said, into which they could retreat, and after their families had forgotten their existence, they would emerge like two glistening butterflies and fly away together.” At last Nariman refused the idea to get marry with Lucy.

Coomy schemes to make sure that Roxana is forced to care for her father in her tiny flat while she and Jal live in the relatively enormous family apartment, pretending that it is disintegrating and not fit for their father to live in. Nariman, a former professor, says, “To so many classes I taught Lear, learning nothing myself. What kind of teacher is that, as foolish at the end of his life as at the beginning? . . . Don’t worry, this Lear will go home again.” Roxana is Cordelia to Nariman’s Lear, the most favored daughter who finds that Coomy, at least, is quite insincere to her father. Indeed, this family has its share of filial ingratitude and betrayal.

Couldn’t this be any elderly gentleman forced to live on his children’s kindness? Yes and no. In every part of the world, families are making decisions and taking certain degrees of responsibility for their elders. But this story is still utterly Indian and there is no question about whether Mistry is the deserving recipient of the Kiriya award. While the story of taking care of our aging and dying elders is a worldwide issue, the minutia of this family’s daily life is distinctly Indian. Bombay’s train system, arranged marriages, unending corruption of government, religious discrimination, exploding pressure-cookers full of curry, Catholics vs. non-Catholics in a cricket match, pollution and jewel toned saris, extremists whose goal it is to abolish Valentine’s day and attack Muslims, children escaping into an Enid Blyton book to fantasize about the sort of British that aren’t even in England. . . the beauty and the agony of India act almost as another character in the story. In a recent NPR interview, Mistry states

that he has never taken care of a dying parent - surprising after reading the details and humanity of Nariman's Parkinson's disease - but relates that having elderly and dying family members in close contact is a way of life when one grows up in India. There simply aren't many other options if you aren't wealthy there. And so, while the minutia of a family's life and struggles are often mundane, Mistry masterfully weaves a reality that is both compelling and easy to relate to.

Roxana's husband, Yezad, works for a sporting goods emporium and has, in the past, eloquently written for permission to immigrate his family to Canada. Mistry himself immigrated to Canada some twenty years ago, as part of the nearly subconscious desire in India to find better opportunity in the West. Everyone in Yezad's family is proud of their Persian heritage and their Persian reputation for honesty and loyalty. And yet nearly each person in the family is lured by temptation into something illegal to make an extra rupee or two for the family's monthly budget. One school-aged son saves his bus fare and walks to and from school; another, the teacher's pet and Homework Monitor, surprises and disgusts himself by accepting bribes from his classmates: improving their marks and adding to his mother's grocery and gas funds.

By living with his father-in-law in cramped quarters for several months, Yezad grows from a moody and resentfully uninvolved husband to a sweet and caring son to Nariman. He comments on the beauty of helping the elderly find comfort in their deaths: "Strange trip, this journey toward death. No way of knowing how much longer for the chief... a year, two years? But Roxana was right, helping your elders through it - that was the only way to learn about it. And the trick was to remember it when your own time came..."

19.4 *Such a Long Journey*

19.4.1 Analysis of the Story

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* is a fascinating story of Gustad Noble, a man, who tries to cope with life's multilayered difficulties. "Tall and broad – shouldered, Gustad was the envy and admiration of friends and relatives, when ever health or sickness was being discussed." Although he had met with a serious accident just a few years ago. Even that left him with "nothing graver than a slight limp." In this novel Mistry returns to Bombay and Parsi world. He had very overtly attempted to deconstruct and repossess his past. The novel presents Mistry's vision of multicultural society and place of minorities in it. The backdrop of the novels is the 1971 Indo-Pak war resulting in the creation of Bangladesh. An intermingling of religion is depicted with a real incident of Sohrab, Nagarwala, who was at the centre of Sixty Lack rupee scam which had rocked the Indira Gandhi government. The chief protagonist, Gustad Noble, an ageing Parsi living with his family in Khodabad building finds himself involved in the Indian politics unwillingly.

In the opening of the novel Gustad seems to be a God fearing man, the envy of all. The novel opens with a scene of morning in which Gustad Noble the protagonist of the novel is performing his prayers. He is facing eastward to offer his orisons to Ahura Mazda. His wife Dilnavaz is going to take milk from *bhaiya*. They are living in Khodadad Building. In the first chapter Mistry introduces his third character Miss Kutpitia. She berates *bhaiya*, milkman, for adding water in the milk. But nobody considers her berate considerable because she never brought the *bhaiya*'s milk herself. Dilnavaz is also waiting there for her turn with aluminum pan in one hand and money in another to buy sickly, watered-down, white fluid milk. She remembers the day when they can afford to buy the fine creamy

product of Parsi Dairy farm. Gustad remembers his grandfathers' furniture workshop: Noble & sons, Makers of fine furniture and how bankruptcy seized everything. He got few pieces of furniture with the help of his friend Malcolm in the old van. He also remembers his other friend Major Bilimoria and his letter which he received now for a favour. Gustad is very happy because his eldest son gets admission in IIT. When he sees blackout paper on the glass pane of the windows he remembers Indo-China war 1961. He wants to wake up Sohrab for his result but he leaves him sleeping. Gustad also remembers his close friend Major Jimmy Bilimoria who has gone away without telling anything. The novel is set in 1971, the year in which partition of Bangladesh take place.

Gustad is a bank employee and father of three children, two sons: Sohrab, nineteen, Darius fifteen and a daughter Roshan nine years old. In Gustad's life, two events are very much significant; his father's bankruptcy and childhood experience at Matheran involving the broken bowl. Gustad associates sensual qualities with the memory of his father's bankruptcy not only does it have the sound of a deadly virus it also feels cold a chisel. What temporarily succumb to the clutches of Bankruptcy are Gustad's plans of attending university, something which would enhance his career prospects considerably. Instead of being able to focus on his degree in relative material security, Gustad is forced to earn money in order to finance his studies.

Apart from the bankruptcy the broken bowl of Matheran points to a second instance where Gustad's life becomes questionable. Gustad remembers how at the end of a childhood. Holiday at Matheran, edible pudding bowl is broken and eaten by the manager of the hotel. This at first sight, trivial incident resurfaces frequently in Gustad's remembrance:

And then the bowl was broken and eaten, I here was something so final and terrible about the act. And when the book store was bankrupt and bailiff arrived, I remembered the broken bowl... the men continuing their task dismantling papa's life, breaking it up into little pieces.... And remembering the dinner of the broken bowl- such a terrible final act.

The breaking of bowl as well as the bankruptcy signifies a boy's first encounter with destruction and life's complexity. Things start in their usual smoothness. Gustad is seen offering his orisons to Ahura Mazda. His son Sohrab gets admission to IIT, a symbol of pride. Gustad plans to celebrate it on the ninth birthday of Roshan at which his very close friend Dinshawji is to be present. He brings a live chicken in the house much to the embarrassment of his wife Dilnawaz. The initial atmosphere of gaiety, humour, songs, jokes, and fun contributed by Dinshawji, followed by a good consisting of basmati rice. At the very moment Sohrab refuses to go IIT he says, "I am sick and tired of IIT, IIT, IIT all the time. I am not interested in it. I'm not going there." He had decided not to study engineering at the Indians Institute of Technology, but to stay in Bombay and complete a B.A. in literature instead. This is taken as a personal offence by Gustad and he responds "with holes in my shoes, I went to work, so we could buy almonds to sharpen his brain. At two hundred rupees a Kilo. And all wasted. All gone in the gutter water." He is disappointed to see that the plans for his son's career will not be realized.

O Dada Ormuzd, what kind of joke is this? In me when I was young, you put desire to study, get ahead, be a success. Then you took away my father's money left me rotting in the bank. And for my son? You let me arrange everything, put it within reach, but you take away his appetite for IIT. What are you telling me? Have I become too deaf to hear you? You wish I was back at the beginning without knowledge of the end. At the beginning at least there was hope. Now there's nothing nothing but sorrow.

Sohrab's deviation from Gustad's expectation seems to make life meaning less. Gustad helplessly unlocks his heart. "How to make him realize what he was doing to his father, who made the success of his son's life the purpose of his own, Sohrab had snatched away that purpose like a crutch from a cripple." Gustad wants Sohrab to attend IIT because he has dreamt of such a career himself: "All I wanted was for him to have a chance at a good career. The chance wrenched away from me." Gustad Noble does not unselfishly complain that Sohrab is deprived of a unique chance of life. At last Gustad says, "Throwing away his future without reasons what have not done for him tell me? I even threw myself in front of a car. Kicked him aside saved him life, and got this to suffer all my life."

Dinshawji is his close friend, whom he meets everyday. Gustad nurses a silent pain caused by the disappearance of his former close friend, Jimmy Bilimoria. Until one day, a message comes from Bilimoria, asking him to transfer some money to a new account. Reluctantly Gustad obliges, after having unsuccessfully tried to return the money. Bilimoria is involved in a narrative in a 'national' plot. He is arrested and imprisoned and when Gustad visit him, he listens to the helpless narrative of the dying friend and surprises that he himself has been used.

Once something is off the normal course others soon follow suit, now many things start suffering at an alarming rate. Soon Gustad has row, with Mr. Rabadi another imamate of Khodabad Building, over the letter's charge that Darius has an affair with his daughter. Gustad corners Mr Rabadi, who is called by him 'dogwalla' for his dog, Tiger, usually, keeps deposits which are copious and rather malodorous. Over Gustad's vinca and sukfa bushes, Gustad's fortune is the coming of the long – awaited package from Bilimoria. The House of Cages is introduced through Gustad's family problems relating to Roshan's illness. Little Roshan is taken to Dr. Paymaster who has his dispensary in the near the House of Cages. It is also the House of Cages that Ghulam Mohammed has his headquarters and where Gustad meets him to return Bilimoria's money. Between Doctors Paymaster's dispensary and the House of Cages is working-class India. It is the place where Gulam Mohammed handover the package of money to Gustad Noble. The package turns out to be a huge sum of Ten Lakh Rupees to be deposited in a bank in the name of one Mira Obili. The whole thing makes both Gustad and Dilnavaz's hair stand erect, who do not know how to hide such a huge amount. And even before the amount is deposited, the secret of the money being received is smelt out by others. Gustad feels it at ease when Tehmul tells the inspector that the former has the amount of money in his flat. Bilimorian gets four years imprisonment and while serving his term, he dies of heart attack and his funeral takes place at Tower of Silence.

The circumstances keep on taking their own course. Roshan's condition improves and she is ready for her school. Sohrab as usual pays his visit to his mother during the office hour of his father. Dilnavaz informs Sohrab about the death of Dinshawji, all about Ghulam Mohammad and tragic death of Major Bilimoria. She also implores Shorab to stay and talk to his father nicely. Sohrab realized that he is responsible for the latter's unhappiness. He reacts as "it's no use I spoil all his dreams, he is not interested me any more." Dilnavaz responds his comments in the following way "So much has happened since you left, Daddy has change. It will be different now."

He attempts to improve the living conditions of the residents of Khodadad building by pavement artist to paints the wall of their compound. The threat to the wall is captured early in the novel: "... dinner was quite a challenge, with flies buzzing and hovering over the food, and mosquitoes dive-bombing everywhere. Roshan shrieked each time one landed on her plate, while Darius tested his reflexes by

trying to each them on the wing. 'Shut all the window tight', said Gustad, 'and we'll kill the ones inside'. Everyone was sweating in the heat before long, however, and the windows had to be opened." The pavement artist first comes to Gustad's attention when he is rushing to the bank to deposit Bilimoria first installment. This is his impression of the artist. The pavement artist did not show one religion on one day "it was elephant-headed Ganesh, given of wisdom and success; next day it could be Christ hanging of the cross; and the office crowds blissfully tossed coins upon the pictures. The artist had chosen his spot well. He sat cross-legged and gathered the wealth descending from on high. Pedestrians were careful with his square of pavement; this hallowed ground, as long as it displayed the deity of the day. This wall becomes the focus of municipal attention and will be witness to the final movement of the novel. The compound wall about to be broken by a team of municipal, workers under the command of Malcolm Saldanha, and destruction is checked by a morcha jointly formed by people from all walks of life ranging from doctor to prostitutes to snake charmers and paanwallas. So an exchange of abusive words ensues and morcha's insistence that the wall be kept intact is not listed to by the municipal workers who proceed with go head signal from the authority. The heated debate culminates in stone throwing. Excited at the sight of the flying missiles Tehmul Lungraa goes out and is targeted and falls flat with a broken for head and succumbs to the injury instantly. Taking the dead body inside the room of Tehmul, Gustad prays, one Yatha Ahur Varya five times and Ashem Vhoo three times with tears from his eyes.

At this moment Gustad comes out of himself to be one with death and one with life. He prays for all, cries for all for him for Tehmul, for Jimmy, for Dinshawji, for his papa, mama for grandpa and grandma all who had to wait for so long. Gustad turns around, he saw his son standing in the doorway; and each held other's eyes. Still he sat gazing upon his son and Sohrab waited, motionless in the doorway, till at last Gustad goes to him slowly. Then he went up and put his arms around him. Then the novel ends with hope. The present dissertation is a modest attempt to decipher at hatching the graph of human values in Rohinton Mistry with special reference to his novel *Such a Long Journey*.

19.4.2 Development of the Theme

Many critics have pointed out one of the central themes of Mistry's novel is loss. Loss in *Such a Long Journey* must be understood in a broad sense of the word. The novel explores implication of loss on a literal as well as on a metaphorical level. The scope of loss probed in *Such a Long Journey* encompasses the loss of material possessions as well as the loss of people by death or estrangement. Gustad Noble is faced with his family's impoverishment in the course of his father's bankruptcy. However he also has to cope with the death of his friends Jimmy, Dinshawji and Tehmul. Moreover loss of Gustad also entails a feeling of alienation of dissatisfaction with the present. The semantics of loss imply a dispossession against the subjects will the result of which can be poverty, isolation, confusion, disillusionment, disenchantment. It is clear through the following detail the causes and effects of loss making its impact on the protagonist of *Such a Long Journey*.

The past is of special relevance to Gustad in *Such a Long Journey*. Two events are significant in this context: his father's bankruptcy and a childhood experience at Matheran involving a broken bowel. Gustad associates sensual qualities with the memory of his father's bankruptcy. The destructive character of this event is not merely conveyed by sound and touch however. The chisel as a tool instrumental in tearing down buildings also deserves mention in this context.

The bankruptcy sees Gustad's family at the receiving end of fate's whims. *Such a Long Journey* illustrates how the vagaries of life can invert position of control. The broken of the bowl as well as the bankruptcy signifies a boy's first encounter with destruction and life's complexity. Gustad's insight indicates an imitation into adulthood. The situations of the reality principal into an ideal childhood world lead to disenchantment.

As a matter of fact braking is the leitmotiv through the novel. The breaking of the bowl is indicative of the workings of destructive forces on human for example his father's business that is reduced to, "the shambles of what had one been the finest book star in the country." In the wake of the bankruptcy, human resources are sapped. The break down of the condition and routines of every day life has far reaching consequence for the sup. An indicator for the ramifications of this fundamental drawn of meaning is provided by one of Gustad's flash back at an early stage of novel. "Sleep was no longer a happy thing for him then, but a time when all anxieties intensified, and anger, grew-a strange, unfocused anger-and helplessness and he would wake up exhausted to course the day that was drawing."

Such a Long Journey is a narrative about the importance of memory. Matheran becomes a reentering sort for Gustad, i.e. a place where an individual or a collective history is subject to discontinuity and fragmentation. When Gustad visits Jimmy in Delhi, he recalls his father's bankruptcy, he remembers that broken bowl of Matheran. Gustad draws analogies between the two events in such a way that the memory of childhood experience at Matheran can be said to provide a fail for the memory of childhood experience of bankruptcy. The experience of bankruptcy, in turn, comes to haunt Gustad when he visits Jimmy in New Delhi and meets a certain Mr. Kashyap who had metal elects on his heels, and his steps rang out on the stone floor. He reminds him of the bankruptcy bailiff, "the cleats on is shoes were clattering brazenly on the stone floor." The effect of his remembrance is "a feeling of profound loss and desolation of emptiness." Matheran, the bankruptcy and the visit to Delhi have some thing in common in that they have not been overcome by Gustad. They all are unpleasant incidents haunting the past and present idylls of Gustad's life with the threat of disintegration. The Bankruptcy and Matheran represent poverty and disenchantment for Gustad Noble and as such are responsible for the loss of the innocence of a happy childhood.

Gustad faces loss in his life by the death of his friends. Gustad's friends do not belong to the socio-cultural majority of Bombay. Malcolm Saldanha helped Gustad after his father's bankruptcy. But in the course of time the two of them have drifted apart. When Gustad and Malcolm meet again after a long time, Gustad seems to find hope in their renewed friendship. As Malcolm Saldanha only carries out the order of an anonymous municipal bureaucracy, it could be argued that is as much a victim of the unpredictabilities and vagaries of life as Gustad. Unable to keep separate of occupational and the private spheres characterizing social life, he blames Malcolm for destroying their friendship. The effects are dramatic in that Gustad apparently loses faith that loss of meaning due to fast and seemingly change can efficiently be opposed by the social system of friendship.

Jimmy is virtually omnipresent in Gustad's and Gulaam's memories and anecdotes his physical absence does not preclude his narrative presence. When Gustad is drawn into the political scandal, surrounding Bilimoria the emphasis is at least as much feelings of betrayal as it is on the marginalisation of the Parsi community and the stories of India history they circulate. Gustad's friendship to Bilimoria, who killed trust, love respect, everything is strained because solidarity appears unreliable Gustad feels

That some vital part of him had been crushed to nothingness. Years of friendship swam before

his eyes and filled the piece of paper, it taunted him, made him turned him into a gigantic canvas of lies and deceit. What kind of world is this, and what kind of men who can behave in such a fashion?

In Gustad's opinion, Jimmy has violated a universal code of behaviour that confronts Gustad with a decay of values. Where as the friendship between Gustad and Malcolm have been eroded by alienation Gustad's friendship to Dinshawji and Tehmul are eventually ended by death. Responsible for a loss of meaning in the context is not the failure of friendship but death. Dinshawji's death comes to signify the end of comic relief; where as the death of childlike Tehmul can be understood death of innocence. Dinshawji risks his job for Gustad by opening and closing a bank account with illegal money. While Tehmul provides meaning as a surrogate son to Gustad after Sohrab has moved out. Their death is not only an impoverishment of Gustad's life.

Equally important for an understanding loss of meaning in Gustad's life as the implication of his friendship is the alienation from his eldest son Sohrab. Sohrab's decision not to study at the IIT but to stay in Bombay and complete a B.A. in Literature instead is taken as personal offence by Gustad. His reaction towards his son's plans is reflected by an intertextual reference to King Lear. It gives a pervasive theme of problematic relationship between father and his child. Gustad Noble, who apparently has a high esteem of the arts, interprets Soharab's decision as "filial desire pact and ingratitude." He is disappointed that the plans for his son's career will not be realized.

How many years have I watched over Sohrab and waited. And now I wish I was back at the beginning without knowledge of the end. At the beginning at least there was hope. Now there is nothing. Nothing but sorrow.

In a nut shell it has been quite proved that the theme loss of meaning totally related to the *Such a Long Journey*. In whole life of Gustad proves himself best by various aspects in the form of good father a good friend and a good husband. He always searches out of his real identity. He lost his friends Dinshawji, Bilimoria, Malcolm and Tehmul. They played an important role in his life. He also lost good life in his previous days due to bankruptcy and life becomes struggle at last. Gustad wants Sohrab to attend IIT because he has dreamt of such a career himself. But with the refusal of Sohrab, he lost his dream and feels betrayed, because he himself is deprived of a source of meaning.

19.5 Critical Responses to Mistry

For the most part Mistry's work has been very well received by critics. However, it has also generated some controversy, both inside and outside India. Like Jewish Canadian writer Mordicai Richler, who provoked the ire of his community through his representations, Mistry has provoked the Parsi community with his sometimes biting representations of the Parsi life in Bombay. Other critics from outside of India – both Indian and non-Indian – have also faulted him for his representations of India and Indians in general. Perhaps the most controversial criticism was launched against *A Fine Balance* by Australian feminist critic Germain Greer. After proclaiming her absolute hatred for the book, Greer faulted Mistry for not representing Bombay realistically: "I just don't recognize this dismal, dreary city. It's a Canadian book about India. What could be worse? What could be more terrible?" Mistry's response was two-pronged. First, he publicly questioned whether Greer's four month stint teaching upper-class women in Bombay qualified her to make such a sweeping judgement of his representations. Then he responded by satirizing the incident and ridiculing such western reactions in

Family Matters.

Greer's reaction to Mistry's representations highlights another issue, the fact that he writes in a traditional realist mode at a time when magic realism seems to be in vogue in postcolonial writing, and criticism on that writing. His writing is intensely realistic, intensely descriptive – which in part might explain the reaction of his critics. Details of daily life and the cultural particularities of Parsi faith are often interwoven with representations of squalor, brutality, sexuality, and bodily functions. Given his realistic representations of the latter, one might be tempted to compare him with V. S. Naipaul, who, in *An Area of Darkness*, seemed to equate public manifestations of bodily functions in India with moral and social depravity of the people. However, such a reading ignores the carnival sequel elements of Mistry's fiction, the fact that bodily functions often hold regenerative potential; and cultural regeneration does seem to an imperative of his writing. Unsophisticated readings of his representations, tied in this case to a scholarly bias against his chosen mode of representation, might explain why, to date, so little scholarly work has been dedicated to the study of his literature despite his critical and popular reception.

A large number of critical responses to Mistry's fiction are very positive. Keith Garebian has seen his short-story collection as the first among works of short fiction to express the Parsi sensibility. Bindu Malieckal in an in-depth study grouped Mistry's work in Parsi history, folklore and social statistics. Nilufer Bharucha also contextualizes Mistry's fiction in the context of the Parsi diaspora. Robert Ross rejects this minimalism by reducing Mistry into a chronicler of Parsi life. Some critics also made comparison of his narrative styles to the classical novelists. For example, Hilary Mental sees *A Fine Balance* as “an intensely angry book, a political novel that pulls no punches” that works with “cyclical pattern(s) of disaster in which Mistry has trapped his characters.” Sharmani Patricia-Gabriel suggests that *A Fine Balance* appears to have been influenced by the narrative concerns of nineteenth century European social realism in its power of detail and intensity of engagement. Amin Malak looks at ‘The Shahrazadic tradition’ in Mistry. This is also acknowledged by the critic Arun Mukherjee who argues that “to do full justice to *Such a Long Journey*, it is important to know the history of the Parsi community.” In his novels, Mistry has ideological concerns, which make him one of the foremost Indian English political novelists of the 1990s. His writing concerns people who try to find self-worth while dealing with painful family dynamics and difficult social and political constraints. His work also addresses immigration, especially immigration to Canada, and the difficulty immigrants' face in a society. Some critics pointed out his inability in portraying the typical complex women characters.

19.6 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we can say that Mistry tries to evolve the Indian image objectively. He, emphasizing the defect of vision, the racial sense and the symbolic actions of Indians, also narrates the mental conflicts and confusions. Mistry's works, pregnant with autobiographical undertones, examines not only the colonial background of India but also the Post-independence Emergency period. He also focuses on the Sino-India and Indo-Pak wars and the religious sentiments and superstitions. It is noteworthy that Mistry also encounters the age-old culture and civilization of Indian sub-continent and views profoundly the dramatic changes occurring in the social, political and cultural atmosphere of India. It is Mistry's unmistakable yearning to go back to his roots nostalgically that finds its multiple expressions in his fiction and short stories. In his writings, he desires to go back to his roots and during the course of narration. Mistry also images India in its multifaceted complexities and realities. He perceives India minutely with a critical viewpoint in his works. Though he is not settled in India and is an expatriate

writer, yet he visited India many a time to give his imaginations and perceptions a concrete shape. While dismissing Indian way of life, he has criticized many persons and issues, their lack of vision, people's nostalgia for Indian culture and civilization, various religious concepts and their negative and positive effects on Indian masses. The manner in which the characters and events are skillfully linked together to run into a stream of stories brings Mistry very close to Chaucer. In his vision of life also Mistry, like the Greeks, believes that the malignant power and the Immanent will stand firmly against the plans of the frail and feeble creature called man. Like Hardy, he also opines that man is bound to the wheel of destiny. But the message conveyed by him is not that of a pessimist; rather it is that of a melliorist. Though Mistry shows a consciousness for political, social and historical events of a particular time of India and its event, he is not a political or social propagandist like Shaw; he emerges as a progressive writer.

19.7 Review Questions

1. Discuss the theme of Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*.
2. Write a note on Rohinton Mistry as a novelist.
3. Write a note on the contribution of Rohinton Mistry to literature.
4. Discuss the critical responses of critics towards Mistry.

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UNIT-20

ROHINTON MISTRY : *SUCH A LONG JOURNEY* (II)

Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Analysis of the novel
 - 20.2.1 Indian Elements
 - 20.2.2 Human Bonds and Sympathy
 - 20.2.3 Spiritual Exploration
- 20.3 Characterization
 - 20.3.1 Gustad Noble
 - 20.3.2 Dilnavaz
 - 20.3.3 Miss Kutpitia
 - 20.3.4 Other Characters
- 20.4 Narrative Devices
 - 20.4.1 Diction
 - 20.4.2 Irony and Humour
- 20.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.6 Review Questions
- 20.7 Bibliography

20.0 Objectives

This unit aims at helping the students to make an assessment of various aspects of the *Such a Long Journey*. The unit focuses on how Mistry's creative ability works in

- modifying Indian elements
- creating cultural & superstitious views
- narrative devices
- developing his characters
- creating human bonds

20.1 Introduction

Shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize, *Such a Long Journey* manages luminously to

portray Indian culture and family life surroundings it against the milieu of the subcontinent's unstable postcolonial politics. The action takes place in 1971 in Bombay at the moment when war breaks out between India and Pakistan, over what is to become Bangladesh. However the other historical events such as Indo-Pak war 1965 and Indo-China War 1962 also occur in the novel. This political backdrop is the canvas upon which the troubled life of Gustad Noble and family is played out. He is the undisputed protagonist of the novel. Mistry expertly marries the major events in India with those in the private field of the Noble family and of the other important characters in the novel. When it was published, this first novel earned itself the Governor General's Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the best book of the year.

20.2 Analysis of the novel

20.2.1 Indian Elements

Rohinton Mistry while living in his adopted home writes more authentically about his Indian experience before going to Canada. He in his fiction not only portrays the picture of social and political life but also offers commentary on his historical situation. His writing concerns people, who are dealing with painful family dynamics and difficult social and political constants. The present section describes the social, political, and historical elements in *Such a Long Journey*.

A. Social Elements

Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* is a fascinating story of Gustad Noble, a moral man, who tries to cope with life's multi-layered difficulties. In the novel Gustad Noble, the protagonist, is a man swimming in the tide water of his fifth decade of life. Through this novel Rohinton Mistry portrays the real picture of middle class family, which have to face hardships and problems in the society.

In the beginning of the novel past is of special relevance to Gustad. Gustad faces many hardships at the time of his father's bankruptcy. Not only does it have the sound of deadly virus it also feels cold as a chisel what temporarily succumbs to the clutches of bankruptcy. He plans of attending university, something which would enhance his career prospects considerably. Bankruptcy is a disrupting incident indeed. Gustad's hopes for promising future and radically changes the course of life. Instead of being able to focus on his studies, Gustad is forced to earn money. His wife Dilnavaz draws a line of difference between the past and present. She says there were days when she and Gustad could afford to buy the fine creamy product of Parsi dairy Farm but now they only bring water milk from *bhaiya*. Due to the economics hardships, her daughter does never have a doll in her life. Poverty haunts Gustad's life in another form when his daughter Roshan's illness continues and financial constraints circumstances compel Gustad to sell his camera and his wife also has to sell her gold marriage bangles. Here we see the typical real conditions of a middle class family due to economic hardships.

On the other side all the events of life both the present and past are wrapped with set back. He has a very few happy intervals in his life. For a while, he feels happy to see favourable developments and very soon they are followed by adverse encounters. Sohrab refuses to go to IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) Sohrab's decision not to study engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology but to stay in Bombay and complete a B.A. in literature instead is taken as personal offence. He says, "With holes in my shoes, I want to work, so we could buy almonds to sharpen his brain at two hundred rupees a

kilo. And all wasted, all gone in the gutter water.” Sohrab’s deviation from Gustad’s expectation seems to make life meaningless. Gustad helplessly unlocks his heart; How to make him realize, what he was doing in his father, who had made the success of his sons life, the purpose of his own? Gustad wants Sohrab to attend IIT because he has dreamt to such a career himself. Gustad says, “All, I wanted was for him to have a chance at a good career, the chance wrenched away from me.” At last Gustad says “Throwing away his future without – reason what have not done for him tell me? I even threw myself in front of a car. Kicked him aside, saved his life and got this to suffer all my life.”

The life of Gustad becomes worse and worse after the death of his friends Major Bilimoria, Dinshawji and Tehmul. At last the novel ends with a hope for future. The novel represents the picture of middle class Parsi family in Bombay.

B. Political Elements

Rohinton Mistry is a writer for whom India is important as a subject matter. India or more specifically, Bombay is a resource for Mistry that he draws on in every piece of fiction he has published Bombay as the place, where he was born, is not only a city that he knows intimately but is also the city that is home to the Parsi community.

Bombay of *Such a Long Journey* is shaken by the rise of the Shiv Sena, a local party with considerable influence in Maharashtra. Founded in 1966, the party started out as a small faction advocating the reservation of jobs in the lower ranks of white – collar workers. The name of the party translates as ‘Army of Shiva’ a name drawing attention to its radical religious motivation. The Shiv Sena is a right wing Hindu organization that openly advocates racist goals and agitates against south Indian immigrants mostly from Tamilnadu, who are blamed for the scarcity of jobs in Bombay.

Mistry shows that Indian national identity construction relies on a strategy of othering that threatens to victimize the Parsis. The Shiv Sena in *Such a Long Journey* is resented by the character as a very real threat to a distinct Parsi identity. Dinshawji the protagonist’s confidant, fears that the “Shiv Sena would not stop till they have complete Maratha Raj. With their Maratha for the Mararashtrians nonsense.” Remembering how followers of Shiv Sena abused members of Parsi community as “Parsi crow eaters.” Thereby mocking the community’s burial rites, Dinshawji fears that the Parsis might become second class citizens in the near future. Of central importance to Shiv Sena agitation are issues of languages and language planning the party advocates a translations of English road names in to Marathi and overlooks the effects that such a step has on the former colonial elite of the Parsi responding to Gustad’s remarks. What is in name? Dinshawji argues:

Names are so important. I grew upon Lamington Dada Sahib BhadKamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac road. Now suddenly it is a Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live on Sleater road. Soon that will also disappear. My whole life, I have come to work at Flora Fountain. At one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have life? Was I living the wrong life with all wrong names? Will I get a second chance to life at all again with these new? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out just like that? Tell me.

In order to construct a post colonial Indian identity, the British street names, so important to Dinshawji, have been altered by the Indian administration. Parsi laments the departure of the colonizers. Thus, Dinshawji, raised and socialized within an anglophile tradition, severely attacks the Shiv Sena’s

re-appropriation of street names and takes issue with its psychological consequences. The change of names does not only lead to problem of spatial orientation but also refers to the troublesome implications that the building of the Indian nation – state has for a distinct Parsi identity.

Both the Shiv Sena and the Parsis realize that the struggle for language is important because it is tied up with issues of identity. If Dinshawji discusses language to express, his worries for the future of the Parsi community, Gustad noble, the novel's protagonist reflects on community's prosperous status too. "What kind of life was Sohrab going to look forward? No future for minorities with all these fascist to? Shiv Sena politics and Marathi language nonsense, it was going to be like the Black people in America twice as good as the white man to get half as much." This passage betrays the Parsi community's little fears and anxieties. This assessment is problematic as it patronizes and therefore distorts the scope of Gustad's foreboding if the Shiv Sena manages to active its goals and puts its plans into practice. Sohrab's future in Bombay will become insecure indeed. A close look reveals that Sohrab's situation is characterized by a dilemma and that his position might become dangerous if he remains in Bombay. Therefore given the openly racist attitude of the party, Gustad seems to imply that the only way out for Sohrab was emigration. However pointing out, the condition to others who have to be "twice as good as the white man to get half as much." Migration and Diaspora are at the something rejected as viable opportunities for a good life.

Such a Long Journey partakes of a relativist frame of reference also by virtue of its Meta-historical exploration of late 20th century Indian history. 1971, the year in which the novel is set, saw India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in political trouble. Ved Prakash Malhotra, then chief Cashier of India's State bank claimed to have heard a phone call from Indira Gandhi, instructing him to pay 6 million rupees for the Bangladesh freedom movement to a courier who would identify himself a Bangladesh Ka Babu (gentlemen from Bangladesh). The man turned out the Rustom Sohrab Nagarwala, a Parsi and former army captain who had worked for Indian intelligence.

The Cashier complied but went to the police later on. Nagarwala was caught shortly afterwards and later claimed to have mimicked Indira's voice. After a hasty trial of three days, he was sentenced to four years imprisonment and died in jail in 1972 under the mysterious circumstances. Sohrab Nagarwala finds expression in *Such a Long Journey* as Major Jimmy Bilimoria. Jimmy Bilimoria is a RAW officer. Gustad gets a letter from Jimmy, who desired Gustad to receive a parcel from him. Gustad does so in the name of his friendship. The parcel contains ten lakh rupees which are to be deposited in the bank in an account held under the name of non existent woman Mira Obili. Gustad accomplished this task with the help of Dinshawji. After some days Jimmy wants the money back. After that Gustad makes a trip to Delhi to meet Bilimoria, who wants to tell him all that had happen. It is a big fraud of Sixty Lakh Rupees in which Prime Minister gets directly involved. Bilimoria is asked to get the money from the Cashier of SBI bank on an emergency basis to finance the gorilla training pending officials sanction by impersonalizing Prime Minister's voice on telephone. After that Major Bilimoria is asked to write a confession, which he did without any second thought. But as soon as the money was received, Prime Minister's office intercepted the money before it was used for the original purpose. Before long Bilimoria was arrested and kept under detention and tortured until he returned the money. Bilimoria gets four year's imprisonment and while serving his term he dies of heart attack and his funeral at tower of silence takes place.

C. Historical Elements

As far as the history is concerned Rohinton Mistry focuses on the Indian past and gives an account of Indo-China war (1962) and Indo Pak war (1948). The Indo-Chine war 1962 is one of the major incidents after the independence. *Such a Long Journey* begins with the practice taken nine years before by the people in order to escape the target of the enemy. In order to prevent Khodadad Building from becoming a potential target for the enemies strikes, Gustad covered the windows of his flat with black out paper nine years ago. It has not been removed for years, although the danger has long ceased to be imminent.

The Novel tells us the history that how India was deceived by China by proclaiming peace and brotherhood. There was no sign of any type of disturbance between the two countries. India was repeatedly announcing the favourable slogan *Hindi-Chinee-bhai bhai* indicating that Chou-en-lai was not Indian's enemy so, both the nations India and China had harmonious relationships. It was shocking the Chinese started coming over the mountain that divides India and China. The Prime Minister was in a fix to know that many Chinese divisions were positioned along the border. On October 26, 1962 the centre announced that India is being put on a war footing to face the Chinese men. Everywhere "People talking of nothing but the way the Chinese had consisted of Soldiers."

Gustad remembers the year: "what a dreadful year 1962 had been. And such a humiliating defeat." Then the finance minister Morarji Desai flagged of the national defense fund with an appeal to the people to contribute generously in rupees, gold or gold ornaments. The political parties were the requesting to people "to be as selfless as the Jawans who were reddening the Himalayan now with their precious blood to defend Bharat Mata." And people contributed with patriotic fervor the fund raising politicians – started to collect the fund from public with their speeches. Rohinton Mistry describes the people's patriotic fervour. The political parties were driving or crisscross to collect the fund from the people. People were giving their blankets, sweaters scarves, and women gave gold bangles and ear ring and finger rings from their person and gave them away for the sake of the country.

The following examples tell the patriotic feeling and generous support for the country: an eighty year old peasant, who traveled to New Delhi, clutching her two gold weddings bangles which she presented to mother India for the war effort. The school children were donating their lunch money. The farmers were working hard to grow more food for the country. The political parties in favour of Congress were praising the government's heroic stance while the opposition parties were denouncing its competency for sending brave Indian Jawans with outdated weapons and summer loathing to die in the Himalayas at Chinese hands. "It was said that some of the donated goods had turned up for sale in Chor Bazaar and Nul Bazaar and in the stalls of road side hawkers every where."

Such a Long Journey contains the Indo-Pak war of 1948 in the history after the independence between the two newly separated countries which is again an important subject. The war was first fought between India and Pakistan over the issue of Kashmir. In the novel Major Jimmy Bilimoria loves to regale Sohrab and Darius with tales from his days of army and battle. Major tells them that the defeat of Pakistanis: "They got drunk and began to loot the first village they passed through, instead of pushing on the attack the capital they hocked up their victims and went from house to house in search of money and jewels and women. All their fun games."

The second Indo-Pak war was fought again over the issue of Kashmir between April and

September 1965. At this time Lal Bahadur Shastri was the Prime-Minister of India after the death of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. It was on September 22 that the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed a resolution to call for an unconditional cease fire from both nations. The Soviet Union led by Premier Alexey Kosygin brooked cease fire in Tashkent (Now in Pakistan) Shastri boarded a plane for Tashkent where Kosygin had offered to negotiate peace, between India and Pakistan. India's Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistani president Ayub Khan signed an agreement to withdraw to Pre-August lines no later than Feb 25, 1966. Related to this war the important set back was the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri. Mistry seems to say that India won the war in field but lost on the table and Prime Minister could not tolerate this agreement made in disguise. Dr. Paymaster gives a short account of the night of agreement; "The night the Tashkent declaration was signed, Shastri died on Soviet Soil less than eighteen months after he became Prime Minister." There were various beliefs of Shastri's death; the authorities announced that Prime Minister died because of heart attack. But some said he had been killed by Pakistanis and others suspected Russian Riot. There was also a popular belief that "it was the new Prime Minister's supporters who poisoned Shastri."

The third Indo-Pak war was fought on December 3, 1971. Mistry presents the reason of war by going back to the colonial history of these two nations. With the end of the British rule in August 1947, partition of India took place and the Muslim majority constituted a separate country: Pakistan. The western zone was popularly termed West Pakistan and Eastern zone was initially termed East Bengal and later East Pakistan. The two zones were separated by several thousand miles of India territory. They were also different from each other culturally. The west zone dominated the country, leading to the effective marginalization of the east zone. The difference was changed into a civil war. East Pakistan wanted to come in India. It is described by this following example in *Such a Long Journey*. Gustad's daughter Roshan defines the meaning of refugee then he says. "They are people who ran away from East Pakistan and came to India because the people from west Pakistani are killing them and burning all their homes."

Due to the violence millions of Bangladeshis fled to neighbouring India, creating huge refugee crises there. Gustad reads the news of refugees in the newspaper. "The refugees were still coming. The official count put the figure at four and a half million but the reporter, who had returned from the refugee's camps said it was closer to seven." The country India who can not feed its own people was taking the burden of too many to feed. That's why on December 3, 1971 then Prime Minister of India declared war on Pakistan in the aid of Mukti Bahini. Indira Gandhi was the Prime-minister of India at that time.

After the involvement of India at that time the war was changed in Indo-Pak war. To see the growing involvement of India, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) launched a pre-emptive strike on India. The blackout was declared all over India. Pakistani Air Force attack failed as the Indian Air Force retaliated with much greater force. Being desperate, Pakistan launched an attack on India's western front hoping to make Indian troops retreat from East Pakistan. The Indians replied the Pakistani invasion with Mukti Bahini. Indian force won; their abettors surrendered to joint force and were taken prisoner by the Indian Army. The war resulted in Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan. After the enemies unconditional surrender, the war was ended with India's great victory.

20.2.2 Human Bonds and Sympathy

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary bonds means something that forms a

connection between people or groups, such as a feeling of friendship or shared ideas and experiences while portraying the life of his character; Mistry also shows the various kinds of bonds that develop between the major and minor characters of the novel. The bond of friendship between Gustad and Major Jimmy Bilimoria finds expression in the flashback of the novel. Gustad considers him as the second father of his children. Jimmy Bilimoria is a retired army officer who lives in Khodadad building. Gustad remembers the days when they used to perform prayer together. When Gustad met with an accident, it was Major Jimmy Bilimoria who saved his life. Gustad remembers those days. "This is the man who once carried me like a baby into Madhiwalla Bonesters clinic? Who could beat me at arm-wrestling as of ten as I beat him?" Suddenly Major left Khodadad building. It was unbearable for him. It is because of this event, Gustad does not allow Sohrab to do B.A. with his friends, after some time Gustad came to know, through a letter that Major is working as a RAW officer. He sends a package of ten lakh rupees for Gustad, so that he can live a good life. Due to fraud of ten lakh rupees, he has been arrested by the police. Gustad goes to Delhi to meet him. Gustad becomes very sympathetic when he finds Major on bed. "On the bed lay nothing more than a shadow, the shadow of the powerfully built army man who once lived in Khodabad building"

Through their friendship Rohinton Mistry presents the bond of friendship and sympathy, which develop between these characters as well. It is because of this bond of friendship; Jimmy does not mention the name of Gustad when he falls in trouble. On the other side, Mistry also reflects bond of friendship between Gustad and Malcolm, who was his earlier friend, during the days of his father's bankruptcy. When Gustad remembers his old days, he never forgets to remember Malcolm's friendship. He had helped Gustad's family as much as he could. He often offered Gustad a good dinner. Gustad was always welcomed at Malcolm's home. Malcolm accompanied his father, and Gustad forgot his troubles for a while. Malcolm the musician taught him to eat beef and mitigate to strain on his pocket book.

The bond of friendship between Gustad and Gulaam Mohammad also is a part of human bond. In his early days he was a taxi driver. During Gustad's accident he was with Jimmy and through his taxi he helped him to reach him Khodadad Building. After some time he meets Gustad again as a mediator of Jimmy. He gives him a package, which was sent by Jimmy. At that time their old friendship, which has been hidden in time, comes out in the light. It is also a part of human bond, in which Mistry wants to show that friendship can never be hidden by the course of time. While discussing the bond of friendship, we may also take the example of Kutpitia and Dilnavaz. The friendship between them shows that Kutpitia, who has no family, has a feeling of sympathy and wants to help Dilnavaz's family. She always tries to remove evil eye that has fallen in her family, by using her superstitious tricks. She tries her best for doing well for Dilnavaz. Besides this Gustad did not like her but she always does her best to help her family. Kutpitia's sympathy for Dilnavaz and their friendship is Indian Human Bond, which Mistry wants to show in *Such a Long Journey*.

Rohinton Mistry portrays the real sympathetic picture by his sympathetic characters of Tehmul and Gustad. Tehmul is a childlike person. He falls from the *neem* tree, which had broken his hip. His parents kept him in school hoping to salvage something. He had been happy trusting there on his little retches, and they paid his fee till the school refused to accept them anyone. His parents were long since dead and his older brother looked after his needs. In his mid-thirties he still preferred the company of children to adults. He loved following people from the compound gate to the building entrance and up

to the stairs, always wearing a big grin, till they shut the door on his face. Except Gustad none likes Tehmul, in Building Gustad always takes his side because he had sympathy and a friendly feeling for him.

Gustad always guides him. Tehmul's appreciated vocabulary always emerged at breakneck, speed whizzing in comprehensibly past the listener's ear. It was as if an internal adjustment had been made to make up for the slowness of his legs with the velocity of his tongue but the results were extreme frustration for both the listeners and Tehmul. If we consider the bond between Tehmul and Gustad, we find that it is quite different friendship. Gustad always helped Tehmul, he always listened to him and never teased him. Gustad becomes very emotional, when Tehmul dies. "Gustad slipped one arm under Tehmul's shoulder and other under his knees with a single mighty effort he rose to his feet cradling the still warm body. He took his body into Tehmul's flat."

People watched from their windows as Gustad strode under their eyes without faltering as though he and Tehmul were all alone. Some of the neighbours covered their heads and folded their hands together, when the Rawaan passed by. The following passage shows the sympathy and feeling of Gustad for him and makes a different bond of friendship between them. "With covered head he sat placing his right hand upon Tehmul's head. Tehmul hair felt stiff under his fingers, mattered where the blood had dried. He closed his eyes and began to pray softly. He recited Yatha Thu Yaryo, five tiems and Ashem Vahoo three times."

Gustad kept his eyes closed. His voice was soft and steady and his eyes closed and started a second cycle of prayer. Tears began to fell from his closed eyes. He started another cycle and yet another he could not stop tears. Mistry gives here a pathetic scene in the form of Tehmul's death. It also shows Gustad's pathos for Tehmul because he was also his friend and one by one he lost all his friends and at last Tehmul also.

Five times Yathu Ahu Yaryo and three times Ashem Vahoo. Over and over. Five and three recited repeatedly, with his right hand covering Tehmul's head Yatha Ahu Varyo and Ashem Vahoo, and the salt water of his eyes, as much for himself as for Tehmul as much for Jimmy for Dinshawji for Papa and Mamma for Grandpa and Grandma all who had wait for so long.

In *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry presents the various kinds of human bond. He shows relationship in Gustad's relation with Tehmul Dinshawji, Bilimoria Malcolm, Gulaam Muhammad and friendly relation between Dilnavaz and Kutopita. He also reflects the pathetic situation like Gustad's lament at Tehmul's death.

20.2.3 Spiritual Exploration

A. Cultural elements

In social life every individual is supposed to behave according to the expectations of the society. These expectations are based on norms and values of society. These social norms determine individuals overt acts, which, therefore, reflect values of culture which vary from society to society and thus each culture has its specific values. Rohinton Mistry in his fiction delineates from the spiritual exploration of Parsis which is a small, yet united, religious community in India. The largest Parsi community is in Bombay. There are Parsis in Karachi (Pakistan) and Bangalore (Karnataka, India). The population

of the Parsi community is diminishing due to its unwillingness to accept conversions to the faith. The Parsis maintain the importance of their purity in the face of high death rates and low birth rates.

The novel, *Such a Long Journey*, recounts the journey of Parsis who came to this land all the way from Iran in the 7th century A.D. In the Novel Gustad is proud of his ancient roots when talking to Malcolm, “But our prophet Zarathustra lived more than fifteen hundred years before your son of God was ever born.” As far as the settlement of Parsis in India is concerned, it was in 936. A.D. Parsis, named after the Persian province of Pars settled near Gujrat in North-west India. Not unlike the pilgrims, father’s journey from a hostile England towards what they hoped would become a New Jerusalem the Parsi migration from Pars to Gujarat has been the subject to mythologizing.

In particular, their arrival in Sanjan and the ensuing negotiations with the local Hindu Rajah Jadhve Rana have become one of the most widely circulated stories about the community. The Parsis were granted the right to settle on the coast of Gujarat provided they would not be disruptive to society and be willing to acculturate. The local Rajah expected them to explain their religion to him to henceforth adopt Gujarati as their native tongue to dress according to local customs, to dispense with weapons along with and to practice their faith only after nightfall, so as to avoid giving offence to the local Hindu majority. As the Parsis complied with the Rajah’s conditions, they were allowed to settle in Sanjan and since that time have proved loyal to their respective rulers.

The trajectory of the Parsis since early modern times is impressive. Starting out as a rural community consisting predominantly of farmers, weavers and carpenters, the Parsis quickly become wealthy merchants and industrialists. As a matter of fact, their rise as a community is closely connected to the British penetration of India. Parsi knowledge of trade and country became a crucial instrument in the British development of the Indian market. Dinshawji remembers the days during the British Raj. “What days those were year Parsis were the kings of banking in those days.” The country made a name of itself by serving the colonizers as cultural translations.

When the British shifted their centre of trade from Surat to Bombay, the Parsis as shipbuilders and industrious merchants were encouraged to settle there. They played an important part in the development of Bombay where they built a dockyard and owned for a long time. As a consequence of their entrepreneurial success, the Parsis become India’s most urbanized and most prosperous community. With their assistance, Bombay developed as the centre of India’s economy and industry and become the focal point of Parsi life and culture. Their being a little uncomfortable in what is now their only home in the world, does creates a sense of insecurity among them. This is evidently seen in *Such a Long Journey* when they say. “Today we have that bloody Shiv Sena wanting to make us second class citizens.” He says that there is a constant threat from Shiv Sena people to the Parsis. They say “Parsi crow eaters we will show you who is the boss” and “wait till the Marathas take over then we will have a real Gandoo Raj.”

In the past, Parsis had been in India for a thousand years and they counted themselves as Indians. On the other hand, there were also who suffered from the Indian postcolonial reality and took refuge in a glorification of the Parsi achievements of the past as well as to an uncritical nostalgia of every thing British. This process of ‘Cultural inversions’ becomes evident in Dinshawji complaint about the change of street names in *Such a Long Journey*. Dinshawji argues:

Names are so important. I grew upon Lamington road, but it has disappeared, in its place is

Devdasaheb Bhadkamkar Marg. My school was an Carnac Road. Now suddenly its on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live at Sleater Road. Soon that will also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at Elora fountain. And one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life, I have lived. Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again with these new? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out just like that? Tell me.

The novel also pays close attention to religion which plays an important role in shaping the Parsi identity. Mistry describes the Parsis as an ethno–religion minority. As Mistry’s discourse does revolve around the Parsi identity, the relevance of the Zoroastrian faith deserves mention not only as a major influence on many world religions but also as a shaping factor for the characters of *Such a Long Journey*.

It is repeatedly emphasized that Zoroastrianism is a matter of birth not of affiliation it is not acquired by the way of social system but considered an integral part of one’s genetic heritage. Among the adherents of the Zoroastrian religion, the teaching of Zoroaster occupies an exceptional position. Zoroaster is the author of the five Gathas (chatns), which are an integral part of Zoroastrian’s sacred scriptures, the Avesta. In the Gathas Zoroaster proclaimed a sole, omnipotent and the Vultures that make short business of us in life are too many and too relentless. The corpses in the Tower of Silence are lucky because they face the ordeal only once. He laughs away the tears and tortures of life. Gustad thinks about the Tower of Silence after the death of Dinshawji “and after the prayers are said the rituals performed at the Tower of Silence, the vultures will do the rest when the bones are picked clean and clean bones gone to proof Dinshawji.”

Mistry in *Such a Long Journey* even gives the geographical description of Tower of Silence “It had a little verandah in the front leading to the prayer hall and bathroom at the back where the diseased would be given the final bath of ritual purity.” Mistry also depicts Fire Temple as well as about the Tower of Silence. The Parsi worship there and perform all holy ceremonies there. They go there for prayer as Hindus go to temple. Muslims go to mosque. Without cap they can not enter in the Fire Temple. Dinshawji’s wife says to her child. “You boy without brain, she said gritting her teeth softly, in deference to the place and occasion; coming to place of prayer without prayer cap.” They go there with ‘Sukhad’ or sandal wood. The place where the fire dwelt is always a sacred and charming place. The ‘sukhad or sandal’ wood proceeds to Sanctum: “The priest picked up a silver of sandal wood dipped it in oil and held it to the flame.”

The individual contribution to the fight between good and evil eventually also entails a moral choice. ‘Asha’ implies truth, honesty, loyalty, courage and charity. Following the principle of ‘Asha’ is an ethical commitment. Man is to care for himself and his fellow human beings as creations of God. The obligation for every Zoroastrian to abide by ethically acceptable behaviour is summed up by the formula, *manashai, gavashni, kunashni*, i.e. good thoughts good words, good deeds. The emphasis on ethics also means that for a believing Zoroastrian deeds will always speak, louder than words. Man can not help the world and himself to salvation through sacrifices on magic prayer, through rites of atonement, but only through correct behaviour. In other words, for the Parsis whose reputation for honesty and propriety is a by word, truthfulness and charity are more important than regularly going to a Fire Temple to worship. This explains why the role of energy within Zoroastrianism is on the whole negligible priests, the theologians are seldom required as mediations between god and man. With the exception of burial marriage and initiation rites, the majority of rituals to be performed can be celebrated

at home. The most important of rituals to be performed can be celebrated at home. The most important ritual Zoroastrianism is the Kusti a prayer in the course of which, the threads of praying belt (kusti) are tied and united in a special order. The writer's concern for kusti is depicted through Gustad Noble in *Such a Long Journey*.

He recited the appropriate sections and unknotted the kusti. From around his waist when he had unwound all nine feet of its slim sacred, hand woven-length, he cracked it, whip like once, twice, thrice and thus was Ahriman, the evil one, driven away – with that expert flip of the wrist possessed only by those who performed their regularly.

According to Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda or Ormazd as he is later called, created the world and will preside over a final judgment on doomsday. Many characters in Mistry's fiction pray for the better to Ormazd. Gustad complains to Dada Ormazd for his misfortunes, "O Dada Ormazd, what kind of Joke is this? In me when I was young you put desire to study get ahead, be a success." Mistry laments seeing the present social chaotic condition and so says "such a gluillsh system ill became a community with progressive reputation and forward thinking attitude." The orthodox defense was the age old wisdom that it was a pure method, defiling none of God's good creation: earth, water, air and fire. Every scientist local or foreign, who had taken the trouble to examine the pro, using modern, hygienic standards, sang its praises. Mistry gives words to the feelings to orthodox camp in the following way.

The orthodox camp for vulturists, as their opponents called them countered that reformists had their own axe to grind in legit imaging cremation they had relatives in foreign lands without access to tower of silence, More over, the controversy was a massive fraud cooked, up by those, who owned shares in crematoria, they charged: the chunks of meat were dropped on balconies from single engine aeroplanes piloted by shady individual on the reformist payroll.

There are also some Parsis interesting consideration which finds expression in *Such a /Long Journey* such as Parsi families never keep cats. They consider them bad luck because cats hate water, they never take a bath. They do not kill spiders. They only eat the female chicken, never a cock. Parsi uses the word, 'Sahab Ji' for the daily greetings. They do not delay the funeral beyond twenty four hours from the time of death which was unbearable within the Zoroastrian rites, besides this Mistry also points the picture of superstition beliefs of the Persian community.

B. Superstitious Elements

The novel while representing the Persian culture with universal significance, tries to bring out Superstitious Elements in other smaller rhythms within its fold. One notice alongside the main plot there runs a sap plot to affect the return of Sohrab and cure the illness of Roshan through magico-religious rites performed by Mrs. Dilnavaz following the advice of Miss Kutipitia. Miss Kutipitia is a person:

Who wanted to offer help and advice on matters unexplainable by the laws of nature? She claimed to know about curses and spell: both to east and remove; about magic; black and white; about omens and auguries of about dreams and their interpretation. Most important of all was the ability to understand the hidden meaning of mundance events and chance occurrences and her fanciful fantastical imagination could be entertaining at times.

Dilnavaz becomes too unnerved when her husband and Sohrab carry on fighting abusing each

other very frequently as her son loses interest in IIT, till at last he leaves her house in violent protest against his father's anger and threat unleashed against him. Equally disturbing is the illness of her daughter Roshan that goes on worsening day by day.

In fact the misfortune that befalls Gustad's family is interpreted by Miss Kutpitia from her own ideological point of view rooted in beliefs and superstitious, culturally accepted and transmitted from generation to generation. First the genesis of the trouble in Dilnavaz's family is attributed to killing a live bird in the house – the live chicken brought by Gustad to celebrate his son's selection to IIT and the birthday of Roshan. Killing a bird in the house is very ominous, according to Miss Kutpitia. Second what has happened at the dinner party has many things to do with the incident which took place at Miss Kutpitia's home the same day. In the morning Miss Kutpitia had killed a lizard on her breakfast table, it broken tail wriggling and dancing for about five minutes definite omen for bidding her to go out for the next twenty – four hours. She declines therefore the honour of joining the dinner party. The initial guest to a merriment of the party decelerate and sink into much second and fury when Gustad and Sohrab tone up their difference anger and arguments with the unwarranted declaration by Sohrab that he is no longer interested to go IIT. Nobody feels like eating and whole effort and relish go unappreciated. "of the nine chicken portion, Six remained in the dish."

When the matter is brought to the notice of Miss Kutpitia by the apparently worried mother; the former attributes all this to jaadu mantar. She further contends that somebody tries to gain the interest of Sohrab out of his own loss of interest and that there are ways and means to set things right Dilnavaz is instructed to do some magic rites for a few days before the setting of the sun. In this process the trial goes on, but the result is far from being satisfactory. Sohrab drinks some lime juice prepared by his mother who does some magic to regain her son's lost interest. But this comes to no avail. Now somebody has to drink a juice mixed with lime juice to transfer the spell from Sohrab to the second person. Both choose Tehmul to be the target. Still there is little effect on Sohrab's mind. Instead things go from, bad to worse. Sohrab revolts and leaves home and Roshan's illness becomes a matter of great concern. Miss Kutpitia maintains that Roshan's illness is caused by evil eye. To protect her from it, she asks Dilnavaz to perform a ritual. "Take needle and thread, a nice strong thread with a big knot at the end. Select a yellow lime and seven chillies. Chillies must be green, not turning red. Never red string them together with the needle. Lime goes at the bottom than hang the whole thing over your door, inside the house."

Then she goes on "It is like a taveja protection. Each time Roshan walks under it, the evil eye becomes less powerful. Actually everyone in your family will benefit" but even this does not relieve Roshan of her illness. It is both evil eye, and some dark forces that are responsible for the continuous illness-argues Miss Kutpitia. Ultimately, she discovers and makes Dilnavaz see that the person behind is a man who has a dog, suggesting that Mr. Rabadi is the man. As regards Sohrab's not coming home, Miss Kutpitia asks Dilnavaz to get some nails of Tehmul to burn in coal fire. And when the nails are melted, then turmeric and cayenne powders are to be sprinkled. This ritual "would open wide Tehmul's channels through which his spirit would reach and yank the evil out of Sohrab's brain." Even that helps little. So the last remedy is thought out that is lizard ritual amidst Miss Kutpitia's warning "Terrible things could happen. And not all your sorrow or regret later on will do any good or change one single thing."

Some miracle or coincidence does take place, Roshan gets better, Gustad returns home

safely from a trip to Delhi; and even Sohrab's absence, Dilnavaz thinks "would now somehow be put right." Whether he returns to Sohrab has something to do with death of Tehmul is yet a matter of speculation,. Surprisingly, the day Sohrab changes his mind, Tehmul dies. All this seems to correspond with the dire consequence Miss. Kutpitia had warned Dilnavaz of but things at this level remain highly unexplainable.

20.3 Characterization

Such a Long Journey is rich with characters. Many characters exist in the novel. The following characters play an important role in the story of the novel:

- Gustad Noble : Protagonist of the Novel
- Dilnavaz : Gustad's Wife
- Sohrab : Gustad's elder son
- Darius : Gustad's Younger Son
- Roshan : Gustad's Daughter
- Dinshawji : Gustad's Friend
- § He works in the same bank in which Gustad works.
- Tehmul Langara : A Handicapped Character
- § He resides in Khodadad building. Gustad is only one who shows sympathy for him.
- Major Jimmy Bilimoria : Gustad's Close Friend
- § He also resides in Khodadad building but we find him absent in the plot from the very beginning of the novel.
- Miss Kutpitia : A resident of Khodadad Building
- § She is a typical character of the novel that plays an important role in the construction of the novel.

We are hereby giving the characterization of some prominent characters such as Gustad Noble, Dilnavaz, Miss Kutpitia and some Minor characters also. The critics also pointed out Mistry's inability to portray complex women characters, especially in his early fiction.

20.3.1 Gustad Noble

Gustad Noble is the protagonist of the novel. He is fifty years old. His wide forehead has numerous lines with grey-white hair. His thick groomed moustache is just black and velvety. He is tall and broad-shouldered. He is the envy and admiration of friends and relatives whenever health or sickness is being discussed. They said for a man swimming the tidewater of his fifth decade of life, he looked so solid. Especially for one who has suffered a serious accident just a few years ago and even that left him with nothing graver than a slight limp. He believes in God very much. Gustad is performing his prayers from childhood.

Gustad is very ambitious about his eldest son Sohrab. Gustad gets a slight limp due to Sohrab.

Once Gustad misread the bus number. They find out only after it has pulled away from the stop and are in the midst of traffic. The bus jerks forward at the very moment that Sohrab steps off. He loses his balance on the asphalt, slick and treacherous with rain and fell. Gustad with his feet kicks Sohrab out of the path of an oncoming taxi. His left took the brunt of the fall. It was the remarkable sacrifice of a father for his son. He became very happy when Sohrab gets admission in I.I.T. But he refuses to go there and leaves home because he was interested in Arts. He brings live chicken to celebrate his daughter's third birthday. Sohrab destroys the happiness of birthday party by declaring that he is not going I.I.T. The residents of the Khodadad building complains about his younger son Darius's affair but he handles the matter safely. Gustad is a good father. He wants to do everything for the future of his children.

The saying a friend in need is a friend indeed is true to Gustad. In the beginning he seems very sad because his close friend Major Bilimoria has gone away without telling anything. He considers him a loving brother and a second father of the children. He is always helpful for his friends. He helps his friend Major Bilimoria in bringing out ten lakh rupees. He actively takes part in the discussion with Dinshawji. He is also only one character in Khodadad building who has sympathy for Tehmul. It is his bad luck that he lost all his friends Major Bilimoria, Dinshawji and Tehmul by the end of the novel. He is also a very good husband who always takes care of his wife. He does not want to dominate in this relationship. He always gives support to her. He never shouts at his wife.

In a nut shell we can say that Gustad is a very strong character. He is a strong man who at the age of fifty looks fit. He is a good father also who always thinks about the welfare of his children. Even he accepts Sohrab at the end of the novel with changed condition. He is friend of friend who helps his friends in even sorrow. He is a good husband also who loves his wife passionately. He is a wise person. He takes interest in regional and national politics. He reads news paper daily. He is a God fearing man. He performs his prayers daily. He believes in God and his power which can do anything. At last we can say that he is a perfect man who wants to prove himself in the whole novel.

20.3.2 Dilnavaz

Dilnavaz is the wife of the protagonist of the novel Gustad Nobel. She is a slight woman of forty eight years. She had had her dark brown hair bobbed for their daughter Roshan's first birthday party, eight years ago, and still wore it that way. She is not sure if it suited her now, although Gustad says it certainly does. Her behavior is very good. Her childhood training to show unconditional respect for elders made her to give respect her elders. She was the only one friend of Miss Kutpitia. She is the only one in Khodadad building who considers her intention good. She gives respect to Miss Kutpitia despite the bizarre stories about the old woman that had circulated for years in the building. It shows her delicate nature.

Dilnavaz performs the duty of a wife very well. She is the only one who can understand the feeling of Gustad noble. In the absence of Major Bilimoria Gustad becomes sad. But she says that he is a good man he went from here for good work. She bears all the mad and wholly impractical scheme of her husband when he brings live chicken at home. Even when he brings ten lakh rupees from Delhi that creates many problems in their life. She is a perfect wife who adjust in both situation either good or bad. She never complains about Gustad's present financial situation. She adjusts everything in his low income. She is also mocked by her husband.

She has three children Sohrab, Darius and one daughter Roshan. She is a perfect mother. It is because of her Sohrab returns back to home. During the time of his departure and arrival she performs even curses and spell suggested by Kutpitia. The death of Tehmul with the arrival of Sohrab is the remarkable events of these curses and spells. It is the feeling of mother which forces her to do anything. She becomes worried when Roshan falls ill and when she receives complains of Darius. But she faces the situation passionately. It is because of her Sohrab visits many times home after leaving the home and the novel ends with a hope.

20.3.3 Miss Kutpitia

Miss Kutpitia is also a leading character of the novel. Mistry introduces this character in chapter-1. She berates bhैया, milkman, for adding water in the milk. She wants to show milkman that there were no fools living here, in Khodadad building. She is a wizened woman of seventy, and seldom went out these days since her bones got stiffer day by day. She has acquired the reputation of being mean, cranky and abusive over the years. She is ubiquitous witch of the fairy tales come to life for children. They would flee past her door screaming, Run from the daaken! Run from the daaken! to provoke her to mutter, curse and shake her fist.

Miss Kutpitia is the only one in Khodadad building who can offer help and advice on matters unexplainable by the laws of nature. She knows everything about curses and spells: both to cast and remove; about magic: black and white; about omens and auguries: about dreams and their interpretation. She has the ability to understand the hidden meaning of mundane events and chance occurrences. Gustad's wife Dilnavaz is the only one woman in the building who considers her good.

Miss Kutpitia is very typical character of the novel. Although nobody likes her but she proves her importance in unexplainable matters. She helps Dilnavaz in her sorrow. It seems that the revival of Sohrab is done by her. At last we can say that she is a fine and typical character of Rohinton Mistry who represents the religious dogmas of Parsi religion.

20.3.4 Other Characters

Major Bilimoria: Major Jimmy Bilimoria is also a resident of Khodadad Building. He is a very close friend of Gustad Noble. He is retired Major from Indian Army. Physically he is very fit. He walks erect with chest out and stomach in. Gustad always pointed him out to the children as a good example. The retired Major loved to regale Sohrab and Darius with tales from his glorious days of army and battle. But we can not say that he is a relevant character in the plot. He hardly appears at the end of the novel clearly. He gives problems many times to Gustad Noble. But it is a very interesting character that lives in remembrance in the last half the novel.

Sohrab: Sohrab is the eldest son of Gustad noble. He is very intelligent. In the beginning of the novel he gets admission in I.I.T. But he refuses to go to I.I.T. because he was interested in Arts. He does not fulfill the desires of his father who has done so much for the success of his son. Here it seems that he is selfish somehow. Who thinks only about himself? The saying that miseries come in battalions is true to Gustad. After his departure from home Gustad faces many miseries. But he never comes to meet his father. He speaks in a rudely way to his father. At last he comes back and the novel ends with a hope of solution.

Other Characters: There are also other characters in the novel that exists in the novel such

as Dinshawji, Tehmul, Darius, Roshan, Dr. Paymaster etc. Dinshawji is another close friend of Gustad, who is also his collogue. He makes jokes several times in the novel. Tehmul is a handicapped and mentally upset man who lives in Khodadad building. Gustad is the only one person who shows respect for him. We can also say that Gustad was the only one friend of Gustad. Darius is the younger son of Gustad Noble. Roshan is the daughter of Gustad Noble who is a delicate character of Rohinton Mistry. There are also some minor characters and the character that do not have their names in the novel but they appear significantly in the novel such as pavement artist etc.

20.4 Narrative Devices

20.4.1 Diction

Diction is the art which is concerned with the choice of words to be used. Words form an important unit of fiction as the basic role of expression depends upon them. This is why the choice of words has been included in the art of creative writing. The vocabulary of fiction is the same as that of language generally spoken and yet different. The only order according to which words are grouped in a dictionary is the alphabetical. But the order of words in fiction is an order based on choice, choice that is guided by the strangeness, evocativeness, commonness or freshness of words. This is an order, which cooperates generally with the grammatical order of words, clashing with it only when the usual grammatical order does not accommodate the motif or motifs, which guide the writer's choice.

Mistry's language is a fine specimen of Indo-Canadian English. He uses highly polished and refined language, sometimes tinged with emotions, when he describes the dignity of his characters and when he champions the cause of the under-dog. Mistry's prose is alive with enduring images and a cast of unforgettable characters. Written with compassion, humour, and insight, his fiction is a vivid, richly textured, and powerful fiction written by one of the most gifted writers of our time. His English characters speak their own adulterated and unadulterated variety. When he describes typical Indian scenes, situations and characters, he uses a different kind of language.

But some times his minor character like Hussain in *Family Matters*, would speak broken English when he is addressing his boss. It would have been better if he had used the vernacular. His broken English is simply a Western reading convention. Some of Mistry's images and diction in *Such a Long Journey* are so powerful; yet exert their power in barely perceptible and nuance ways. Here's an example that resonates at multiple levels:

Alone, Gustad gazed at the horizon. There the sea was calm. The tidal hustle and bustle could only be perceived near the shore. How reassuring, the tranquility at the far edge, where the water met the sky. While the waves crashed against his rock. He felt an intense-what? joy? or sadness? did it matter?...If a person cried here, by the sea, he thought, then the tears would mix with the waves. Salt water from the eyes mixing with salt water from the ocean. The possibility filled him with wonder.

Mistry uses a great deal of Indianisms. When the springs of his emotions are deeply touched, the torrent of his words is alight with his fine imagination. He is sometimes even tempted to lapse into the pseudo-poetic. He frequently uses poetic lines in his fiction to beautify the narration of his art. Let us have an example to demonstrate this feature:

Gho-o-osts to right of them,

Gho-o-osts in left of them,
 Gho-o-osts in front of them,
 Hungry and thirsty!
 So ye take the high road and I'll take the low road,
 And I'll be in Scotland afore ye,
 But me and my true love will ne'er meet again,
 On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.

Rohinton Mistry's fiction is conspicuous for his use of vernacular. The vernacular expressions like '*Humko kuch nahin maaloom*' '*Arre*' etc. abound in his fiction. Jaakaylee's own onomatopoeic and Hindi vocabulary co-exist in his fiction. Coming home from midnight Mass at Christmas Eve the first manifestation of the Firozsha bhoot is the first encounter: "After reaching the first floor I stopped to rest. My breath was coming fast-fast. Fast-fast like it does nowadays when I grind my curry *masala* on the stone." (*Tales from Firozsha Baag*, 44) There is also a good example of mix language in which he uses Hindi, Marathi, and English. He freely uses the vernacular abusive expressions in his novels. Such abusive expression as '*maa...☆ ch...☆*', '*golaas*', '*bahen ch....☆bhungees*' abound in his fiction. Sometimes he uses the English translation of vernacular abusive expression in his novels such as 'sister'. But the frequency of Hindi abusive expressions are more than English abusive expressions.

Interestingly, while Jaakaylee's private language is embedded seamlessly into her narrative, without italicisation, those words lifted from Indian languages, although as much authentic parts of that private language, are highlighted *bai*, *seth* and so on. Mistry signals to the reader's intellect thus its ok, you don't understand this word; you aren't expected to, but context will make it clear. It is a puzzle, which upon solving the reader can congratulate himself. It is reminiscent of the games linguists have played with children, with nonsensical words, to demonstrate our seemingly innate grammar proficiency. Mistry's text can be seen as an immersion programme, instilling a potted collection of Hindi words in an almost colonial manner. A readership is re-created, like those imperialists who once re-created English scenes on the subcontinent, and who needed a private semi-language to sustain them while they did it, becoming in their own fashion, mimic men of a kind.

Mistry seems to evoke the legacy of the Raj and that is why the phrases like 'high dudgeon', 'unbeknownst to', and 'cherubic features' are frequently used, though they don't really fit in the contexts into which they're placed. Also, the Indian words are often strung together in what seems like an unnecessary striving for 'local colour': 'Bawaji got paan pichkari right on his white dugli . . .' The dugli can be called a white shirt but is different from a standard shirt in its strictly white colour and unusual length, width, and style, and indicates the wearer's identity. That's why; Mistry uses dialect to produce the real meaning.

It has been argued that since the recent rise of current popularity of Indian fiction in English that such writing panders to Western tastes; the everyday life of the subcontinent since the retreat of the West is laid open for scrutiny. He or she sells out lives once lived, experienced or heard of by the author in return for first-world success. Hence Mistry uses the word *bhoot* in '*The Ghost of Firozsha Baag*', synonymously with *ghost*, as a device to give authenticity to Jaakaylee's narrative, yet *bhoot* remains italicised, as an almost-not-quite element of the language, of the narrative itself. Mistry, mediating

between East and West resurrects the position of the 'mimic man', the halfway man who once played mediator between the ruling race and the minions.

We always give the past a place in our life. When the question of exposing the inner world comes, we can do nothing but dig out the past, and the problem that comes before us is that past always comes to us through filtered memories and flashes. The art of catching these fractured memories, flashes of events with multiples of joints, disjoints and welding in words and images is difficult one. There is no other way of revealing the inner world of a character without reviewing or recounting his/her past.

In his fiction, Rohinton Mistry avoids the simple technique of the straightforward narration. Instead, he employs the flash back method for presenting fractured memories of his protagonist in disorderly sequence. In *A Fine Balance*, while the Prologue deals with present, the later chapter moves backwards in time, culminating in the final chapter, which again deals in the present. This, he does in order to accommodate his multiple themes in the novel. The novel essentially deals with the major characters Dina, Om, Ishvar, and Maneck's painful self-analysis. In his latest novel *Family Matters*, Mistry uses a different technique for flash back technique for presenting fractured memories of his protagonist Nariman. He, while discusses the life of the Nariman, uses Italics lines to indicate the past. The same technique he uses in "*The Ghost of Firozsha Baag*", a story from *Tales from Firozsha Baag*. But in his first novel he uses simple technique to indicate the past.

20.4.2 Irony and Humour

In Mistry's works use of irony and humour is a special feature. It is by his use of humour that Mistry has won a permanent place in the hearts of his readers. Humour is the stuff and substance of his entire mental constitution and the essence of his art for which he does not seem to have consciously worked. It is spontaneous; it is his way of thinking, a habit of mind and an attitude towards life, which has been unconsciously formed by his interest in humanity, and his tolerance of their absurdities and failings. It is the colour of humour that gives the lively touch to his fiction and makes it a fountain of liveliness and joy.

His works has a variety of humour in tune with the characters employed in the fiction of Rohinton Mistry. There is a lighthearted touch of a sly humourist seen in the characters. There is Tehmul, the child-man, crippled by a fall from the apartment compound's neem tree, a man whose jumbled speech flies past the listener's head at breakneck speed. When the chicken which Gustad brought home for Roshan's birthday escapes, Tehmul catches it and brings it back, crying: "GustadGustadchickenrace GustadGustad chickenranfastfast IcaughtIcaughtGustad."

Only the Parsi priest, Dhinshaji, who excels at sordidness and licentiousness, equals his depravity. Mistry, by dint of his highly comic digressions which act like theatrical asides, reveals the real deceptive nature of what are believed to be chaste holy men, "known to exchange lewd remarks between lines of prayer: Ashem Vahoo, See the tits on that chickie-boo..." (*Tales from Firozsha Baag*, 14) His humour is so sly that we cannot be sure that whether the poet is joking or not.

In *Such a Long Journey*, there is also lighthearted touch of a sly humourist while Mistry characterises Gustad. Gustad says in a very pleased way, "Look at that, you would think he has been handling chickens all his life. Look at the expert way he holds it. I'm telling you, our son will do wonderfully at IIT, he will be the best engineer ever to graduate from there." (*Such a Long Journey*,

27) The humour in the case of *bhaiya* is kindly and patronizing. The *bhaiya* sells milk. His costumers always complained him about the watery milk. The *bhaiya* was accustomed to hearing that faceless voice. He mumbled for the benefit of his costumers: “As if I make the milk, Cow does that. The *malik* says go, sell the milk, and that is all I do. What good comes from harassing a poor man like me?” There is ironic humour when Gustad says to Dinshawji about the importance of biceps in body building. Gustad gives the same guarantee to Dinshawji as he gave to his son Darius. “I will cut off my hand and give you if your biceps don’t increase by one inch in six months.” Dinshawji argues: “No, no forget it. At my age, only one muscle needs to be strong. Darius laughed knowingly, and Dinshawji said, Naughty boy! I am talking about my brain!” Gustad describes the tyre retreader as the patient of Dr. Paymaster. He had the misfortune of working directly opposite the House of Cages (Prostitute). “Gripping a tyre between his knees while the sharp tool in his hands zigzagged the circumference, he sometimes let his eyes stray to the women lounging spread-leggedly across the road; sometime he gazed too long, and then the tool slipped.”

Mistry also describes broad and semi-farcical humour. Dilnavaz tells a story about a childhood neighbour. When he was a little boy, this man ate lots of mosquitoes. From then, Mosquitoes stopped biting this boy. He grew up into a mosquito-proof man. The insects would sit on his skin, crawl down his back, but never sting. Their buzzing and hovering no longer annoyed him either; he said it was like a serenade sung lovingly in his ears. To respond Dilnavaz, Gustad says, “So what are you suggesting? That we should stop using Odomos and start munching mosquitoes?” Thus we can say that Mistry’s humour is all pervasive and there is a subtle touch of humour. In short Mistry’s humour is wide and sweeping, and ranges from the finest delicate shades of good natured persons.

20.5 Let Us Sum Up

Thus we can say that Rohinton Mistry paints the real picture of middle class Parsi family. He gives words to the hardships frustration and economical circumstances dominated on Gustad’s life. On the other hand he also portrait the situation when Gustad’s hopes feeling towards his son has been destroyed by him. Rohinton Mistry successfully describes the political element in *Such a Long Journey*. Through his novel he deals with moral temperament of national leaders, such as Indira Gandhi. He does not paint a good picture of Indira Gandhi. He describes the one sided reality. He criticizes Indira Gandhi’s decision for the nationalization of Banks. In *Such a Long Journey* he shows the guilt of Indira Gandhi in famous Nagarwala case and also gives place the assumption that the supporter of Indira Gandhi’s family poisoned the Prime-Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri to get the chair of Prime Minister. Mistry has successfully embedded the political crises of his time in his literary endeavours depict the fact that they seem one sided picture of historical events. He depicts the contemporary politics by encountering its stark features.

The historical events also have an important role in *Such a Long Journey*. In it Rohinton Mistry gives an account of war between India and neighboring countries, China and Pakistan. The Indo-China was in 1962, Indo-Pak wars during 1965 and 1971 and birth of Bangladesh are some of the events around which the story rotates. In it Mistry beautifully describes the patriotic feelings of the Indians during the Indo-China war. Simultaneously he also describes very clearly the dark side of Indian politics by giving the place to the assumption that thing which was collecting during the war for donation was selling in the chor bazaar. He is very critical about Mrs. Indira Gandhi and very much against her during Indo-Pak war 1971. Here Mistry narrates his own one sided history. It is history

from a writer's point of view that tries to discover the neglected chapters of Indian history.

In a nut-shell *Such a Long Journey* is an account of social, political and historical events. By these events Mistry presents the realistic picture of India. He successfully strikes the real incidents. By the novel he presents the picture of Parsi community's hardships and conditions. It also reveals the fact that these events are the one sided version of historical events. To conclude we can say that he describes the one side reality according to the minority perspectives.

20.6 Review Questions

1. Write a note on the society of *Such a Long Journey*.
2. Would you agree that Rohinton Mistry is uncomfortable in dealing with typical women characters?
3. Sketch the character of Gustad Noble.
4. Do you think Miss Kutpitia is a typical character? Justify your views.
5. In what extent the politics is relevant to the main plot of *Such a Long Journey*.
6. Discuss Mistry's social history in this novel.
7. How the author put together the history of the Parsis into the tapestry of the novel?
8. Write a note on the diction of the Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey*.
9. Discuss the narrative devices of Rohinton Mistry.

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UNIT-21

SHARON POLLOCK : A DISTINGUISHED DRAMATIST

Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 History Plays
- 21.3 Features Of History Plays
- 21.4 About The Playwright
- 21.5 Pollock and Theatre
- 21.6 Awards
- 21.7 Sharon Pollock's Plays
- 21.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.9 Review Questions
- 21.9 Bibliography

21.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to Canadian drama and theatre.
- To familiarize them with terms and aspects of Canadian drama and theatre.
- To give the students an account of Canadian experience in Canadian drama and theatre .
- To give the students a general estimate of Sharon Pollock as a playwright.
- To expose the students to the contribution of Sharon Pollock to Canadian drama and theatre.

21.1 Introduction

Sharon Pollock is Canada's best known woman playwright. She does not write plays about romance of sexual escapades or happy domestic circumstances; constitutionally she is drawn to issues and ideas. Produced nationally and internationally, author of a long and varied canon, she has had a long and illustrious career in the theatre. From backstage to onstage, from front of house to director's chair, from actor to author, from teacher to mentor to artistic director of venues both large and small, Sharon Pollock remains an active, controversial and prolific participant in the Canadian theatre scene.

Pollock is considered one of Canada's most respected dramatists. She employs innovative staging and writing techniques, works in multiple genres, and creates fluid dialogue that conveys strong social messages about oppressive forces and those who struggle under oppression. She has won numerous awards, including Canada Council Governor General's Literary Awards in 1981 for *Blood Relations* (1980) and in 1986 for *Doc* (1984); the Alberta Writers Guild award in 1986; and the

Alberta Literary Foundation award in 1987. A prolific writer, her plays have been produced on stage, television, and radio.

Occasionally labeled a documentary, historical, or feminist playwright, Pollock crosses the boundaries that these labels impose. Her plays are considered complex in structure, frequently using nonlinear progression, and critics commend her experimentation with dramatic styles and genres. Commentators applaud her character development and her ability to realistically and compellingly capture an individual in the throes of a monumental inner struggle. Reviewers note that her earlier works are concerned with political and social issues whereas her most recent plays are more introspective and deal with women's issues and rights, and believe this signals her maturity as a dramatist.

21.2 History Plays

An interesting feature of the recent flowering of original drama in this country is the prominence of works based on Canadian history, for example, *Striker Schneiderman* or *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust* at the St. Lawrence Arts Centre; *The Ten Lost Years* or *From the Boyne to the Batoche* at Toronto Workshop Productions; *1837, The Farmers' Rebellion* at Theatre Passe Muraille; *Walsh* at the Stratford Festival; *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* in Vancouver; and the Donnelly Trilogy at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto. What distinguishes many of these Canadian history plays is not only the generally high standard, but also a mood of questioning and inconclusiveness. This mood suggests that Canadian playwrights are searching, sometimes unconsciously, for significance and form in our past. In an effort to find such form, they sometimes impose traditional fictional patterns inherited from the Old World on Canadian events. At other times, without new patterns, they seem incapable of giving shape to events that do not conform to traditional stereotypes. Part of the fascination of Canadian historical drama, therefore, is the evidence it provides of a continuing search on the part of our playwrights for a distinctively Canadian myth as is evident in five plays written over a period of almost a hundred years; Charles Mair's *Tecumseh* (1886). Robertson Davies' *At My Heart's Core* (1950), John Coulter's *Riel* (1962) and *The Trial of Louis Riel* (1967), and James Reaney's *Sticks and Stones* (1973).

Charles Mair's sprawling closet drama, *Tecumseh*, in five acts and twenty-eight scenes, is the work of a poet who had no experience of the theatre and little expectation that his play would ever be staged. The play was undertaken quite deliberately to inculcate a sense of loyalty to Britain and a feelingly national identity.

As the title suggests; the play is primarily about the great Shewanee chief who fled to Canada after the defeat of his people by the American army at the battle of Tippecanoe. It deals with Tecumseh's participation with General Isaac Brock in the capture of Fort Detroit and with his death in the battle of Moravian Town. Mair was attracted to the story for two reasons. To begin with, the Indian epitomized those qualities of heroism and loyalty which the poet so highly regarded. But of equal importance was Tecumseh's race. For during his long association with the Indians in the Canadian North West, Mair had become convinced that the image of the native presented in so much American fiction was "villainously wrong."

The image of Canada as a bastion of "true" (that is, hierarchical and constitutional) liberty against the forces of egalitarianism and anarchy threatening from the south is central to Mair's vision in the drama. *Tecumseh* seems at first to be the exact antithesis of Brock. He is uncivilized in the literal

sense that he lacks the artificial accomplishments of city life. But, as Mair shows, the Indian is a natural aristocrat, understanding instinctively what Brock has had to learn. Tecumseh's insistence on boundaries (the product of a "natural" system of order and degree) and his rigid separation of Indians and Whites can be seen as another form of "true" liberty - liberty which is overwhelmed in an America that does not respect differences between individuals, classes, and races.

In the character, Lefroy, Mair has created not only a character who is central to *Tecumseh*, but also a character who anticipates some of the themes that reappear again and again in subsequent Canadian historical drama. The significance of Lefroy in the play is that he is equally opposed to American materialistic democracy, to Brock's unquestioning conservatism, and to Tecumseh's proto-apartheid policies of racial segregation. His conception of social order is based on a belief in instinct rather than reason or doctrine. "The world," he states in refutation of Brock, "is wiser than its wisest men." Social betterment, if it comes, will not be the result of the triumph of either city or wilderness over the other, but of a reconciliation of the two.

One reason that *Tecumseh* is interesting reading today when much of the poetic drama of the nineteenth century is cold and lifeless is that Mair has the true dramatist's ability to sympathize deeply with all of his characters. Brock, Tecumseh, even Harrison, all seem right from their own point of view, and each wins temporary approval from the reader. One feels, however, that it is Lefroy who has most completely captured Mair's imagination. For in the educated Englishman's search for a way of life that will combine the best elements of British civilization and savage wilderness Mair has perhaps embodied the nineteenth-century archetypical Canadian quest.

Among the later dramatists who deal with some of the issues touched on by Mair, one of the most thoughtful is Robertson Davies. In *At My Heart's Core* (1950), the playwright presents an imaginative reconstruction of events that might have taken place during the rebellion of 1837. The play is "historical" only to the extent that the characters are named after people who actually lived near Peterborough in the early nineteenth century. Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill, and Frances Stewart were distinguished Ontario pioneer women. The aspect of their lives with which Davies has chosen to deal, however, is matter which is hidden from the factual historian. The focus on inner action enables the dramatist to grapple with themes which are not confined to a particular time or place. Nevertheless, in treating these universal topics, Davies does reveal certain prejudices (or leanings) which do reflect their regional origins. The title of the play is taken from a poem supposedly written by a Scottish immigrant to Canada which was originally published in the Cobourg newspaper.

But the fundamental issues raised by Cantwell - whether a woman's career should be sacrificed for her husband and the attendant questions of whether the creative or scientific spirits can ever flourish in the inhospitable intellectual climate of Canada - are adroitly skirted by the author. The result is a curious sense of ambivalence in the play which, is very close to the author's own attitude. For while his mind tells him that the pursuit of imaginative and scientific truth is the highest human ideal, his heart (or at least his heart's core) suggests that the discontent which drives the artist and the scientist, far from being divine, is in fact diabolical. Like Mair, Robertson Davies seems to be saying that personal contentment and love are ultimately superiorly achievements of the Imagination and the intellect. In this play, as in his paperwork, the writer wrestles with the problem of wholeness. For him, personal (and, by implication, national) "virtue" consists of balance. Both conservative and radical stances are "sinful" because they are extremes. Sometimes, too, he seems to regard love as its own-justification, seeing it

in spiritual or religious terms as a form of charity and humility. At other times, he tries to identify the lovable quality of Canadian life with individuals who somehow escape, or ignore, the dichotomies In *At My Heart's Core*, for example, the Indian Sally and the Irish ruffian Phelim Brady, in different ways, represent modes of feeling and intuition which are distinct from the English and American stereotypes. But the true embodiment of wholeness in the play is Mrs. Stewart. And it is her combination of strength and sensitivity, intellect and a capacity for self-sacrifice, that Davies seems to admire most. If the vision of natural superiority embodied in this backwoods lady seems a little too romantic, a little too Shavian for the mid-twentieth century, it should be emphasized that it is modified by more than a dash of Shavian irony. For when Stewart exclaims that "women are the greatest single force against rebellion in the country," we can sense, the ambivalence of an author still divided in his attitude to at least two of these fascinating subjects.

21.3 Features Of History Plays

The most striking peculiarity of these works is the kind of hero they celebrate. These plays do not record the triumphs of national champions such as Aeneas or Henry V. They focus on the defeated, the impractical visionary, the defenders of lost causes, the failures. In most of these plays, the strong, the self-confident, the courageous but uncomplicated characters are regarded with suspicion, or relegated to positions of secondary importance. The qualities these dramatists admire are not the assertive and belligerent ones usually extolled in epics of war and politics. They are the more passive virtues of instinct, imagination, and self-sacrifice. To a certain extent, this emphasis may be owing to the climate of the times which makes the unqualified admiration of brute courage difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless there is an elegant, even devotional, mood to these plays .

(a)Emphasis from Public To Private Issues

The shift of emphasis from public to private issues in these plays inevitably affects the way in which conflict is presented. It is an interesting characteristic of these works that in them strife is frequently resolved, not by direct confrontation, but by strategic retreat. Closely related to this temperamental desire to avoid direct conflict is an interesting syndrome which might be described as "xenophilia." Whereas much historical drama is based on a hearty dislike of foreigners, these dramatists are strongly drawn to the exotic stranger. The characters embody an alternative to that English tradition and represents qualities which are presented as superior.

(b)Desire For Inclusiveness

If there is a single characteristic which could be said to unite the visions presented in these five plays, it is possibly the desire for inclusiveness. Unlike conventional historical dramatists who celebrate the establishment or defence of national boundaries, these Canadian playwrights are assimilationists. They regard with distrust the physical and spiritual obstacles that separate people, and seem to long for a Utopia in which such divisions would disappear. To the extent that it is possible to discern a "Canadian myth" in these plays, therefore, that myth might be described in part as a search for a workable synthesis of authority and liberty, intellect and intuition, self-assertion and sacrifice.

21.4 Sharon Pollock as a Playwright

Mary Sharon Chalmers (b.1936)was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, the daughter of

esteemed physician and long-time New Brunswick MLA, Everett Chalmers. She was educated in the Eastern Townships of Quebec and briefly at the University of New Brunswick, leaving in 1954 to marry Ross Pollock, a Toronto insurance broker. Separating in the early 1960, she returned with her children to Fredericton, where she worked in various capacities, including acting, at the Playhouse Theatre (later Theatre New Brunswick). In 1966 she moved to Calgary with actor Michael Ball, performing in a semi-professional touring theatre, Prairie Players. That year Pollock won the Dominion Drama Festival best actress award for her performance in Ann Jellicoe's *The Knack*. Her first stage play, *A Compulsory Option* (unpublished), a black comedy about paranoia, won an Alberta Culture play writing competition in 1971 and was given its first production at Vancouver's New Play Centre the following year. Now living in Vancouver, she completed *Walsh* (1973; rev. 1974, 1983) which premiered at Theatre Calgary in November of 1973. A new production in July 1974 at the Stratford Festival's Third Stage first drew Pollock to national attention as a play-wright.

Although in the years that followed Pollock increasingly built her reputation as a major Canadian dramatist, she has been equally active, artistically and administratively, in other aspects of theatre: as director, actor, dramatist, artistic director, and theatre founder. She was head of the Playwrights Colony at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts (1977-80); playwright-in-residence at Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary (1977-9) and the National Arts Centre (1980-2); briefly artistic director at Theatre Calgary (1984), and writer-in-residence at the Regina Public Library (1986). In 1988 she was appointed artistic director of Theatre New Brunswick, serving for two seasons. In reaction to the restraints of subsidized theatre, in 1992 Pollock, in partnership with her son K.C. Campbell, established an independent company at the Carry Theatre, a former movie house in the neglected Inglewood district of Calgary. She has directed in many Canadian theatres, such as the Manitoba Theatre Centre, Neptune Theatre, Magnus Theatre, and Alberta Theatre Projects—including productions of her own plays: *One Tiger to a Hill* (1981) at the National Arts Centre in 1981; *Doc* (1986), under the title *Family Trappings*, at Theatre New Brunswick in 1986; and the premiere of *Saucy Jack* (1994) at the Carry Theatre in Nov. 1993. Her roles as an actor included several in her own plays: Miss Lizzie in Theatre Calgary's production of *Blood Relations* (1981) in 1981; Mama George in her radio adaptation of *Getting It Straight* (1992) at the International Women's Festival in Winnipeg, July 1989; and Renee in the premiere of *A Death in the Family* (unpublished), June 1993 at the Carry Theatre. Since 1977 she has maintained residence in Calgary.

21.5 Pollock and Theatre

When Pollock returned to Fredericton, she arrived just in time for the Beaverbrook Playhouse to open, a new theatre in town. Pollock found a job running the Playhouse Box Office. At the Playhouse Pollock, along with some of the members from the UNB Drama Society, formed "The Company of Ten", which performed 6 shows in the 1964-65 season, then dissolved the following year. (81) During this time Pollock had begun dating fellow actor Michael Ball. In Calgary in 1965, Victor Mitchell had been starting up a Drama Department at the University of Calgary and offered Ball a position starting in January 1966.

Pollock followed Ball west, hoping that this move across Canada would allow her and her children the opportunity to start fresh, to leave the emotional baggage of her family behind her. The 1960's were a booming time in Canadian Theatre. There were regional theatres and festivals popping

up all over the country. After their move to Calgary, Pollock and Ball began touring with Mitchell's theatre group The Prairie Players. They traveled around small towns in Alberta performing in any space they could find. If they were lucky, the troupe would earn \$35 a week. Shortly after, in 1967, Pollock joined the MAC 14 Theatre Society, which was the merge of The Musicians and Actors Club of Calgary and a theatre group called Workshop 14. The MAC 14 club was the founding Company of Theatre Calgary. In this same year, Pollock's sixth child, Amanda, was born to Pollock and Ball. The 60's and early 70's were not easy for Pollock and her family. They lived in barely acceptable living conditions, on an extremely scarce income. In about 1967-68 Pollock began writing plays.

Having worked as an actor for a couple of years, Pollock was becoming frustrated with how even as an actor she rarely felt her voice was heard. Pollock was tired of reproducing others work and longed to hear a Canadian voice on stage. She was trying to fill a gap. The way theatre was those days she felt that no one even wanted to hear a Canadian voice, or a Canadian story. Pollock's first work was *Split Seconds in the Death of*, a radio play that was broadcast on CBC on November 22 1970. These were the days of radio, when a radio play drew a bigger audience than a theatre did. Already in this first script Pollock is pushing the boundaries of the realist narrative. Pollock followed *Split Seconds in the Death of* with two other Radioplays, *31 for 2* and *We to the Gods* both in 1971, all for CBC Radio.

21.6 Awards

- Dominion Drama Festival Best Actress Award for *The Knack* (1966)
- Alberta Culture Playwriting Competition for *A Compulsory Option* (1971)
- Governor General's Award for Drama for *Blood Relations* (1981)
- Golden Sheaf Award for *The Person's Case*, Television(1981)
- Alberta Achievement Award (1983)
- Chalmers Canadian Play Award for *Doc* (1984)
- Governor General Award for Drama for *Doc* (1986)
- Canadian-Australian Literary Award (1987)
- Honorary Degree, University of New Bruniswick (1987)
- Japan Foundation Award (1995)
- Harry and Martha Cohen Award for contributions to Calgary Theatre (1999)
- Honorary Degree, University of Calgary (2004)

21.7 Sharon Pollock's Plays

Pollock's plays have been written in four phases: the plays of seventies, the plays of eighties, and the plays of nineties. The plays of seventies are *Walsh*, *Outgoes You*, *The Koma-gata*, *Maru incident* and *One Tiger to a Hill*. The plays of eighties *Blood Relations*, *Generations*, *Whiskey Six Cadenza*. The plays of nineties include *Doc* and *Get-ting it straight*, *Fair Liberty's Call* and *Saucy*

Jack

Pollock's plays of seventies, drawn both from the past and from contemporary life, are marked by a strong commitment to political and social issues. The historical chronicle *Walsh*, structured in the episodic manner of the epic theatre, explores the treatment of Sitting Bull and his people when they fled from the USA to the Canadian Northwest after their defeat of General Custer at Little Big Horn. Major Walsh of the North-West Mounted Police is caught between personal integrity and the political expediencies of the Macdonald government of the 1870s. It explores the relationship between the North West Mounted Police officer of the title and Sitting Bull's Sioux on the Canadian prairies in the 1870s. *Outgoes You*, a satiric comedy on contemporary British Columbia politics. It unfolds urban redevelopment. Pollock returned to history with *The Koma-gata* and *Mam incident* (1978) and premiered at the Vancouver Playhouse, in Jan. 1976. This is a stern indictment in presentational style of Canadian racism based on a historical event in 1914 when a shipload of Sikh immigrants was denied permission to land from Vancouver harbour. *One Tiger to a Hill* premiered at the Citadel Theatre, Edmonton (Feb. 1980) was inspired by the New Westminster prison hostage-taking of 1975 in which a classification officer was shot. It attacks Canadian institutional complacency and public apathy about prison reform.

In a notable shift of emphasis in the plays of the next decade, Pollock subsumes the polemics of public controversy in the personal conflicts of family life, wherein conventional value systems are challenged by the rebellious behavior of her protagonists. *Blood Relations*, a study of the famous New England spinster Lizzie Borden, acquitted by the courts for the axe murder of her parents in 1892, was first produced at Theatre 3, Edmonton, in Mar. 1980. Structurally it is Pollock's most sophisticated drama to date, taking the form of a play-within-a-play: ten years after the acquittal, Lizzie's actress friend (probably the historical Nance O'Neill) acts out the crucial scenes at the time of the murders, responding to stage directions from Lizzie herself. The play explores not only the ambiguities of evidence, but also the social repressions of a middle-class spinster in the late nineteenth century. A more conventionally naturalistic work followed: *Generations* (1981), first written for radio and premiered on stage at Alberta Theatre Projects, Calgary, in Oct. 1980. It also evokes family tensions, but its conflicts inhere in contemporary prairie farm life. *One Tiger to a Hill*, *Blood Relations*, and *Generations* have been published in *Blood Relations and Other Plays* (1981); the title play won the first Governor General's Award for published drama. *Whiskey Six Cadenza* (1987), premiered at Theatre Calgary in Feb. 1983, is a vivid recollection of prohibition days in a southern Alberta mining community. Here the issues of an oppressive law and exploitative working conditions are expressed in the twisted relationship of parents and children. These climax in a destructive emotional triangle consisting of a flamboyant gospeller of free will who is also the local bootlegger, his adoptive daughter, and the rebellious son of a local temperance zealot. The play is published in *Newest Plays by Women* (1987), edited by Diane Bessai and Don Kerr.

Pollock's next two plays, *Doc* (premiered at Theatre Calgary, Apr. 1984) and *Getting it Straight*, show Pollock forging dramatic structures to accommodate an increasing interest in the subjectivity of female character. The theme of the former, partly autobiographical, is the conflict between a compulsively dedicated physician and his alcoholic wife, with particular emphasis on the impact of their discord on a growing daughter. In a further step from *Blood Relations*' retrospective time frame, this play rejects linear time, directly engaging the audience in the two present-time characters' associational memory patterns. In the monodrama *Getting it Straight*, Pollock explores the subjective

virtually to its dramatic limits in the fragmented mind of Erne, an escaped mental patient who broods brokenly on the horrors of male aggression—in particular as manifest in the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Pollock won her second Governor General's Award with *Doc* in 1986; *Getting It Straight* is published in *Heroines* (1992), edited by Joyce Doolittle.

Thereafter Pollock returned to his-torical subjects: *Fair Liberty's Call* (1995)—which premiered at the Stratford Festival, July 1993—and *Saucy Jack*. The former demonstrates a new complexity in the playwright's revisionary perspectives on the Canadian past, examining the moral and spiritual ravages of revolution in a Loyalist Boston family. Now living in the wilderness of early New Brunswick, the Roberts are further torn between principle and expediency in a life of hardship that is incongruously combined with the perpetuation of class privilege in the new community. In *Saucy Jack*, Pollock once more expresses her fascination with famous unsolved crimes, offering a variation on speculations concerning the identity of Jack the Ripper. Somewhat reminiscent of *Blood Relations*' device of the play-within-a-play, here an actress is hired by an intimate friend of the heir presumptive to the British throne to enact the roles of the viciously slaughtered East End prostitutes. While narratively the motive is to locate and cover up possible guilt in high places, the dramatist's main purpose is to give voice to the anonymous underclass victims.

Further, much of Pollock's stage work would appear to divide along a line between history play like *Walsh*, *The Komagata Maru Incident* and *One Tiger to a Hill* and *Fair Liberty's Call* and more personal family plays, beginning with *Blood Relations* and including *Generations*, *Whiskey Six Cadenza* and *DOC*. The later plays do not easily fall into either category.

21.8 Let Us Sum Up

Sharon Pollock is one of Canada's most distinguished dramatists. Her *Generations* (1981), in which different generations of a prairie family clash over a homestead inheritance, is almost unique among her works in its wholly realistic convention. Her other plays depend on imaginative rearrangings of historical detail and disruptions of realistic illusion that force audiences to concentrate on issues inherent in the events portrayed. *Walsh* (1972), first produced by Theatre Calgary, uses an episodic structure to present the injustice the famous officer felt duty-bound to commit against Sitting Bull. In *The Komagata Maru Incident* (1978) Pollock indicted Canada's racist handling of a 1914 shipload of Sikh immigrants by giving the action a side-show atmosphere. *One Tiger to a Hill* (1981) dramatizes the complex tensions in a prison hostage-taking. In *Blood relations* (1981) Pollock skilfully employed a play-within-a-play device and juxtaposed different time-frames to create a tantalizing ambiguity about Lizzie Borden's guilt in the famous murders, allowing us to see a range of forces controlling her destiny. It won the first Governor General's Award for published drama. *Doc* (1986), which won Pollock a second Governor General's Award, draws to some extent on her own family history in exploring questions ranging from the metaphysical to the political and psychological. Another inventive layering of realities on stage presents a tale of a renowned doctor obsessed with helping people while he allows his wife to commit suicide and robs his daughter of his love. In *The Making of Warriors* (1991), Pollock mixes several subjective and objective voices/characters to interweave three stories (about abolitionist Sarah Moot Grinke, Native activist Anna Mae Aquas and a woman who witnesses Anna Mae murder) in a moving, urgent call to action that was broadcast on CBC radio. *Getting Straight* (1992) has met with a mixed reception; in it Erne, a middle-aged escapee from a schizophrenic ward, hardly mad at all, rails, rages, and contemplates the perilous state of women, men,

and the world. It is a *tour deforce* for a performer and ends in glorious ambiguity on an image of a net spun of women's hands and Rapunzel's hair, which encircles the globe—and with the repeated questions: 'What would it spell?/what would it spell?/ what would it spell?'

21.9 Review Questions

1. Write a note on the development of Canadian Drama.
2. What are the features of history plays?
3. Write a note on the development of Canadian theatre.
4. Discuss Sharon Pollock as a playwright.
5. Give an estimate of Sharon Pollock's contribution to Canadian drama and theatre.
6. "Pollock's plays of seventies, drawn both from the past and from contemporary life, are marked by a strong commitment to political and social issues." Discuss.
7. "Modern Canadian drama was born out of an amalgam of the new consciousness of the age—social, political and aesthetic—with the new Canadian self-consciousness". Discuss.

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UNIT-22

SHARON POLLOCK : *DOC*

Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 First Production of the Play
- 22.3 *Doc* as a Memory Play
- 22.4 Autobiographical Element in the Play
- 21.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.6 Review Questions
- 21.7 Bibliography

22.0 Objectives

- To expose the students to Canadian experience in *Doc*,
- To give the students a critical estimate of the play *Doc*.
- To expose to the form of a memory play with special reference to *Doc*.
- To facilitate the student to have an account of Sharon Pollock's autobiography in her play, *Doc*
- To make them acquainted with the theme of the play, *Doc*.
- To introduce them with the characters of Sharon Pollock with special reference to *Doc*.

22.1 Introduction

The two act play, *Doc* having the following characters

EV, an elderly man in his 70s

CATHERINE, his daughter in her mid-30s

KATIE, Catherine, as a young girl

BOB, Ev's wife, Catherine's wife

OSCAR, Ev's friend, consists of sometimes shared sometimes singular memories of the past, as relived by Ev and Catherine, interacting with figures from the past. Structurally, shift in time do not occur in a linear, chronological fashion, but in an unconscious and intuitive patterning of the past by Ev and Catherine.

A kaleidoscope of memory constitutes the dialogue and action of the opening sequence. It is followed by a scene set more firmly in the "now". Ev as an old man wears glasses and worn cardigan sweater. He is old during these two segments, as he is at the opening and closing of Act two. Although

Ev relives the past as a young man, we never see Catherine any age but in her mid-30. Catherine and Katie blend, sharing a sense of one entity, particularly in the scenes with her father's best friend Oscar. This should not be interpreted to mean that Catherine and Katie share one mind or always in accord. They are often in conflict. Oscar is first seen in the opening sequence wearing a Twenties era hockey uniform. He is a young man about to enter medical school. As far as Bob is concerned, he is in her mid-twenties to mid-thirties. She wears a dressing gown which has a belt or tie at the waist, and under this she wears a slip. It is necessary to say that her descent into alcoholism, despair and self-disgust must be carefully charted.

22.2 First Production of the Play

DOC was commissioned and first produced by Theatre Calgary in April 1984 with the following cast:

EV, Michael Hogan

CATHERINE Susan Hogan,

KATIE Amanda Pollock (Pollock's daughter)

BOB Kate Trotter

OSCAR Chuck Shamata

Directed by Guy Sprung

Designed by Terry Gunvordahl

Music and Sound Score by Allan Rae

The play was extensively revised for the Toronto Free Theatre production later that year, and has gone on to a number of regional theatres including Manitoba Theatre Centre and the Vancouver Playhouse, where the title role was taken by Pollock's ex-husband Michael Ball in another interchange between Pollock's art and her family life. In 1986 the play won Pollock her second Governor General's Award, and she herself directed a production for Theatre New Brunswick under the title *Family Trappings*. Her father attended opening night and provided program notes.

22.3 *Doc* as a Memory Play

Doc takes the form of a memory play, but with three variations on the traditional memory play structure. First, the lens through which the memories are filtered is bifocal. Rather than a single protagonist, two characters share—and shape—the past conjured in the play: Catherine and her father, Ev. Let us have the first interaction between Catherine, Ev and Bob, which unfolds their past :

Ev: The niggers from Baker's Point, the mill workers from Marysville, they 're the ones got this hospital named after me. Left to the politicians God knows what they'd have called it.

Catherine: Well, I'm proud.

Ev: Some goddmn French name I suppose—

What?

Catherine: Proud, you must be proud having the hospital name after you.

Ev: That day I first started practice, that day I was proud. Was the day after you were born... There was a scarlet fever epidemic that year, you remember?

Catherine: No Daddy.

Ev: Someday...some couple came in, they were carryin' their daughter, what was she? two, maybe there? I took her in my arms...could see passed her back to her mother. hold her tight, I remember that woman holdin' that child in the hallway?

Catherine: No Daddy.

Ev: No. That your mother...that was your mother.

Bob: Blueberries, Kattie.

Ev: You were just little then.

Bob: Blueberries along the railway track, and every we'd pick them and sell them. I was the youngest, and Mama was always afraid I'd get lost, but I never got lost.

(Doc, 371)

What is remembered will not necessarily be less subjective or distorted, but it will have at least two sides. Catherine's accusing memories are met and in effect rebutted by Ev's self-justifying ones. In the memory scenes Ev's wife Bob and his friend Oscar tend to support Catherine's accusations, while Katie, Catherine's younger self, most often sides with Ev. This ability of the characters to talk to each other across the memory frame is the second variation that Pollock plays on the form. Insofar as the play resembles a trial, with Catherine sitting in judgment of Ev, and Bob acting as prosecutor, the fluid form allows an elaborate complex of cross-examinations to be conducted from both sides of the frame.

The third variation is probably the most important: Pollock's decision to split the character of the daughter into an older and younger self, Catherine and Katie, played by two different actors. This results in Catherine's struggling not only with her ambivalent feelings for both her parents, but with her own sense of personal fragmentation and alienation. She hated seeing her father's selfishness and not so benign neglect drive her mother deeper and deeper into alcoholic depression, chipping away at Bob's sense of identity and self-worth, actively conspiring to neutralize her strength and even her sexuality. At the same time she hated her mother's weakness in allowing herself to be so diminished, hated her for the terrible games of hide-the-bottle that Katie was forced to play. And she admired her father's strength and self-sufficiency, the stubborn singlemindedness that made him such a good doctor—and such a terrible husband. The Catherine/Katie split represented by the two actors in such graphic theatrical terms is also the wound that adult Catherine carries within her, a kind of internal hemorrhaging made more acute by her perception of her own guilt in her mother's death.

Bob: Everyone has something hidden in this house. I hide it and he hides it and you hide it.

Catherine: Do something.

Bob: Do something. Just like four father . Do, do, do.

Bob: Just stop. (She finds a bottle of pills.) Stop doing. She unscrews the bottle; pours pills in hand; looks at Catherine.) Stop. (She swallows the pills; settles back in the chair; shuts her eyes.)

Shift. Katie slowly approaches Bob. She and Catherine stand, looking at Bob. Pause.

Katie: She was blue... I'd never seen anybody blue before. Robie went in the Kitchen and cried. I stood at the bottom. Of the stairs and watched them bring her down on the stretcher. I don't cry... I don't know what she took—was it the pills that make her sleep?

Catherine: Uncle Oscar said.

She was asleep alright. And really blue. I thought... I thought...

Catherine: go on, you can say it.

I thought may be she was dead

Katie: All better.I wonder, do you know what I wonder? I wonder did she take the pills to sleep like she sometimes does, or did she...

Catherine: ...in the mirror, I look in the mirror...

Katie: ...I see Mummy and I see...

Catherine: ...Gramma, and Mummy and me...

Katie: I don't want to be like them.

(Doc, 397)

The play moves towards a reconciliation of the two selves: in the vocabulary of contemporary therapeutic literature, Catherine comes to accept and embrace her inner child. The following dialogues shows this reconciliation:

Katie: I don't hear you! (pause) I don't hear you! (pause) I don't! (Katie jumps up and whirls around, to look over at where she last saw Bob. Pause softly.) I don't hear you at all.

Catherine: You can cry Katie...it's all right to cry...

Katie: Would you want to have me?

Catherine: Yes, yes I would.

(Doc, 401)

But that self-reconciliation is possible for Catherine only through reconciling with her father. Since she has been accusing herself of essentially the same crime as *Doc*, she has really only two

choices: to convict him or drop the charges. She chooses, in effect, the latter. Not only is the potentially incriminating evidence of Ev's mother's letter not introduced, but it is destroyed—by Catherine herself. At the end she speaks her father's language, lets him have the last word, and smiles at him a smile that smacks of complicity. Throughout the play Catherine and Katie have wondered and worried about which of their parents they most resemble, whose character they are most likely to have inherited. Catherine appears finally to have cast her lot with the charismatic (and living) father. But the cost is heavy: a silencing of the dead victims, mother and perhaps grand-mother, whose cries for justice reach from the grave. They are heard, but in the end rejected, that the living might carry on. To conclude Pollock's shows her forging dramatic structures to accommodate an increasing interest in the subjectivity of female character.

22.4 Autobiographical Element in the Play

Every writer knows that his or her own biography is an important resource. Personal experiences and lived memories exist like photographs, ever ready to become the site where imaginative fiction can begin. In the programme note to her most overtly biographical play, *Doc*, Sharon Pollock commented on her approach to personal or documentary sources: "My father is Ev but Ev [the character] is not my father... [These characters] aren't really the people I know any more. They started out that way but now have grown past them" (Zimmerman, *PW* 84). The story and the characters develop beyond the strictly personal or the documentary. As Pollock said, "If it was just my story, I would have put it in a letter and sent it to my family" (*PW* 84). Moreover, the writing of fiction deeply rooted in biography can yield discoveries for the artist too. According to Pollock, "self discovery is why plays are written" (Zimmerman, *CTR* 69: 38). In *Doc*, Pollock bravely raised ghosts from her own past. Once summoned, they brought with them new challenges.

In an interview in 1991, I asked Sharon Pollock if there was anything left unfinished when she completed *Doc* (prod. 1984). She replied that there was, that the tragic figure of the mother, Bob, had overshadowed the main character, Catherine: "Central to the play is Catherine's journey, the discovery which allows her to accept the responsibility that belongs to her and to lay the rest aside without guilt. It frees her from the past". Yet Catherine's story seems less compelling because Bob's presence is so haunting. According to Pollock, "because Bob is more present, more active even though she is acted upon, I don't think the audience sufficiently realizes what has happened to Catherine. Catherine is the figure that has learned from the tragedy". Bob dominates the play even though it is named for her husband, the doctor, and even though Pollock intended the focus to be on Catherine. The truth of this is apparent when one finds that the critics also emphasize the fate of the mother, a point I will return to. However, the spirit of Bob has not been easily put to rest by the playwright either. It can be argued here that the spectre of Bob inhabits all of Pollock's mother figures, and most especially those created after *Doc* (1984): Eme, the protagonist of *Getting it Straight* (1988), and Joan, the mother in *Fair Liberty's Call* (1993). These women are related. The portrait of the maternal figure evolves through the course of these plays and, as it is altered, Pollock reconfigures not only the image of the maternal, but also that of the other participants in the family plot: father and daughter.

Pollock's semi-autobiographical play *Doc* makes it clear how close to home many of her earlier plays are, not always in the details of theme or exposition, but in the force which drives the work. For example, Pollock herself has spoken of having trouble with authority (*PW* 93). A troubled relationship with authority has provided the central conflict in numerous plays. The struggle takes a

critical turn in *Blood Relations* (1980), a play Diane Bessai calls a “turning point.” The first play with an “entirely feminine point of view,” *Blood Relations* is also the first to have the locus of its political and social issues completely in the family home (*PW*73). The daughter’s trouble with her father, the undisputed authority, leads to murder. It is not surprising that the father is not only dominating and unyielding, but also charismatic—or that his daughter, who challenges his authority, is deeply attached to him. His inspirational source is clearest in *Doc*, Pollock’s most intensely personal play to date.

Sharon Pollock’s father was Doctor George Everett Chalmers, a vibrant personality who, like Ev, was a tireless and dedicated family doctor. He pioneered polio treatment in the province, was an active member of the provincial legislature, and in 1974 had a hospital named in his honour. In his book *Gentlemen, Players, and Politicians*, Dalton Camp describes Everett Chalmers as “impressive on sight, exuding confidence [...]. Clothed in an impeccable white suit, he looked [...] like Clark Gable”. More importantly, Camp comments on Chalmers’ “commanding presence, his terrible candour, and [his] personal authority and prestige”. He was a man, says Camp, “worshipped by legions of patients” and “celebrated for his compassion,” a “remarkably fearless [and] combative man”. He was, in fact, “the ablest practitioner in New Brunswick” and “He looked it”. Chalmers’s mother did commit suicide and he did marry a nurse named Eloise Roberts (nicknamed Bob) who became an alcoholic and committed suicide in 1954, when their daughter was a teenager.¹

The handsome and commanding Doctor Everett Chalmers provides a blueprint for Pollock’s authoritarian males, a figure at once idealizable and infuriating. One could argue that a number of Pollock’s plays map a kind of “working-through” of this complicated connection. Young Katie suggests as much when she speaks of how she “figures things out” (*Doc* 49), and when looking at her notebook, she says, “I write it all down. And when I grow up, I’ll have it all here” (*Doc* 83). When Catherine, a writer in her thirties who no longer uses the name Katie, returns to the family home, her father Ev is no longer as formidable. Although still angry and combative, he has mellowed, having just suffered a heart attack.

Doc is a watershed play not only because of its complicated bending of time and space, its inwardness, and its use of highly personal material, but also because it presents a kind of closure on what has been a central preoccupation to this point: the struggle with authority. At this juncture, the adult daughter is not beholden; the aging patriarch is simply her father. So, at the end of the play, to mark the change in his character, Ev is able to give his daughter the unqualified support he was unable to give his wife, and Andrew Borden in *Blood Relations* was unable to give his daughter. Recalling a photograph of her mother, Catherine says,

CATHERINE. [...] she looked as if she was waiting. Just waiting.

[...] whatever it was [she was waiting for], she couldn’t grab it.

EV. Do you know what you want?

CATHERINE.... Yes... Yes, I do.

EV. Then you grab it. (*Doc*, 125)

Father and daughter then burn the unopened letter from Ev’s mother, which they assume is an accusing one. There is a sense that they have both come to an understanding about the limits of responsibility and the limits on choice. Extinguishing the accusation becomes a pact to stop assigning

blame. Perhaps now they can forgive themselves and each other. As the stage lights go down on the dying flames from the letter, "CATHERINE looks at EV and smiles". Some critics have found this reconciliation scene disturbing because it seems to diminish the mother's tragedy:

[... I]n accepting the sacrifice and silencing of the dead mother [...] the daughter pays too high a price for her own peace. Perhaps even more unsettling is the satisfaction Catherine seems to find in this resolution of the oedipal triangle [...] she and Doc share a smile of complicity in her being, at the end, daddy's only girl. (Wasserman 32-33)

Wasserman says Catherine "lets her father off the hook" because she feels herself implicated in her mother's death. She "must [...] forgive her father so that she might forgive herself".

The problem, I think, is that Wasserman forgets the child Katie in this story, as does Rosalind Kerr in her excellent article, "Borderline Crossings in Sharon Pollock's Out-law Genres." By focusing on the mother as victim, they marginalize and minimize the daughter's traumatic experience, which leads me back to Pollock's important comment: "I don't think the audience sufficiently realize what has happened to Catherine" (*CTR* 38). And so it is that in *Doc* Sharon Pollock reaches closure on one front (the struggle with the authoritarian father) and reveals unresolved conflicts on another (the maternal connection). The mother in *Doc* is a haunting presence; her spectre remains long after the lights on her go out.

In *Doc*, young Katie is adamant that she does not want to be like her mother or her grandmother. "I'm not like them," she claims. "I'm like you, Daddy". She even changes her name from Katie to Catherine so as not to have the same name as her grandma². In Katie's eyes, her mother and grandmother are losers, and victims because they surrendered. Her mother's situation especially infuriates her: "You all say she's sick, she isn't sick," she yells at her father. "She's a drunk and that's what we should say!" . This is extremely important because to young Katie, "not sick" means her mother has a choice. To her, being an alcoholic is a wilful indulgence. So, when her mother complains, the adult Catherine asks the logical question: "why couldn't you leave?". Katie knows that Oscar's mother "had the good sense to get out". She also knows that Oscar is in love with her mother and would help Bob leave her marriage, if that was what Bob wanted. Catherine will herself get out. So, why is Katie so enraged? Why does the mature Catherine have difficulty summoning sympathy? It is not only the wish to identify with the idealized achieving father; it is also because this child was abandoned, neglected by both of her narcissistic parents. And this is my point: both put their own needs before their daughter's. Her father's neglect amounts to his never being home and being oblivious to the fact that he is leaving her alone with a suicidal, alcoholic mother. The non-nurturing, unempathic, and totally self-absorbed mother is even worse. She isn't there for her daughter either; she leaves the scene by entering an alcoholic haze and then calls on her little girl for help. Bob fails Katie completely. Still seeking the approval of a husband who is no longer paying attention to her, she does not take care of her children. Ev says, "she'd let the kids starve to death if it weren't for the maid!". "I hate you and I wish that you were dead!" Katie screams . The rage is not simply Katie's inability to empathize with the one who succumbs; it is also that she believes she was, and remains, an unwanted child.

So, the adult Catherine comes home as chief investigator and it is as if Ev is placed on trial. Was his success worth it? Whose fault is Bob's alcoholism and suicide? Whose fault is it if a "strong, capable woman degenerates into alcoholism," as Wasserman describes her? It is too easy to read her simply as the neglected wife. She had been an achiever like Ev, but now she tells Katie: "There is

nothing I can do". She is talking about her own lack of resources. As in the photograph that Catherine recalls, the one Oscar took of Bob "looking up at the camera" where "she looked as if she was waiting. Just waiting," Bob waits for rescue. It is Katie who will prove resourceful, who will do it by herself (84). Now, as Pollock puts it, the daughter must "take control of her life in a positive way" (*PW* 93). After the writing of *Doc*, Pollock moves away from such surrenders and suicides, from figures as trapped as Bob.

Pollock's stage work would appear to divide along a line between history play like *Walsh*, *The Koma-gata*, *Maru Incident* and *One Tiger to a Hill* and *Fair Liberty's Call* and more personal family plays, beginning with *Blood Relations* and including *Generations*, *Whiskey Six Cadenza* and *Doc*. But Pollock herself considers her all plays autobiographical indirectly. She says that She has really been writing the same play over and over, a play about fathers or other figures betraying the trust of those who depend on them, driven to those betrayals by their own adherence to a set of external, systematic values, and usually refusing to acknowledge the responsibility for the damage they do. With *Doc* she cuts closest to the autobiographical bone, projecting herself directly into the play in the form of two characters, and creating one of the most powerful and affecting experiences in the Canadian theatre. In fact in this play she seems to mingle the historical and sociological element with the personal history or personal history with the historical and sociological element. In her program notes for the second production of *Doc* at Toronto Free Theatre in 1984, Sharon Pollock wrote about how she has dealt with historical and broadly sociological in her early plays rather than confronting her own past. She says: "possibly I found my personal history too frightening and confusing to confront directly." The history she dramatizes in *Doc* is based on her own family during the years she was growing up in Fredericton, New Brunswick: her father, Ev, devoting himself to his work as a respected physician and pillar of community while her mother slowly came apart at home, and she herself as a child watching the unfolding of this terrible drama of guilt, recrimination, alcoholism and eventual suicide.

Thus the theme of the play, partly autobiographical, is the conflict between a compulsively dedicated physician and his alcoholic wife, with particular emphasis on the impact of their discord on a growing daughter. In a further step from *Blood Relations*' retrospective time frame, this play rejects linear time, directly engaging the audience in the two present-time characters' associational memory patterns.

22.4 Let Us Sum Up

To sum up the play, partly autobiographical, is the conflict between a compulsively dedicated physician and his alcoholic wife, with particular emphasis on the impact of their discord on a growing daughter with two selves. The play moves towards a reconciliation of the two selves: in the vocabulary of contemporary therapeutic literature, Catherine comes to accept and embrace her inner child. The play consists of sometimes shared sometimes singular memories of the past, as relived by Ev and Catherine, interacting with figures from the past. Structurally, shift in time do not occur in a linear, chronological fashion, but in an unconscious and intuitive patterning of the past by Ev and Catherine. It takes the form of a memory play, but with three variations on the traditional memory play structure. First, the lens through which the memories are filtered is bifocal.

22.5 Review Questions

1. Attempt a critical estimate of the play *Doc*.

2. “*Doc* takes the form of a memory play.” Discuss.
3. Discuss *Doc* as a modern Canadian drama.
4. Sharon Pollock has dealt with her autobiography as a the theme of the play, *Doc*.
5. The play, *Doc* “moves towards a reconciliation of the two selves: in the vocabulary of contemporary therapeutic literature, Catherine comes to accept and embrace her inner child.” Discuss.
6. The play, *Doc* consists of shared sometimes singular memories of the past. Evaluate the play in the light this statement.
7. Write a note on art the of characterization of Sharon Pollock with special reference to *Doc*.

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UNIT-23

UMA PARAMESWARAN : A DIASPORIC WRITER

Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
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- 23.7 Four Phases in the Immigrants Life
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23.0 Objectives

- To introduce the students to a Canadian writer of Indian origin.
- To familiarize them with terms and aspects related to Diaspora Writing.
- To enable the students to gain a knowledge of Immigrant Experience.
- To understand the futuristic trends in the works of the writer.

23.1 Introduction

The emergence of New literatures in the twentieth century has seen a manifold increase in the sphere of immigrant or Diaspora Literature also. The world is experiencing an intermingling of races

with people from different nationalities and creed migrating to far-off lands in search of better opportunities for gaining knowledge as well as for livelihood. They have explored various lands and Canada has also attracted settlers from various parts of the world. The nation is well known for cultural fusion and the nation has witnessed the flowering of British, French, American and South Asian Cultures. Canada has adopted the policy of Multiculturalism but still the immigrants who go with great expectations, actually see a gap between expectation and reality and undergo a feeling of being marginalized, even while enjoying the sense of wonder and adventure at the sight of the new landscape, and experience nostalgia for the land left behind, where they were second to none. Uma Parameswaran a writer of Indian Origin settled in Canada, has tried to accommodate the best of both worlds in her literature by recalling an Indian past with its mythology, culture and legends and unifying it with her Canadian experience, thereby preserving and asserting her identity.

23.2 About The Author

Uma Parameswaran—poet, playwright, and short-story writer—was born in Madras and grew up in Jabalpur, India. Currently she is a professor of English at The University of Winnipeg. Since settling in Canada, Parameswaran has devoted much of her writing and efforts in the literary field to creating an identifiable South Asian Canadian Diaspora. Parameswaran read extensively drawing motivation from epic poetry and Greek theatre through her schooling and during the India-China war of 1962. She received a Master of Arts degree and Diploma in Journalism from Nagpur University. Receiving the Smith-Mundt Fulbright Scholarship, Parameswaran moved to the United States to study American Literature at Indiana University earning her MA in Creative Writing. She completed her Ph.D. in English at Michigan State University in 1972. She started as a newspaper reporter in India and joined the faculty of the University of Winnipeg upon arrival in Winnipeg. She has written plays that were produced in Winnipeg and published in Toronto and India. She has written or edited ten scholarly books in post colonial literature and women focused research. Her poems have appeared in various journals and having been at the University of Winnipeg for three decades, she has published many articles and essays over the years.

She has also been active in The Writers Union of Canada, serving on the National Council in various capacities throughout the 1990s, a past president of The Manitoba Writers' Guild and a board member on various women's organizations. As founder of the Performing Arts and Literature of India (PALI), she has been involved in organizing instruction in the classical dances of India in Winnipeg (the first to do so in 1978) and producing a weekly show (1978-1990) on India and Indians in Canada on community television. She has published several books on post-colonial literature, and has authored ten books of creative writing, including awards-winning *What was Always Hers* (short stories), and *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* (novel), and *The Forever Banyan Tree* (novella) and *Fighter Pilots Never Die* (stories). She recently retired from the University of Winnipeg in order to concentrate on her writing. Being a skillful writer, she received several awards, like the Jubilee Award for *What was Always Hers* in 2000, Lady Eaton Award for *The Door I Shut Behind Me* in 1967.

23.3 Uma Parameswaran's works

In 1962, while still in India, Parameswaran wrote "Sons Must Die," a play centered on the Partition of 1947. Other plays followed: "Meera" in 1971, "Sita's Promise" in 1981, "Dear Deedi, My Sister" in 1989 (first prize in the Caribe play writing contest, 1989) and "Rootless but Green are the

Boulevard Trees” in 1998. They were collected into *Sons Must Die and Other Plays* and published in 1998 as a part of the South Asian Canadian Literature Series (SACLIT), of which Parameswaran is the general editor. Parameswaran’s volume of poetry, *Trishanku and Other Writings* (1987) is also included in the SACLIT series.

Parameswaran recognizes the experiences of Indo-Canadians as expressed through literature to be unique in their own right: The literature of Canadian writers born on the Indian subcontinent (India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh) is varied in content and form, but common to all of them is a passionate faith in their own voice that is raised to express their Canadian experience. Indo-Canadian writers bring to their writing not only racial memory and contemporary history, but the poetic traditions and modes of India. As such, Parameswaran published SACLIT, An introduction to South-Asian-Canadian Literature in 1996. The work is a collection of essays written between 1982-1992 and focuses on the South Asian diaspora in Canada.

What Was Always Hers, a collection of short stories and winner of the 1999 New Muse Award and the Canadian Authors Association 2000 Jubilee Award for Best Short Stories, is Parameswaran’s latest work of fiction. The volume contains the stories “What Was Always Hers”, “Maru and the M.M. Syndrome,” “Darkest Before Dawn,” “How We Won Olympic Gold,” and “The Icicle.” Parameswaran has been the two-time chair of the Status of Women Writers Committee of the Writers’ Union of Canada, member of the Margaret Laurence Chair of Women’s Studies, and has sat on board of Immigrant Women’s Association of Manitoba, she is no stranger to the experiences of South Asian Women in Canada. The stories in *What Was Always Hers* take Parameswaran’s writing to an even further height as she develops character relationships between South Asian women. She has been able to write about South Asian women in a range of professions from the secretary to the housewife drawing from her own experiences as a professor and her observations of South Asian Canadian women. From immigrant women and Canadian-born South Asian women to exploring the generation gap between old and young South Asian women, Parameswaran’s stories contain the highest degree of cultural sensitivity. By Parameswaran’s writing we are not only constantly aware of the South Asian experience, but also of the struggles in life that make us all human.

23.3.1 *Mangoes on a Maple Tree*

This is her first novel. The novel is set in Winnipeg and the action takes place over a period of twenty days in 1997 during the great flood. The primary focus of this novel is the life of two related families, the Bhaves and the Moghes, and the narrative is told from the different perspectives of the family members although Jyoti (the young daughter of the Bhaves) emerges as the protagonist of the novel.

This novel steers clear of stereotypes about Indian immigrant families. The Bhaves and the Moghes are refreshingly different from some families that inhabit the world of diasporic fiction. There are no daughters being threatened with arranged marriages, no authoritarian parents, and no weepy sentimentality about the land left behind. Instead there is a narrative about a family that has migrated to Canada and whose daily life involves what most immigrants are familiar with — a negotiation between different cultural values. This novel does not simply emphasize cultural alienation but also finds joy in everyday immigrant life. The Bhave family consists of the parents, Sharad and Savitri, and their three children, Jyoti, Jayant, and Krish. Jyoti is a college student in a relationship with Pierre about which she

becomes increasingly conflicted as the narrative develops. Jayant, who has recently turned 18, is planning a long road trip with his buddies and the trip, the car his friends are working on, and the idea of leaving home preoccupy him. Krish is still in elementary school and his life focuses on sports. Sharad who comes from a wealthy family in Pune has taken to business in Canada after having given up a professional life as a scientist. Savitri teaches at a local school and is engaged in the life of disadvantaged kids whom she mentors. As parents, Sharad and Savitri, try to balance their desire to protect their kids while allowing them their independence. Consequently, their daughter's sex life or their older son's planned road trip test their abilities as parents as they work hard at keeping the family together.

The Bhave home also becomes a space for many of the young Indian students at the university. The students, mostly young men, come to the Bhave home in search of home cooked meals and conversations. These characters such as Sridhar, the intelligent student who is in love with Jyoti but unable to express his feelings for her; Danesh, the newly arrived student learning about life in Canada; and Vithal, Sharad's nephew are all characters who are deftly drawn by Parameswaran to provide a believable and very human cast of characters.

The Moghes are a somewhat different family. Veejala Moghe is Sharad's sister and they have two children, Vithal and Preeti. Veejala is a very different woman from Savitri; whereas Savitri is able to balance her family and her career, Veejala is torn between the demands of the two. This novel traces the parenting and marital issues of both couples and the differences between the families are presented as merely differences that exist within the diasporic community as the families carve out a life for themselves in Canada. Parameswaran refuses to offer stark contrasts or judgments about any of her characters or their life choices.

23.3.2 The Forever Banyan Tree

The Forever Banyan Tree is Uma Parameswaran's novella. Mooga, the central character in *The Forever Banyan Tree* was a precocious child. He was "crawling at five months, talking at eight months, repeating the alphabet all the way to V by the time he was fifteen months." He knew the Mother Goose rhymes from cover to cover and could recite the multiplication tables long before he started school. All that ended when he came down with a fever. It was a "freak fever and nothing at all could be done about it at that time; by the time they knew it was THE fever, it was too late." The illness made him slow, both mentally and physically, and at the age of thirty nine he was still a child who lived at home with his brother Vignesh, sister-in-law Neela and their two children.

There are no dramatic flourishes in this book. It is a sensitive and insightful account of the events in the life of a family. We see almost all of the events through Mooga's eyes. Set in Chennai, this is a story of Mooga's world – his relationship with his family, their friends and the servants in the household. The story begins with a description of that world – Mooga taking a bath with the help of Karuppan, the man who has been hired to take care of his needs; women dropping in to chat over a cup of coffee; Vignesh and Mooga watching videos together. Neela, the woman of the house, oversees everything with quiet efficiency. She supervises the servants, serves meals on time and takes care of the children and their activities.

The quiet rhythm and flow of their lives is shattered when Vignesh is diagnosed with cancer. After setting the scene, the greater part of the novella describes how the members of the family cope

with this crisis, particularly Mooga who struggles to make sense of the world changing around him. His sensitivity and intuitive understanding of the people closest to him is particularly touching. In a sense he is the glue that holds the family together, sensing their needs and drawing in Neela's parents to help the family through their crisis.

The Forever Banyan Tree is followed by a short piece *Epiphany at the Farewell Party* and excerpts from Parameswaran's other writings. *Epiphany* is a mother's ruminations as she awaits the return of a prodigal daughter. The tone and language of this piece is very different from the earlier novella *The Forever Banyan Tree* is dedicated to mothers and surrogate mothers everywhere.

23.3.3 *The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-wet Bodice*

The Sweet Smell of Mother's Milk-wet Bodice another novella of Uma Parameswaran. Inspired by real stories, the novella tells the tale of a sponsored wife of a landed immigrant, who soon experiences abuse followed by divorce with no spousal support from the husband that betrayed her.

23.3.4 *Sisters at the Well*

Sisters at the Well is a collection of poems by Uma Parameswaran, which starts with two powerful poems on the Air India crash of 1985. As in *Trishanku*, her earlier collection, these different voices capture the experiences of Indo-Canadians, and resonate with the speakers' diasporic memory and contemporary realities. Collectively, the poems address various phases of immigrant experience from nostalgia for the land left behind and wonder at the new environment, through the realities of racial discrimination, pressures of settlement and struggle to strike roots, to the final affirmation that "Home is where your feet are, and may your heart be there too."

Parameswaran's approach to the short story is more slice-of-life than sting-in-the-tail, more Katherine Mansfield than Saki. Pleasure is derived from a sense of ordinary lives lived, in a world without tidy coincidences and clever endings, but also without vivid colour. The brick wall overlooks a genteel suburban street and a well-manicured back garden, the kind of garden where one feels someone will be along soon to trim the ivy and prune back the disturbances.

23.3.5 *Trishanku*

Trishanku is a collection of about fifteen different voices through which she shows different types of response to moving from one environment to another. It reflects her observations and empathetic experiences. As an academic working on diasporic experience, she noted that there are different stages that we, as individuals and as a community, go through: from nostalgia for the old country mingled with wonder at the new environment, on to a phase when our main social interaction is with our own South-Asian fellow immigrants, to a phase when we move into the larger Canadian community and take our place in the social and political structures of our adopted country. However, *Trishanku* (1988) speaks more of the first three phases than of the last phase.

23.4 Contemporary Literary Trend of Diasporic Literature

Uma Parameswaran is a popular name in diasporic culture. She migrated from her native country, India, the place of her birth, to travel and migrate to Winnipeg, a foreign land. Thus her writings have all traces of diasporic culture in them and can be studied under diasporic literature. To

understand better, what her poems and plays want to convey, we must know what diaspora is.

The term diaspora was assimilated from Greek into English in the twentieth century. Even then the word Diaspora literally meant the scattering of people from their homeland by willing or by force and settling in other countries. The terms migrant, expatriate, exile, refugee were replaced by the term Diaspora in recent days. The word has an ambiguous meaning of the scattering of two types of people i.e. ambassadors and refugees. The first one includes professionals and job seekers who fled the country in search of white-collar jobs. The second types of people are those who were expelled out by force. These people fled the country due to ethnic conflict, economic problems and as indentured labourers.

Though both the type of people leave their country for settling in an alien land, the need for both of them differs. There were many reasons for the dispersal of the people from their homeland. While one tries to understand the foreign culture and makes life comfortable, the other seeks refuge and protection in the host land. The former has a forward looking attitude and assimilates the host culture easily while the latter keeps himself isolated and has a nostalgic attitude in them of their homeland. Though the definition for the immigrants and the expatriates differs, what captures one's attention is the cause of the migration.

At present there are different Diasporas in the world. Among them the Jewish, Indian, African and Chinese are some notable Diasporas. The Indian Diaspora is a major one, which constitutes approximately of twenty million people all over the world. They are serving as entrepreneurs, workers, teachers, researchers, innovators, doctors, lawyers, engineers, managers and even political leaders. There are many eminent writers of Indian Diaspora like Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Jumpa Lahiri and Uma Parameswaran who have been discussing several issues concerning their homelands and the land in which they live.

The diasporic experience is shaped by economic positions, personal skills and political relationships between the country of origin and the country of adoption. Reception and acceptance of immigrants in the host country also helps in shaping the diasporic experience. The host country's immigration law, legal system and cultural openness also contribute to this diasporic experience. The diasporic writers are situated in a critical position between two nations and cultures. They can neither forget their nation or culture from which they come nor can they fully assimilate the culture of their adopted nation. The concern of the diasporic writers is not only with the memory and nostalgia but also with the 'place' and 'displacement'. The theme of home/homelessness is an important issue in diasporic literature. The space of the homeland that seems constricting for the people prior to migration becomes a source and object of nostalgia and longing after the migration. The immigrant could only have the nostalgia but can never think of returning to his homeland because the concept of identity entirely changes with the dislocation of the immigrant. has brought out the condition of the mind of the homeless immigrants. The psychological trauma that they undergo makes them get affected mentally. Regarding missing out on customs and traditions, Uma in her work *Trishanku*, writes thus:

I am Chaman Lal Dwivedi
learned in three Vedas....
I have a green card for America

And am also landed immigrant here.
Everything is possible if you know how....
I am called now to talk to students,
White men. True worth will tell.

Everything is fine here.
One must make adjustments
Of course. At first
I thought this was rakshasa land
Where everything is opposite—
Where people monstrously huge
Make night day
And sleep till noon.
Where women chase men,
Like Surpanaka of old.

It was difficult at first
To eat meat and drink liquor
But the rishis did both
In older days; *sruti*, word of God,
Unchangeable, *smriti*, customs
That society accretes and sheds
For change of times.
I, well versed in both, know this,
For I am Chaman Lal Dwivedi
Learned in the Vedas.

In all the diasporic writings, the identity is represented as a fractured one. Like the Diaspora (people) that get scattered and dispersed around the world, the identity of these people is also scattered. Here are many diasporic writers who have seriously discussed this issue. They say that all the immigrants irrespective of caste, nation, gender, religion, race or educational background face an identity problem. These immigrants who have multiple identities in their homeland lose such identities in the host land instead they get different identities as an ambassador or a refugee. Though both types were losing their

identity, it is the latter one, which undergoes much scrutiny. This is because the former gets a recognition in the host country whereas as the latter cannot. The first group of people has a national identity in their home country. So they can return to their homeland whenever they wish but the latter type cannot do such because these are people who were denied identity in their homeland itself. So the problem of identity affects these people most. In *The Door I Shut Behind Me*, Uma Parameswaran describes this through the character of Chander:

Chander mulled over his own feelings of aversion and fear. What were they? Not Indians any more, nor were they Canadians; clearly they were a close-knit group; they seemed to have kept their own identity and did not seem to have any affinities with the people or place around them. The women had not changed their costume and none had changed their food habits if one were to judge by the food on the table. But they shield away from all talk of return. They hoped to go back, they said, but Chander felt that their hope was for a time as far into the abstract future as their memory was for an abstract past.

The Door I Shut Behind Me. 101.

This is an echo of the Indian Diaspora in Canada or United States or Australia or anywhere around the world. Expatriates, exiles or emigrants settlers who find themselves displaced from one country or culture or aspire to accept the new identity of the alien land into which they have moved into, will constitute the Diasporic Community.

What surfaces in diasporic experience is the underlying trauma in this act of displacement. Oscillating between the polarities of the experiential tremors of a sense of banishment from the native land on the one hand and an exilic existence in another country on the other the expatriate or the expatriate writer articulate his deep seated sense of rootlessness.

The memories of homeland and the life in a new region have been disturbing both in terms of defining cultural identity and also to assimilate into a new space and writers who have left their homeland for settlements abroad have voiced this new premise of experience: an experience which validates many facts of the expatriate sensibility that Amitav Ghosh observes that “the diasporas also counts some of the finest writers.” Uma Parameswaran in her work *The Door I Shut Behind Me*, describes this diasporic experience in a beautiful manner:

It was not indifference that prompted them to be blind and deaf; it was some nostalgic idealism, or was it escapism? They seemed to have an image in mind, a golden age of romanticized memories. They did not even want to experience those pleasures again as was evident when Agarwal passed a plate of his betel roll packets. They reminisced about betel areca shops at the street corners, the vendor dipping into a dozen different tins of spices and liquids to prepare the roll of betel leaf that melted in one’s mouth; they talked about the time when they were road side Romeos clustered around such shops, eyeing college girls as they strolled by in groups, but only a few took Agarwal’s packets.

The Door I Shut Behind Me. 101.

The strategic concern underlying this diasporic writing is the search for home. Is their home this new country or the memories of the land they have left behind or whether in expatriation is a virtual snapping of the immigrants ‘ties with the mother country? Whether he makes mental visits home to refurbish his emotional and cultural loss? An exploration into this phenomenon made Rushdie observe that there can never be a complete breaking away for the expatriate from his home country. In an essay written in 1993, Rushdie an expatriate writer, precisely analyses how “...If we do look back we must also do in the knowledge which gives rise to profound uncertainties that our physical alienation from

India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost .”This is true in the case of many writers, who come back from their home country at recurrent intervals to recover the “lost patria” but often returned disillusioned cognizing that home is no longer it used to be what far away in some foreign land they had loved and cherished in their memories.

Whilst this is so, some writers opt for the permanent exile abroad, and yet continue to draw their cultural and aesthetic sustenance and substance from their Indian past as in the case of Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Parameswaran , Rohinton Mistry , Chitra Divakaruni and many others .The act of displacement activates the diaspora writer to their frequent mental visits home through dreams and literature, so much so that their homeland reappears to them as series of objects or fragments or narratives .It is thus the writers retain their contact with their original home reliving her through their memory dreams .Uma Parameswaran, talking about this experience observes how, “. . .though the landscape around us was spruce and pine, the landscape of memory was filled with jasmine and mango.”

As a result of this, whether the writer “straddles two cultures” or “falls between two stools” to echo Rushdie”, there is always the dual feeling of the sense of wonder and adventure at the sight of new landscape of the sense of wonder and adventure at the sight of the new landscape and simultaneously the nostalgia for the world left behind the ensuing conflict between these two mental frames are well observed by these lines of Vijayshree, who finds the tension patterning themselves into are experience in an expatriate writer like Uma Parameswaran. The experiencing of inhabiting two geographical and cultural spaces simultaneously is wrought with subtle and involved tensions which get polarized into patterns such as dislocation verses relocation; domicile versus diasporic consciousness; dispossession versus integration; heritage versus hybridity and exile versus involvement.

23.5 Uma Parameswaran as a Diasporic Writer

However, the writers of the Diaspora reveal the voice of the marginals though colored in a vibrant emotion; and their stories are those that depict the struggle to negotiate into a new space culture. They draw their strength from their own country whilst assimilating in a new milieu. Uma Parameswaran is a popular name in Diasporic Literature along with A.K. Ramanujan, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry, Kiran Desai and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. These diasporic writings which are also known as ‘expatriate writings’ or ‘immigrant writings’ give voice to the traumatic experiences of the writers when they are on the rack owing to the clash of two cultures or the racial discrimination they undergo. A large number of people have migrated from India to various alien lands under ‘forced exiles’ or ‘self-imposed exiles’. Immigration proves a pleasant experience only to a few immigrants who succeed in assimilating themselves with new geographical, cultural, social and psychological environment. To most of the diasporic writers, immigration is not a delectable experience. They often find themselves sandwiched between two cultures. The feeling of nostalgia, a sense of loss and anxiety to reinvent home obsess them which find expression, consciously or unconsciously, in their writings. Thus, immigrant writers reflect, on the one hand, their attachment to the motherland and on the other, their feeling of alienation and rootlessness.

South Asians in Canada usually find that the cold, forbidding Canadian climate is outmatched by the icy, hostile social environment where they feel themselves doubtly marginalized.

23.6 Uma Parameswaran :The Immigrant Experience

Parameswaran seems to say that whatever the ideology governing the production of culture may be, the act of reading itself is what matters, for it opens up differences that might have been covered by hegemonies of production. In an astute manner, the critic speaks of three distinct kinds of readers and their readings of Markandaya: Indians who have settled abroad, Indians living in India, and non-Indians. The division appears to be too neat, but she sticks to her “metacriticism,” which is quite illuminating. The implications of diaspora itself are problematized thus. William Safran’s definition of diaspora, Parameswaran argues, fits the Jewish diaspora to a T, “But most of the points are not applicable to Indians, especially to those who emigrated after 1947.” The premise with which she begins clearly is different from the way in which diaspora has been perceived, particularly in the West. The Indian Diaspora, for her, constitutes Indians who left India after 1947 and made their home in another country.

Halfway through the study the critic identifies two phases in the development of diaspora consciousness: first, the immigrant is possessed by the new land of opportunities and cannot go home. Second, “One possesses the land that has possessed one,” what she identifies as a member of the diaspora coming home to England. But to be fair to Indians who left the subcontinent, they did so to be better off both professionally and materially. Parameswaran sees this cup, as always, as half full and not half empty. And so, the majority left India not just to grab at a materialistically better life, “but to get away from the hassle of the competition and systemic corruption of working in India.”

The process of acculturation is an inevitability that cannot be escaped by an immigrant. To settle down in a culture different from his or her own is difficult and the transplanted writers explore the immigrants’ experiences. Their work reflect their expatriate sensibility – the experience of alienation ,nostalgia and transplantation –that they undergo during the process. Uma Parameswaran’s *Sita’s Promise and Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* reflects on the problems of the immigrants at various levels and their struggle between the pulls of two cultures .

23.7 Four Phases in the Immigrants Life

Uma Parameswaran talks about four phases in the immigrants life :

The four phases are :first ,wonder and fear at the world around oneself and nostalgia for the world left behind :second an overriding impulse to survive in the new world that makes one immerse oneself in ones profession or family , and often precludes political or social participation in the larger society ;third, after one has found job security, a turning towards organizational activity within one’s own ethnocentric community ; and finally , an active participation in the larger political and social arena outside one’s own immediate community.

Though Uma Parameswaran claims that most immigrants reach the final phase , the question remains whether complete assimilation is possible . According to the psychiatrist James Tyhurst, a merger into the cultural main stream of the host nation is very difficult for the first generation, who might acquire a relative adjustment, that is ‘acculturation ‘,but not ‘assimilation’ . ‘Acculturation’ is ‘the adoption of changes in the external behavior for a smoother acceptance the new society, whereas ‘the assimilation is the ability to react instinctively and emotionally to a culture’ . The degree of assimilation is in direct proportion to the degree of friendly reception by the host country .It also depends on the age and the

immigrant's length of stay in the two cultures. In the process of acculturation and assimilation, every immigrant has to unlearn what he has learnt in his own culture and undergo the learning process a new in the alien culture. The old order has to give way to new this is expressed by Clarke Blaise as 'unhousement' and 'Enhousement'. The process of transplantation is relatively easier for the younger generation immigrant who has not got his roots firmly fixed in the culture of his birth. All these problems and the various stages in the process of acculturation and assimilation are clearly portrayed by Uma Parameswaran in her plays "Sitas's Promise" and "Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees".

23.8 Assimilation in Uma Parameswaran's Writing

Unity in disparity and diversity exemplified in the colourful mosaic of Canadian landscape gives rise to the quaintness and exoticity of Canadian literature. From the Equatorial to the Arctic, Canada has embraced in its generous bosom a diversity of humanity of different languages, stock and culture. People with varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds working towards a common goal- forging ahead , breaking down narrow barriers of ethnicity ensuring the formation of a nation with a more humanitarian society; this is the ideal vision of Canada as perceived by Uma Parameswaran in her sweeping novel *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* which deals with the life of an Indian immigrant family-the tensions within the family and also the tensions which they face in dealing with the greater part of society in which they are a minority, in Canada's most centrally located city- Winnipeg.

The Lacanian principle of *need, demand* and *desire* are the basic compelling forces with which migrants deliberately leave the nation of their and migrate to newer land in search of better prospects. Once this need for a better livelihood is addressed, they begin demanding and asserting their rights in the new nation with a *desire* to be assimilated into the new fold. In a nation like Canada, where they enter a cultural 'mosaic' unlike the American melting pot, migrants go with the expectation that they shall be accepted as they are, without any need to change in order to be assimilated.

Canada as a multicultural land. Officially .Legally. Here, they insisted , you did not have to change. Here you could- indeed, it was your duty to- remain what you were. None of this American melting pot nonsense, none of this remaking yourself to fit your new circumstances: you did not have to adjust to the society, the society was obligated to accommodate itself to you.

From this initial notion the emigrants gradually mature to accept the new nation as their own and hold out, help one another in their holistic growth with humanitarian values:

Hands reaching out to her from all directions. The same hands at times needing hers and at other times steadying hers. But now she did not know whose had the need, whose gave the assurance. (Parameswaran, *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*.2002: 34)

This is the observation which a teacher makes of her students. All life on earth, or all livelihood is interdependent. The children in the school are from different backgrounds. some have parents and some do not and it is the teacher's duty to reassure them that they all mattered, whether they had parents or not and on the other hand the teacher seeks "reassurance about the worthwhileness of her job among so diverse a room of children with such diverse levels of background, performance, emotional needs." (Parameswaran, *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* 2002 :34)

In the same book in a casual discussion of politics among college students one of the students, Jayant's observation reinforces the fear that the emigrants(we) "have to change...Just the other day

someone said just the opposite and it sounded even better. Take to the road, get stoned, sleep around, but you'll never become one of them." This statement is an emphasis of the fact that the migrants land in a new nation with a lurking fear that they may or may not be accepted as one of the local inhabitants.

Humble attempts by the migrants to assimilate are also warded off or squashed by denouncing the Asian migrants as being communal, parochial and so on.

They – white Canadians- don't want us to assimilate. They want us out. We'll be squashed like bugs soon...All these years they led us to believe the isolation was coming from us, that we were communal, parochial, closed with our cultural exclusiveness, etc. etc. but now that we are trying to merge, their real feelings are coming out. They've never wanted us and now we've become a real threat. Serves us right for wanting to be one of them. We have to stay separate from them and stay together, and we've got to show them that we have as much right to be here as those pissed-off whites who've bullied their way into this country these last three hundred years. We've got to stay apart, stay together. That's the only way.

(Parameswaran, *Mangoes On A Maple Tree*)

The Asian migrants enter the newly adopted world with the feeling that they have to live in ghettos: "That's what's called multiculturalism here. Each group stays within a closed charmed circle never bothering about the others.". They also have a feeling that all this hue and cry about the government initiated multiculturalism was the power group's play of divide and rule. The students also discuss how the different ethnic groups are hyphenated to differentiate them from one another and a great deal of money goes into baiting them with funds inducing them to squabble amongst themselves. The students decide that they shall stand tall come what may, do something concrete and establish an identity for themselves just like the Jews who were ghettoed for three centuries and start doing things three times better than others. The suggestion of one of the students is that: "We shall build our temple at the confluence of the Red and the Assiniboine, and then we shall say we are ready to assimilate. But not here, not now". They feel that if they get assimilated immediately without any achievements, it would amount to boot licking.

Amongst the immigrants also, there are immigrants of different types and attitudes. Some Indians get angry because they emotionally identify with every brown face they see. Some others are more detached despite seeming fanaticism. So a student, Sridhar's suggestion is that "Never mind your class and cultural differences, stand together.". The most beautiful part of the novel is when this opinion of ghettoisation and each one living only for himself is reversed in a crisis situation.

We find that whenever there is a crisis, "clannish exclusivity" or ghettoisation dissolves and "collective solidarity" is established. For instance, in the novel, we find that when there are floods, students from all clans, communities, creed and colour get together to arrange sandbags and prevent flood water from entering the low lying areas of the city. Each one forgets his selfish needs and they start working for a common cause.

Uma Parameswaran has observed in *Sacilit* that writers of South Asian diaspora have frequently dealt with "the themes of otherness and alienation from their homelands- themes common to all immigrant literatures." In this novel she has a suggestion for the immigrants:

Instead of seeing things as "them" and "us" we should take on people on a one to one basis.

After a generation or two... cultures will get diluted...we'd have a newer and richer mix within each community and within society generally, and once we have a white -brown mix kids, we'd be better off. Just a matter of time.

(Parameswaran, *Mangoes On A Maple Tree*)

People migrate and hop from one culture to the other with a lot of aspirations but sometimes the adopted place falls short of their demands and aspirations and their intellectual demands are not satisfied and they plan to return to their homeland once again. Veejala is one such character a University Professor who craves for acquiring more knowledge and professional satisfaction: "We have been here longer than we have been in any one place, and it is time to go...when I watch the shimmering dance of the Borealis, I feel I have to have one last crack at real scholarship, real research..." (Parameswaran, *Mangoes On A Maple Tree*.2002: 148) but she is not comfortable leaving behind her school going daughter with her husband and sister-in law. At such a moment when pangs of separation stifle her, her husband's advice to her is that she should not allow guilt complex to develop in her and that if family is important, it is equally important for her to pursue her dreams and not care about society's norms which will exert a tremendous pressure on our psyche and deter our progress.

These norms, these expectations, preconceptions and misconceptions ...had a way of exerting pressure, forming a malignant tumour that grew unfelt and burst unawares to poison the whole system, oozed toxins into the system, sapping it of vitality. The only way to counter it is to be conscious of it and consciously fight it. Which is why ... I am warning you to consciously withstand guilt feelings.

(*Mangoes On A Maple Tree*)

In the book, *Mangoes On A Maple Tree*, Uma Parameswaran has pointed out how in her own birthplace , India , things had changed with the workforce of women increasing day by day and attitudes to life changing accordingly. Even then people would raise eyebrows to see a woman staying away from husband, children and family responsibilities in pursuit of knowledge. A woman's professional aspirations are not viewed considerately by society. It is only because of some broadminded, considerate men like Anant that societies are progressing, allowing individuals to grow and accomplish their dreams and aspirations.

Anant also offered to take care of their little daughter by staying in the same place, foregoing a better offer from an American company because his wife had decided to move out. Anant's patient, caring attitude with a logical, systematic, uncomplicated way of analyzing matters and viewing them from the right perspective makes him stand apart from the awe and sundry. He was also sure that a good education was a must for anyone wishing to make a mark in life, and he was rather upset that his son was not serious in studies.

The world is moving at a fast pace and people are exploring possibilities of settling down in various continents with the intention of satisfying their intellectual, emotional, psychological as well as emotional needs. Sometimes the transition and displacement brings about a feeling of insecurity in children and there is a feeling that they are "in the eddies of a whirlpool all their life".(Parameswaran, *Mangoes On A Maple Tree* .2002: 94). They soon overcome it ,accept not only the new place but also the customs and habits associated with the adopted country and celebrate Christmas in the customary manner with a Christmas tree and gifts. When one of the children makes an observation that the Christmas tree does not have roots, another child opines very passionately: "We will plant evergreens

and oaks with roots Krish. And grow mangoes on maples, and jamuns on birches, and bilvas on spruces. God willing we shall.” (Parameswaran, *Mangoes On A Maple Tree* 2002 : 221).

This observation by the child of grafting their own native trees with the ones available in the country to which they have migrated accounts for fantastic possibilities beyond imagination. It is associated with the thought that the migrants are like transplants- rootless like the Christmas tree which has been brought home for the celebrations and has to be discarded sooner than later. The immigrant also begins life with no hopes of getting rooted , but sometimes ventures to get rooted and assimilated.

23.9 Policy of Inclusion and Global Brotherhood

Citizenship is about inclusion. The desire for it emerges from the realization that one’s intellectual and emotional loyalties have through the years, come to commit themselves to the idea and actuality of Canada. One makes a life, puts down roots, and from the feeling of belonging comes the wish to be as fully part of the country as possible. (Bisoondath, 2002 : 226)

Incidentally the child’s observation is the title of the book also- *Mangoes on the Maple Tree*. The title suggests the intensity of desire of some South Asians to co-exist, to coalesce, into the conglomeration of varied colours of the mainstream and become an indispensable part of the mainstream. Here we get an idea of cultural hybridization where the outcome would be a more healthy, cohesive assimilation with full Canadian status. In this regard Pico Iyer also has some interesting observation:

It was only at the level of the imagination, it seemed to me , that we could begin to think differently about one another, and to make meaningful an acceptance so natural that we didn’t have any words for it .And it was only at the level of the individual that we could truly penetrate the Other... (Bisoondath, 2002 : 237)

On the other hand, there are others like a young boy Jayant ,who just believe in living in the present without any dreams of the future who are comparable to the Christmas tree :

That’s us, Dad. Not just you and me with memories of another land ,another life, but all of us in this modern world in the year 1997, rootless but green for the length of our life, long or short; not a plantain tree that leaves a young one in its place, not an oak tree with its roots stretched a mile radius, this evergreen does not have a Christly use, it isn’t good even as firewood, but it is there, it is green ,it is beautiful and therefore right. (Parameswaran, *Mangoes On A Maple Tree*. 2002 : 221)

Even though the child’s observation is that they are as useless as the Christmas tree, we find that in an emergency situation they are infused with collective solidarity and work towards a collective goal of survival, having emerged from individual demands, preferences and partisan politics towards establishing a cohesive and healthy nation. This attitude of working collectively for a common welfare without any feeling of clannish exclusivity is in keeping with Neil Bisoondath’s observation in his book *Selling Illusions*:

I am at home in Montreal as I am in Vancouver, in Toronto as I am in Quebec City, in English as in French. Nowhere have I felt myself a stranger. Alienation, expatriation, exile: they are just words to me now, not personal issues: they are intellectual concepts that fascinate precisely because they are so distant. (Bisoondath, 2002: 19).

Uma Parameswaran’s poems also speak about the policy of inclusion and global brotherhood.

In the first poem of Trishanku, she speaks in the first person, she says:

Begin with one,
 Anyone, but make him truly him
 And thereby you, and your people
 And thereby us.

Similarly, another poem is about the community of new immigrants in Canada, probably for the community of non immigrant community.

 We are new Canadians
Come from far away places
 The Alps and the Andies
 Essequibo and the Ganges,
 Our memories, and our faces
 Chiseled by ancient cultures
 Whose course had been half run
 Long ere Cartier's had begun.

We are new Canadians
Come from many races,
Black, white, olive, brown,
All alike, for all the many places
High tech, mid-tech or no-tech
Are one.

We are new Canadians.
Same as the old, we grew
Ten moons in our mother's womb,
Learnt to love, play and pray
On parent's knees,
Tasted youth's sadsweet greenness
And love's silver dreams.
Canada's fields are sown with gold,
Some said and so it is.

It will not be easy, some said,
And it has not, as we well know
Who have worked hard, or worse still
Have no work at all, though willing and waiting for break
That would set us on our own.
What we were not told, never guessed
Is written on our children's faces
Furrowed with tears because of our race
Or colour, or tongue that stumbles
Over words so alien to the many places
From which we've come.
Will doors shut on them as on us?
Landlords', employers', neighbours' ?
Have we come from the Niger and Luzon
From the Antilles and Hong Kong
To these vast empty spaces
Only to see our young ones' faces slapped
By unthinking scorn, unfeeling barbs
From closed fists and closed hearts?

23.10 Feminism

Uma Parameswaran not only narrates her immigrant experience, but she is also a feminist and her writings express this element very clearly. She says her brand of feminism celebrates being a woman, and the joys of birth, the ability to give birth to and nurture a child. In the poem entitled "where are my children?" she writes:

Where are my children, I said, the sheer joy of hands holding talc soft baby bottoms ... Why aren't my children here?

(*Sisters at the Well*. 64)

The same feeling continues in another poem *Usha's Song* in which a mother expresses the bliss in having given birth to, bringing up her child:

Pride of my soul, I've watched you grow
These sixteen years.
The wrench of pain, the etherized calm,

The first cry, the touch that thrilled
Newborn motherhood.

Watched you these sixteen years.
Nay more; for since I was woman
I have had you.

Watched the virgin waist
Waiting to be blessed
With bridal flowers that it may bloom.

Then as each moth moved on
Cyclic hope and cyclic pain,
Not yet for you motherhood
That are too much for wife.

Years.

Then
The wrench of pain, the etherized calm,
The first cry, the touch that thrilled
Newborn motherhood.
As the fevers caught you one by one
I have seen life within that tender frame
Fighting to stay. Prayed, begged,
That my strength enter you
So you may stay . . .

And one day I will know
The joys of ripened motherhood,
The joy of being mother of a man.
But now I know there is no such joy,
That motherhood has no right to returns

Nor right to say what you should do
Only to hope that you will do it.
The joys are found only in the Now,
In the thrills of the infant touch,
The first “Ma!”

(Sisters at the Well. 40)

Another poem “The Interview” also is one such poem. The poem is based on discrimination on the basis of sex and how the female sex is treated as a second class citizen, not given the due respect and position. Not only this, many a times they are deprived of their rights, and treated impartially. This poem talks expresses the rage in one such woman who is not given appointment even when she qualifies all requirements. Outspoken as she is, she loudly speaks her voice, declaring openly the reason and fear of the men, if a lady should be appointed:

And she answered with even keel:
All my playcards, buttons, pins
Always say the same thing—Equality.
I wear one all the time,
And I would wish that all of woman born
Would wear one too, with me.
And four silent hisses breathed
Yes, that is the problem.
Playcards, buttons, pins,
Yes, that’s why we cannot hire you.
And she answered their unspoken fears.
I am your problem.
In me the bodies of those you’ve stepped over
In your race to the ivory tower;
In me the voices of those you’ve silenced
In your climb to brutal power;
In me the grief of those you have drugged into helpless trance
By your Urizenic plans for perpetual dominance.
I **am** your problem, she said,
But only because you brand me as such—

A problem to be swept under the rug.
I have been there, she said,
Under the rug with dust-mice
That once were human beings:
Once girl pawed by your friends, crude, cruddy;
Older women joked at by your veiled threats of firing;
Workers baited by your carrot powers of hiring.
I am your problem, she said,
But I am your answer too.
For I have been under the rug
And I really do know
How it can be cleaned
Without undue hurt to your ego.

(*Sisters at the Well*. 25)

The poem *Vigilance* is about the issue of absence in tenure-track positions at the University. The subject is about community of women activists who have paid a high price for being women and activists. The title is drawn from vigils that are held by women's organizations when a woman dies a violent death, often at the hands of a lover. Mourners assemble; stand in a circle, holding hands, with a candle at the centre. The names are those of women who died a violent death. Wilma was a woman in her fifties, killed by her common-law husband. The central image in the poem is of vigils held for female victims of abuse:

Vigilance

This is where we are now.
We
Who once raised hell on campuses
Are stormed citadels of power
And brought dons and deans to their knees;
Who once raised lovers to passionate pitch
Till clouds reverberating across continents
Thundered down in torrential rain;
Who once raised our nurslings
Tending and crooning them to golden wings;

Who once sang from sea to sea,
Sweeping rivers into a chorus of joy
And passed each other never touching;
Now
Here come together to hold hands,
Silenced by missiles from powers that be,
In silent thought for those who slain
Or randomly killed by anti-feminist rage,
Mutely mourning children streetwise but unspared.
We
Who soared into skies of endless desire in our men's
arms,
who kissed asleep and hugged awake our children
with a prayer,
now start the day holding each other,
in thought or over telephone wires to say,
take heart, hang in there.
O my sisters, my loves,
As we circle the flame
That was once Wilma, Susan, Anne-Marie,
Michelle, Sonia, Genevieve,
Do we know, how not know,
It is our own vigil we hold
In quiet despair.

Susan is subject of another poem, "Epiphany", and was a teenager who had left home and taken to drugs and the street.

23.11 Let Us Sum Up

Uma Parameswaran has published several books on post-colonial literature, and has authored ten books of creative writing, including awards-winning *What was Always Hers* (short stories), and *Mangoes on the Maple Tree* (novel), and *The Forever Banyan Tree* (novella) and *Fighter Pilots Never Die* (stories).

The term diaspora was assimilated from Greek into English in the twentieth century. The diasporic

experience is shaped by economic positions, personal skills and political relationships between the country of origin and the country of adoption. Reception and acceptance of immigrants in the host country also helps in shaping the diasporic experience. The host country's immigration law, legal system and cultural openness also contribute to this diasporic experience. The diasporic writers are situated in a critical position between two nations and cultures.

These diasporic writings which are also known as 'expatriate writings' or 'immigrant writings' give voice to the traumatic experiences of the writers when they are on the rack owing to the clash of two cultures or the racial discrimination they undergo. A large number of people have migrated from India to various alien lands under 'forced exiles' or 'self-imposed exiles'. Immigration proves a pleasant experience only to a few immigrants who succeed in assimilating themselves with new geographical, cultural, social and psychological environment. To most of the diasporic writers, immigration is not a delectable experience. They often find themselves sandwiched between two cultures. The feeling of nostalgia, a sense of loss and anxiety to reinvent home obsess them which find expression, consciously or unconsciously, in their writings. Thus, immigrant writers reflect, on the one hand, their attachment to the motherland and on the other, their feeling of alienation and rootlessness. Amongst the immigrants also, there are immigrants of different types and attitudes. Some Indians get angry because they emotionally identify with every brown face they see. Some others are more detached despite seeming fanaticism. Citizenship is about inclusion. The desire for it emerges from the realization that one's intellectual and emotional loyalties have through the years, come to commit themselves to the idea and actuality of Canada. In her novels, we find that whenever there is a crisis, "clannish exclusivity" or ghettoisation dissolves and "collective solidarity" is established. Uma Parameswaran not only narrates her immigrant experience, but she is also a feminist and her writings express this element very clearly. She says her brand of feminism celebrates being a woman, and the joys of birth, the ability to give birth to and nurture a child.

23.12 Review Questions

1. Give a brief note about the contemporary literary trend of diasporic literature.
2. Write a note on Uma Parameswaran as a diasporic writer.
3. By giving examples, show how the works of Parameswaran have feminism in them.
4. Assimilation is a special feature in Uma Parameswaran's writing. Elucidate.
5. Explain the term "Diaspora."
6. Write a note on Uma Parameswaran's delineation of the immigrant experience.
7. Name a few of the literary works of Uma Parameswaran.
8. 'Trishanku' refers to different phases of immigrant experience. Elucidate.
9. Discuss the policy of inclusion and global brotherhood in Uma Parameswaran's works.
10. What is the subject of the poem Vigilance by Uma Parameswaran?

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UNIT-24

UMA PARAMESWARAN : *SONS MUST DIE*

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Uma Parameswaran's Views about a Writer
- 24.3 Uma Parameswaran's Views about Language
- 24.4 Uma Parameswaran's Approach towards Racial Bias
- 24.5 Uma's Belief in Multiculturalism
- 24.6 *Sons Must Die* and Other Plays
- 24.7 *Sons Must Die*
- 24.8 Theme of War
- 24.9 Tolerance vs Weakness
- 24.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.11 Review Questions
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24.0 Objectives

- To acquaint the students with the plays written by Uma Parameswaran.
- To enable them to perceive the interweaving of Canadian sensibility and Indian culture and mythology.
- To familiarize the students to understand the views of Uma Parameswaran about a writer and aspects of writing.
- To understand the play '*Sons Must Die*' and to understand the symbolic implications underlying it.

24.1 Introduction

Trained as a scholar and critic, and possessing a flair for creative writing, Uma Parameswaran is the founder and general editor of the South Asian Canadian Literature Series, whose first two volumes she herself authored. The work under review is the second and contains six plays, which are not very dramatic, though they are said to have been staged in Winnipeg for the benefit of the Indian immigrant community there. They are an expression of the symbiosis of cultures and the aspirations of the immigrants. In her "Author's Statement" Parameswaran gives some details of her life and provides informative comments on her own works.

In her eagerness to show the intermingling of cultural influences, Parameswaran lets her imagination override her reason. Thus, in the play "Sons Must Die", the son who died in a Kashmir

battle says he will not die, but the mother urges him to do so as a soldier for the country. In “Sita’s Promise” the playwright brings in the incarnation of Krishna into what has been conceived as a play dealing with Sri Rama- imagine a kind of situation where Moses and his wife talk about Jesus and his times. The plays are replete with Indic words, some of which are incomprehensible to non-South Indians. Notwithstanding its errors, *Sons Must Die and Other Plays* helps us see Parameswaran’s other side, the creative writer.

24.2 Uma Parameswaran’s Views about Writer

Uma Parameswaran believes that writers always do have a conscious sense of addressing a community. The parameters of the community might change from phase to phase of a writer’s career or as in her own case, from persona to persona. All poems are triggered into existence by an external stimulus that might be personal or vicarious experience, a newspaper report or overheard conversation or something else. But according to her, “all poems go beyond that personal triggering into a writer-community relationship”.

Uma Parameswaran has always subscribed to John Keat’s concept of chameleon poet who totally becomes the persona for a brief span of time rather than the other concept that the persona is a spokesperson for the poet’s personal experience. For the duration of the poem, Parameswaran says, she is the persona, and if she can communicate that empathy to the reader, then the poem is a good one. Perhaps the persona and herself can be brought together by the hindu concept of incarnation, that each persona is a partial incarnation. If that sounds too metaphysical, one can see a poet as a Russian doll, a big one with all those other dolls, complete in every way, one inside the other. Psychologists call multiple personalities a disorder, but for a writer it is not a disorder but the breath of life.

24.3 Uma Parameswaran’s Views about Language

According to Uma Parameswaran, we communicate through language but there are many languages. The way she reads terms “language” and “langue” is that a language creates its own distinctiveness and medium of emotional communication, but that literature is universal because there is a substratum of language for all languages. The realities of cultural barriers cannot be broken down by any linguistic skills. We have to confront the effect of cultural imperialism on the way a reader is steered to respond to the written word. Parameswaran is divided between these two views, namely that communication across linguistic backgrounds is possible because we share a substratum of human language and that communication is impossible because the words written by one are read by another and a cultural chasm exists between the two.

According to her, best literature is coming from peripheries... Life within a white pocket fence is neurotic and dull, and the literature of the dominant culture has made a habit of living off the neuroses and sexual obsessions of effete minority. All that is worth writing about is out there at the peripheries of dominant culture, out there among the women and ethnocultural minorities. All her poems are affirming that all good writing is often topical, always political, and that all worth-while writing is rooted in community and directed to a community. A writer who is consciously moving towards non sexist and non-racist language feels the constraints not only of her own cultural baggage but that of others.

While the reader’s language and sensitivity repertoire grows with reading, and a culture’s

language and sensitivity bank grows with acceptance of diversity, at the basis of this growth is the writer's personal agony of choosing the language that would best ignite the creative process. Even given language skills and sensitivity and experience, a transplanted writer has other problems that retard the creative process, and landscape is one of them. Uma Parameswaran's own personal experience is such. Though the landscape around Parameswaran has been spruce and cedar for the last twenty five years, the landscape she is most familiar with, is with mango and jasmine trees, being an Indian, she can describe without effort the tender yellow blossoms and the hailstone showers that bring the green mangoes to the ground but she cannot be effortless when it comes to pine cones that she has been raking off her yards for the last so many years. The endless skies and vastness of prairie fields recur frequently in her poems and with a single change of adjective she communicates the persona's feelings of alienation that turns to love, but the details are not there. The following poem reflects the same:

Under a sky more vast than any I've seen
On snow more cold than ever I dreamed
I stand alone amid masks that speak an alien tongue.
Far, far are those I loved and love
And far the fragrance of my native flowers
O'er which bees murmur homeland tunes.
Under a sky more vast than any I've seen
On snow more white than any I've dreamed
I stand beneath the Golden Boy
Holding golden sheaves of corn
Heralding a dawn of joy
In years to come.

Uma Parameswaran admits that the metaphor of jigsaw puzzle with reference to literary analysis has always appealed to her, and has a personal anecdote behind it. When she had first come to America as a graduate student, she was a part of a hospitality programme where foreign students spent a few days with a local host family. She was assigned to a small family in Indiana; the family consisted of three teenage girls and their parents. On a coffee table in the L shaped drawing-dining room, they had a fifteen hundred piece puzzle. One or the other girls would work on it for a few minutes at a time, and quickly place twenty or thirty tiles in place. Over the three days that she stayed with them, she did not manage to find a single tile that really fit, the few tiles that she placed, were subsequently replaced by one of the girls, who taught her that there were dozens of seemingly correct tiles for any given spot, but only really correct one. Intrigued and frustrated, when she went to the dormitory at the university, the very first purchase that she made was four boxes of jigsaw puzzles. She also bought a small typewriter at the same time since American graduate school routine forces one into writing assignments almost from day one. While her books were piled up on the bed and chairs, her study table was reserved for the puzzle; she spent an obsessive time on the puzzle, while papers

remained in various stages of incompleteness. The first puzzle took her three weeks; the second only two, and an addict by then, she found the third puzzle easy. She realized that she had bought puzzles cut in the same way, with only the picture pasted on the paper being different. Thus she discovered the basics of literary analysis—that once we figure out the shapes and patterns of images, metaphors, symbols, one can put together a consistent interpretation of the text.

The short story collection, *Fighter Pilots Never Die* is another work of Parameswaran which shows to us a different perspective in her writing. It has the elements of nostalgia, human experiences, cultural values and a demand for emotional response from its characters as the dominant elements in the setting and plot. Winnipeg, where the author resides and teaches, features too in the title story in this collection, *Fighter Pilots Never Die*. The stories are sometimes set in south India and sometimes in Winnipeg, Canada, the author's home-ground for the last thirty odd years. The stories set in Canada sketch a picture of a successful, integrated, yet chronically beleaguered group of Indians who have comfortable relationships with non-Indians but depend on each other when things really fall apart. The shocks and concussions felt by individuals radiate outwards into the community: one woman's divorce triggers another woman's anxieties about her own unsatisfactory marriage; a whole group of volunteers shows up to help when a man dies.

24.4 Approach towards Racial Bias

Uma Parameswaran's approach towards racial bias is carried on the vehicle of the situations and positions in which her characters in *Dear Deedi (My Sister)* and *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* find themselves. The double problems of race as well as gender faced by the women are relatively mild in Uma's characters. However, her character Veejala represents the female intelligentsia who try to make space for themselves in Canadian context, fail and then give up to go back home. Of course it is with a great mental turmoil that she decides to take this step. The treatment of women in these plays is diverse. Uma Parameswaran's women are conscious of the diasporic experience, migration, and trauma of being in an alien land and with an alien tongue. Her women, be it the newly migrated like Nayana or old settlers like Savitri, highly educated like Veejala or uneducated like Aziza, are all conscious of the shut windows that confine them at various fronts. But as in Rana Bose, there are no daughters being forced to settle in "arranged" marriages here. They are placed inside the family set up and they carry the usual reservations of the family. For example the traditional attire of Savitri, or the aversion to non vegetarian food shown by Nayana is common to most of immigrant women. Nevertheless, they do acculturate themselves in order to blend. Savitri wears a formal western outfit to her workplace and Nayana confesses that "I have a lot to learn"

The use of family unit to show the impact of race and gender on the dealing with people is primary in Uma Parameswaran's works. For example, in both her targeted plays- 'Dear Deedi, My Sister' and 'Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees', all the women are in the middle of family situations and that brings out their own experiences vis-a-vis those of the others. It means that family is primary in the understanding of the women. Work place, or the lack of it, is secondary in discussion.

24.5 Uma's Belief in Multiculturalism

Uma Parameswaran has a strong faith in the multicultural policy and its application. She reiterates her philosophy that the mosaic is here to stay and for the better. She illustrates that the ultimate in multiculturalist attitude, for example, would be when Canadians would be as comfortable

with the imagery from India and Hinduism as the Indians are with imagery from Christian world. She believes that it is not only the immigrant who adapts to the host country. The host country also, in order to absorb the incoming influences, has to change and widen its scope and metaphor. Uma Parameswaran feels that the diasporic writers should have the focus on the present homeland. She feels that both writers and critics of the Indian diaspora need to shift their gaze from the original homeland to the present homeland. Sticking to the past glories and not writing about the present is a bane of many highly successful writers of the diaspora settled in Canada. Most of the writers, according to her, stick to the “safe spaces of their original homelands” but they should venture out into the unexplored vista of the observations and subsequent writing about their adopted homeland. At the same time, she feels that by constantly harping on the oppression and oppressors, the writers give them a centre stage that they do not deserve. There are celebratory aspects in a diasporic consciousness too. They should be explored and celebrated. She feels that mostly celebratory and victimizing aspects are polarized and they don’t meet at all.

Uma Parameswaran believes that art cannot be separated from politics and that “all worthwhile writing is rooted in community and directed to community.” She, through her *Kanishka* cycle of poems (though not a part of the immediate project) brings home a bitter fact that it is very hard to swallow being treated as a less than equal community. As a politically aware writer, she compares Mulroney condoling Rajiv Gandhi on “your great loss” of the *Kanishka* (Air India flight 182) bombing in which majority of the 329 were Canadian nationals to George Bush allying all his allies while waging war on terrorism and excluding Canada from those allies.

There is a distinctive progression in Parameswaran’s works. This progression can most easily be seen through both her choices of subject matter and in her increasing fluidity in language.

24.6 *Sons Must Die and Other Plays*

Sons Must Die and Other Plays provides an excellent example of her progression. *Sons Must Die* centers on the experiences of three women in 1947 India. “Their maternal sensibility transcends political boundaries and sees what Wilfred Owen calls the ‘pity of war.’” The play is influenced by Parameswaran’s interest in Greek tragedies, containing a chorus and stylized language of the verse. The other plays in the collection, *Meera* and *Sita’s Promise*, on the other hand “set out to celebrate Indian art tradition and at the same time to educate the outsider about our culture.” Written during her years in Canada, both “*Meera*” and *Sita’s Promise* draw from the Hindu *puranas* and the great Hindu epics of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. At the same time, both these plays blend in a sense of modernity and the Canadian experience. *Sita’s Promise*, for example, utilizes the characters of the *Ramayana*, but is set in Canada and uses modern English prose. Parameswaran’s literary works wherein she unifies an essential Canadian sensibility with that of her Indian historic past. Like every expatriate writer, she attempts to “grab the better of two worlds to use her own phrase. Most of her one-act plays recall an Indian past, with its mythology, legend and the gods and goddesses. Her early play *Meera* written in 1971 is a script that deals with the episodes linking Meera’s life with that of Lord Krishna, affirming the power of faith and the spiritual space afforded by act. *Dear Didi* (My Sister) however, written in the 1980’s deals with the women issues.

Dear Deedi, My Sister describes the life and hardships of immigrants in Canada through a variety of characters and the letters written between Sapna in Canada and her sister in India. As Sapna muses, “Here too women suffer, dear Deedi, for being women. The burdens are different but the pain

is the same.” The play opens with the character of Sapna, a lady in her late twenties, writing to her elder sister, from Winnipeg.

The opening of the play itself reflects a nostalgia for the lost land, in her case, India. The prick of unusualness and foreignness of the place, to which she has yet not grown habitual of, is felt thus:

Wheat grows almost by itself, miles and miles of prairie gold; but now the fields are cold, dear God, it is so cold. I shall never get used to these needle pines that stand green against the white. For though the land around me is cedar and fir, in the landscape of my memory, there are other smells and sounds—of mango blossoms, monsoon rains, temple bells. Temple bells. I long to hear them, dear Deedi. I long to walk to our temple bearing flowers and incense for Parameswara, supreme lord of all.

Further we have the second immigrant from Nicaragua (probably a refugee) who still seems to be urging for a feeling of belonging from the land that she has fled and at the same time accepting the fact that she has been rehabilitated, to which she has come.

Next, we get acquainted with a young woman from Kenya, feeling completely alienated and lost. Next comes the character of Ilago, a boy from from Phillipines. Being a child, assimilation comes easy to him and his joy in the new land can not be measured. We next meet Sekoni, a young man from Nigeria seated in a bus, expressing how unwanted he feels in a foreign land of foreign people:

Who are these faceless people

Among whom my life is oozing away?

Each so self-assured,

Glancing swiftly but completely

Through me, wordlessly asking:

Why are you here?

And the bus moves on and we.

Another immigrant’s restlessness and uneasiness becomes blunt and clear through her experiences that she narrates, how the stink and appearance of non-veg displayed in a shop makes her feel nauseated, but she dare not express it. We see her familiarity with her NRI deedi, as she is also Indian, and her inability to accept and speak English. Aziza, an old woman comes next. She is from Pakistan, clad in a salwar kameez. The character represents the generation of immigrants who are too old and accustomed to the ways of their native land. These people find it very difficult to acclimatise to the lifestyle of foreign lands.

Uma’s next play *Sita’s Promise* is an attempt to link the epic India with modern Canada through myth and dance. Dealing with the forest exile of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana - the main characters in the *Ramayana* - during their forest exile find a wounded Arctic tern that has lost its way in its northern migration. They resolve to take it back to its home; they travel northwards through India to the Himalayas, where Jatayu, the sacred eagle, carries them to the tern’s home by the shores of the primeval ocean that we now call Lake Agassiz. The native children dance for Sita and ask her to stay with them. Sita says she must go but promises them that she will come again, ”to this lovely land of lakes, blue skies and snow. I, through my people, shall surely come again,

and we shall build our temple and sing our songs with the children of all the different lands who make this their home.”

In *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees*, Parameswaran’s progression of subject matter moves to the new generation of Indo-Canadians ie. the children of immigrants raised in Canada. The relationships and complications of the characters aided by the free flowing prose of the play reveal Parameswaran’s attempt to capture the South Asian Canadian experience across all boards through literature.

Rootless but Green Are the Boulevard Trees was first published in 1987. Set in 1979, it follows the story of a family from India, at a time when a large number of immigrants to Canada came from South Asia. Despite the specific references the characters make to India and their heritage, plus some references to dated events and expressions that are no longer in common usage, the challenges these characters face apply to every group that has immigrated to this country in the past and at the present time.

The challenges are of identity and adjustment. Can the first generation of immigrants ever really feel at home in their adopted country? Can they go “back home” once they have left? Does the second generation have any way of “finding themselves” if they do go back to their parents’ homeland? How long will it be until someone is considered just “Canadian?” Will being non-white always be a barrier to assimilation? Each of the characters is dealing with the disruption caused by immigration. Sharad, the father, trained as a scientist, makes his living in Winnipeg as a real estate broker. His wife, Savitri, is exhausted with the demands of her job as a teacher and the demands of her family. In India, they would have had a higher social status and would have had servants to fulfill their daily needs.

The parents sacrificed their status for their children’s betterment, yet Sharad is often nostalgic for his past and questions his decision (“.....if an Ontario poplar can’t grow and survive in Manitoba soil, what chance do we have?”). Still, he tries to instill their children with the vision of opportunity he feels that immigration offers and is confident they will retain the best of their family and cultural values. Daughter Jyoti has a white boyfriend, and Jayant, their oldest son, is planning a driving trip to Montreal with his buddies. But even though the children have Caucasian friends and are engaged in activities outside the Indian community, the two oldest are not convinced they will ever belong.

The extended family also has issues. Sharad’s sister, Veejala, announces she is quitting her job at the university, leaving her family, and going back to India. Veejala has never felt comfortable in her new surroundings and has other personal problems. Her unhappiness is reflected in her unhappy children. Her son Vithal is alienated. He has failed in school and in relationships and has also toyed with extremist Indian politics. Her young daughter, Priti, needs mothering but is being left behind.

The characters find that to survive they must redefine themselves and accept each other as they have become. That does not mean leaving their past behind entirely, but it does mean that they must put down “roots,” just like a tree, to thrive. Their family bond assists them all as they go forward. The play is an effective examination of all the issues that immigrants face. The immigrant experience informs her work. She has written several novels, plays and poems on issues faced by Indo-Canadians.

We find that the plays *Meera*, *Sita’s Promise*, *Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees* and *Dear Deedi, My Sister* in the collection *Sons Must Die and Other Plays* are different from the play *Sons Must Die*. While all other works talk about Indian mythology, the diasporic element,

alienation, acculturation and assimilation, this particular play, *Sons Must Die* is about war, how soldiers sacrifice their life unquestioningly for the nation, the agony of mothers when their young sons are lost in war on the one hand, and on the other some very courage models of mothers who bravely offer their sons in order to serve their country.

It reflects both the evolution of the Indo-Canadian community and the evolution of the writer. The collection was written much earlier in 1962. The plays are based on Indian culture, mythology and literature. At one level, these plays deal with the demands and experiences of such universals as motherhood, *bhakti*, transplantation etc. while at the level of specifics they delineate the growth the growth of theatre in the Indo-Canadian community. Her play “Sons Must Die’s” main evocation was the Indo-Pakistan war of 1947- 48. The idealism and romanticism of war was shred to pieces when the author had the first hand experience of meeting several families in India who lost their sons. Many young women lost their brothers, as some lost their young husbands.

24.7 *Sons Must Die*

The play, “Sons Must Die” depicts the horrors of war and is set in the backdrop of Kashmir. Here, three women from different parts of India: a Tamil Brahmin, wrapped in Conjeevaram silk, Zohra Begum a Muslim mother wearing a *salwar kameez* suit with gold embroidery on the blue velvet and Prem Behn, a Punjabi mother all meet at Kashmir in search of their sons. The three mothers have lost their sons who were at the battlefield fighting for Kashmir.

The play opens with the description of Kashmir which is beautiful and so had lured many rulers of various cultures and nations:

Kashmir! Valley beloved of the Great!
Many have been wars fought here
These two thousand years.
Fratricidal wars for all wars are fratricidal,
No hollow platitude –all men ARE brothers.
Many were the hands that held your scepter
Varied the faiths of your rulers.

The whole history of rulers is traced and the nation’s power over people is thus established. Kashmir is portrayed as an enchantress who could love people and also be the valley beloved of Gods. But “is this enchantress worth sons’ lives?” asks the author, as one by one the mothers come and bemoan the death of their sons.

Meenakshi cries out “ My son, my son, where are you? But as he is not alive he cannot respond. Her tears eclipse the beauty of the land that she exclaims:

I know nothing but that I love my son,
And he a wanderer, wrecked perhaps,
Fighting for a region we need not have

Though ours by right it may be.

The same emotion is found in one of her poems *Usha's Song*, in a part of which we find a son going away for higher studies, asking for the blessings of his mother, and the mother bidding him farewell with tears brimming in her eyes:

Give me your blessing, mother,
That my hopes do not vapour
Like water down a too hot water engine.

I shall return, mother,
With laurel wreath
Academic robes
Scroll of honour
Passport to health, wealth and happiness
To give you all the comforts
That love and money can buy
To live happily ever ever more.

Give me your blessing, mother,

For I must go.

Thus spoke my son, my only child,

My widow hope, pride of my soul,

The one fair gem of all the five

Fair children I conceived.

And my mind ached for his happiness.

“Go my son,” it said, go and live and the Gods bless you for your love

And hopes for me.”

but that mother heart, that woman heart,

that human heart within

cried, “O my son, stay,

I want nor comfort nor wealth

Nor dreams of cheer, of health,

But a son in flesh and blood and here,

A son to set the fire
To the brand on my funeral pyre
When I die.”

Sisters at the Well.42.

It is difficult for mothers to part with their sons even for the sake of education, and to part with them permanently for the sake of one's nation is a great unimaginable sacrifice which patriotic parents are doing. Zohra Begum, a Muslim mother appears in the same valley, she too is looking out for her son. She is proud that she has sent her two sons and their father to the war field willingly. Though the mother is crestfallen, she doesn't fall to weeping but sorrowfully proclaims "O Allah, send us not such mournful punishment." Last of all, comes the Punjabi mother Prem Bhen, who sees her son, a young lad in perfect health who becomes a victim of the onslaught. Happy to see his mother he pitifully cries out that she does not want to die, asks his mother to prevent him dying; his implorations to his mother is pitiful:

I am too young to be dead
I refuse
I want to live;
Feel the blood of youth coursing
through my veins,
To race over the fields, to swim across the Sutlej,
To see springs first spring
To join harvest songs and dances.

His yearning for life on the death-bed at this battlefield is agonizing. He is twenty years old and is too young to die. The disillusionment is appalling. HE had loved India, and the beautiful Kashmir, but they have only killed him: and the yet the mother, who has been fed on the romanticism of war, only says "Go Kishore, Go", saying "few die in so noble a cause you are one," advising him that he should not hesitate to die for the sake of his country.

The bewailing mother for the loss of a son on the one hand and the young lad of twenty who does not want to die but live a hale and healthy life to participate in the pleasure of the living on the other is well equiposed. The chorus who act as the narrator and the other characters who appear foreground the atrocity of war .The poet the dacoit, British nun and the Indian *sadhu* provide perspectives on the horrors of war.

The poet is the first to see the ravages: he witnesses the green splendor of the valley transformed into a stream of blood, and wailing mothers whose sons must die. Where the poet is disillusioned with humanity to see the beauty metamorphosed into bloodshed, a nun appears there and she is closely followed by a dacoit. The nun is a European in the attire of the order of St. Joseph murmuring the prayer with her fingers rolling the rosary. Engrossed in her prayer, she is startled on seeing Zohra wondering whether she is Pakistani. Seeing her fright the chorus assures her that there is nothing to fear:

Come, come not all tez wearers are Pakistanis

Nor all Pakistanis ravagers.

And tell her “you are safe here.” But the nun who has witnessed the evils of war only exclaims that ‘the imprint of fear on the human heart is deep’. As if in answer to her fears comes the Dacoit in search of her.

Dacoit: Ha! Where is she whose purse is heavy with gold?

Chorus: Barbarian! Would you waylay a woman?

Dacoit: Sure I would, if she has gold.

Chorus: Attack a servant of god?

Dacoit: God? Who is that? And where is he?

The episode of the Dacoit is almost satirical of the institution of religion: Hindus or Christians or Muslims the God who came out of the pillar and the god of the Immaculate Conception is laughed at by the Dacoit

.....There is no God. And her God. Ha! Virgin Mary, Immaculate Conception.

I too am a God.

For I doubt my mother ever married.

It is at this moment that a Sadhu, clad in leopard skin enters; he has a brass jug in one hand and a trishul in the other looking like Shiva. The Dacoit is puzzled and exclaims whether it was a world Conference of Religions shaping out here:

The Sadhu’s words to the Dacoit are paradoxical. Yet they communicate the central message of the play. He observes that he too has often wondered if there was a God. Waiting, fasting, praying and mortifying himself in icy caves “hoping to come face to face with him.” But he did not come. But “then I saw a mother and her babe” and knew that it was here that god lived:

..... I looked on the mother

And her babe I felt something shooting this

Flooding my mind with Light.

He seems to be saying that the only existing God on Earth is the mother who suckles her baby. The love and affection of a mother for her child is the only strong permanent bonding which does not lessen or decrease no matter what situation people face. There is always a mother behind every struggling soldier who is a strong moral support boosting his morale. The mother here refers to the mother in general and also the motherland, India. The sadhu says:

And it is,

.....there I saw what perhaps is god

See the mothers that are.

They give birth to sons,

Are proud and jealous for them.

But when the sons leave

What can a mother do?

Except that god knows what is to be.

The sons leave the mother and join the army to fight on behalf of their nation. The land may be beautiful, but what is it to a mother – the sons she had guarded jealously – have they left her forever?

24.8 Theme of War

Basically war is not a civilized act. The human reaction to war has always been ambivalent. War has been extolled in some of the greatest classics of the world and at the same time, decried by thinkers and writers like Bernard Shaw. Still from time to time, countries resort to war to expand their territories and to protect their sovereignty. Uma Parameswaran's (a versatile writer, now settled in Canada) play, *Sons Must Die* is against the backdrop of Kashmir and the Indo-Pak. war of 1947-48.

In this play, there are three mothers – Meenakshi Zohra and Prem Behn, who come to Kashmir, from different parts of India, looking for their sons, who went to fight for the sake of safe guarding Kashmir from enemies. Meenakshi and Zohra consider the fighting meaningless. Meenakshi says:

Fighting for a region we need not have

Though ours by right it may be.

My country as it stands commands the sea,

Land, air, oh why do they want more?

My India is wide enough, plenteous enough,

Rich enough, aye confused enough too

To want more. Enough have we of riches

Enough of troubles. We need no more,

O what amount we stake for this:

Lives human lives, sons' lives, O India

“Is this enchantress worth sons' lives? (Pp.17-18)

Zohra quote religion while decrying the war:

“Happy is our land ruled by the learned and strong

And happy we so long as we stay within.

But new lands, why new lands? Why Kashmir?

People here are of our faith I know,

What matters who rules them so long

As they bow to Islam?

Prem Behn says, as she is proud of her son, fighting for his country:

Proud I am that my son is fighting

For such a prize. Loving vale, had I a Hundred sons.

I'd, send them all to fight for thee and consider it.

Sent sacrifice for such a treasure

This play assumes special significance in Indian situation especially in the post Kargil scenario.

The dying of the sons is to be noted, Meenakshi's son dies a 'satisfied young man', being his childhood ambition of flying in a plane got fulfilled. Quoting his own words, "few men realize their dreams fully; few prayers are granted wholly." Like Yeats' Irish airman, it is almost with exaltation that from the tumult of skies, he looks down on the tumult of the men of earth. His decision to volunteer, therefore had had nothing to do with the sense of duty to them, nor has he sought glory and public acclamation by making a patriotic gesture.

Kishore Prem Behn's son, at his dying moments craves that his life may be spared. He wants to drink life to his full hence he is unwilling to die prematurely, much to the shock and amazement of his mother, who considers his outburst unpatriotic. Kishore cries:

I want to live;

Feel and blood of youth coursing

Through my veins,

To race over the fields, to swim across the Sutlej

To see springs first spring

To join harvest songs and dances.

To get the sting of winter's freezing cold,

Kishore dies, a broken young man, being unable to understand his mother, who wants him to accept his death calmly.

There are other characters too. There is a nun. We find her prejudiced against Muslims due to her past unpleasant experiences. She is not even ready to believe that they also can be good and religious. For, "the imprint of fear on the human heart is deep"(p.21). There is a Dacoit, who is a cynic, at times uttering blasphemous words. When everyone is blaming him, he scores a point when he says:

And so with one voice you dismiss me ,

You who so phanatically kill each other

For your faiths, slaughter woman and children

Where I but steal their gold. (P-25)

Then there is a poet, a romantic turned disillusioned soul. He becomes the commentator of the

nightmarish reality of Kashmir.

Last night the moon was red
the birds flew from the east and said
“The moon is red tonight.”

I looked up and the sun was red, a bloody red it was as it touched the horizon , and where it touched , red stream melted

And flowed down in blood

This morning when I went to the river with frozen blood, eyes eaten away,

Limbs maimed (p. 12-20)

He is pained on seeing the suffering of others, especially of mothers. He rather suggests mothers not to give birth to sons if they want to avoid the agony:

A son of India who must die
Whose blood must flow into that stream I saw
Whose mother waits in distant pain
And waits in vain. Mothers, bear no more sons
If you want to spare the pain that befalls you
And them, the carrions hasten their bleeding end
And you with painful hearts wait, and wait in vain.

In an act of extreme sympathy for the dying Kishore, he, in an emotional moment, stabs himself saying that he may be taken and Kishore may be spared. This really puts questions before all who can think the futility of war is apparent.

Thus, this play portrays the conflict between romantic idealism and the survival instinct. It portrays the sad reality of the costly loss of scores of human lives in an armed conflict. Uma Parameswaran herself admits in her preface: “the play deals with the pity of war.”(p.8)

In the post Kargil scenario, the play assumes special significance. In Kashmir and elsewhere, say in the North –East, mother India is continuously losing her sons to war and terrorism .Both the slain and the slayer happened to be Indians or at least, the people of the Indian sub continent. The play is pacifistic and prophetic in tone .It subtly advocates the need of finding alternatives to end the chronic conflicts which the country is facing now. Otherwise the decrees ‘Sons Must Die’ is here to stay.

The author shows how during a war like situation, religion loses its significance. There is general apathy among the public and the strong rigid people are ridiculed at by the not so strong believers. War seems to be ruthless, and so those whose children are at war, seem to be praying while they are ridiculed at by the others who see no sense in their prayers as war is inevitably dreadful. In the words of a character, who is a cynic:

God again. There is no God. And her god. Ha,
Virgin Mary, Immaculate Conception. I too am a god
For I doubt my mother ever married.

Not only this, the play at various places expresses the gallantry, bravery of soldiers going to the battlefield. We find the strong spirit and patriotic spirit stressed on by the author through the character of Begum who talks about her sons:

My gallant sons have fallen and their father.
They were sturdy. My heart
Fair burst with pride looking at them—
He with a son on either side
Discussing deals planed or made—
As they returned for evening prayer.
Tall and handsome, straight nose,
Bold eyes below broad forehead,
Beards clipped neat....

Yet he upset the entire routine of life
And went to war willingly.
Strange how patriotism moulds heroes of men! 18

Further in the play, Uma Parameswaran makes use of symbolism to depict the horrors and aftermath of war.

Last night the moon was red.
As I sat on the banks of the blue lake
The birds flew in from the east and said
'the moon is red tonight.'
And the swan sailed by west and I traced
The parting water as it swam and saw
The western fringe all red.
I looked up, and the sun was red,
A bloody red it was as it touched the horizon,
And where it touched, a red stream melted
And flowed down in blood. The sun set

Leaving crimson gashes in the sky. The moon rose

But I dared not look up knowing it was red.

Here the red colour is symbolic of bloodshed which she projects as being depicted in all sights of nature be it the moon, sun, sky or stream. Symbolism continues to exist further in the play. The story being narrated by the dacoit is symbolic. Red colour signifies blood, Hiranyakashyap's blood was sucked out by the lord.

24.9 Tolerance vs Weakness

Uma Parameswaran through her story *The Door I Shut Behind Me* has pointed out the basic nature of Indian citizens which is one of a very high level of tolerance. Uma Parameswaran wonders whether we do not react to situations out of tolerance or it is out of weakness, when being questioned or attacked or cross examined by others:

Was it patience that made him listen to the boor? Was it tolerance that kept him from rebuking? Or was it weakness? Tolerance and weakness, one considered a virtue, the other a vice, but were there after all different words for the same quality? Was it tolerance that had allowed India to suffer wave after wave of cultural and political invasions? Tolerance that prompted Hinduism to be so submissive while missionaries and governments had drawn away its people and its wealth? Or was it weakness? Non-violence or cowardice? Two names for the same quality, and that quality a national trait for the people who flaunted it by the more flattering name... a nation made of spineless thinkers and unthinking egotists....

(*Trishanku And Other Writings* 96)

This is the observation made by Uma Parameswaran with reference to a set of people who are immigrants, suffering quietly, unable to speak out what is in their minds or act boldly, whereas in *Sons Must Die* she points out the brave and undaunting spirit of Indian soldiers who fight with a never-say-die attitude no matter come what may.

In the same story *The Door I Shut Behind Me* Uma Parameswaran stresses on the lack of unity and tolerance inside the country on the basis of culture and language and lack of tolerance between the people of different linguistic communities even when they travel abroad and have to settle there as expatriates of the same nation:

Here they were, two men who came from the same country, saluted the same flag, worshipped the same gods, yet so alien to each other! "My own people, my own language..." Could they never be one people unless they had the same language? Was it after all only a language that could hold a nation together in peace time?

(*Trishanku And Other Writings* 96)

The people of the same nation, when they face a war-like situation and go out to fight as soldiers or settle as immigrants usually try to remain united despite all differences of caste, colour, creed or language as is depicted in *Sons Must Die*.

24.10 Let Us Sum Up

Uma Parameswaran is a scholar and critic and possesses a flair for creative writing. She is the

founder and general editor of the South Asian Canadian Literature Series. She has written and staged plays in Winnipeg for the benefit of the Indian immigrant community there. They are an expression of the symbiosis of cultures and the aspirations of the immigrants.

Regarding language of communication, Parameswaran is divided between the two views, namely that communication across linguistic backgrounds is possible because we share a substratum of human language, and that communication is impossible because the words written by one are read by another and a cultural chasm exists between the two.

Uma Parameswaran's views on writing is that all poems are triggered into existence by an external stimulus that might be personal or vicarious experience, a newspaper report or overheard conversation or something else. But according to her, "all poems go beyond that personal triggering into a writer-community relationship". While the reader's language and sensitivity repertoire grows with reading, and a culture's language and sensitivity bank grows with acceptance of diversity, at the basis of this growth is the writer's personal agony of choosing the language that would best ignite the creative process. Even given language skills and sensitivity and experience, a transplanted writer has other problems that retard the creative process, and landscape is one of them.

Uma Parameswaran admits that the metaphor of jigsaw puzzle with reference to literary analysis has always appealed to her -she discovered the basics of literary analysis—that once we figure out the shapes and patterns of images, metaphors, symbols, one can put together a consistent interpretation of the text, no matter what the storyline, etc.

The treatment of women in her plays is diverse. Uma Parameswaran's women are conscious of the diasporic experience, migration, and trauma of being in an alien land and with an alien tongue.

Uma Parameswaran has a strong faith in the multicultural policy and its application. She reiterates her philosophy that the mosaic is here to stay and for the better. She illustrates that the ultimate in multiculturalist attitude, for example, would be when Canadians would be as comfortable with the imagery from India and Hinduism as the Indians are with imagery from Christian world. The plays in the collection, "Meera" and "Sita's Promise", "set out to celebrate Indian art tradition and at the same time to educate the outsider this play portrays the conflict between romantic idealism and the survival instinct. It portrays the sad reality of the costly loss of scores of human lives in an armed conflict about our culture."

While all other works talk about Indian mythology, the diasporic element, alienation, acculturation and assimilation, this particular play, "Sons Must Die" is about war, how soldiers sacrifice their life unquestioningly for the nation, the agony of mothers when their young sons are lost in war on the one hand, and on the other some very courage models of mothers who bravely offer their sons in order to serve their country.

24.11 Review Questions

1. Write a short note on Uma Parameswaran's belief in Multiculturalism.
2. How does Uma Parameswaran describe different experiences of immigration through her characters in the play *Sons Must Die*?
3. Attempt a critical estimate of the play *Sons Must Die*.

4. Uma Parameswaran has dealt with the theme of war in the play *Sons Must Die*.
5. What does Uma Parameswaran have to say about Tolerance vs weakness with reference to immigrant behavior?
6. How can we say that Uma Parameswaran is a diasporic author of Indian origin?
7. What are Uma Parameswaran's views about a writer?
8. What does Uma Parameswaran say about language?
9. Give a critical estimate of the story 'Fighter Pilots Never Die' and compare it with 'Sons Must Die.'
10. What sort of approach does Uma Parameswaran have towards racial bias?
11. Attempt an essay on Symbolism in 'Sons must die.'

24.12 Bibliography

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