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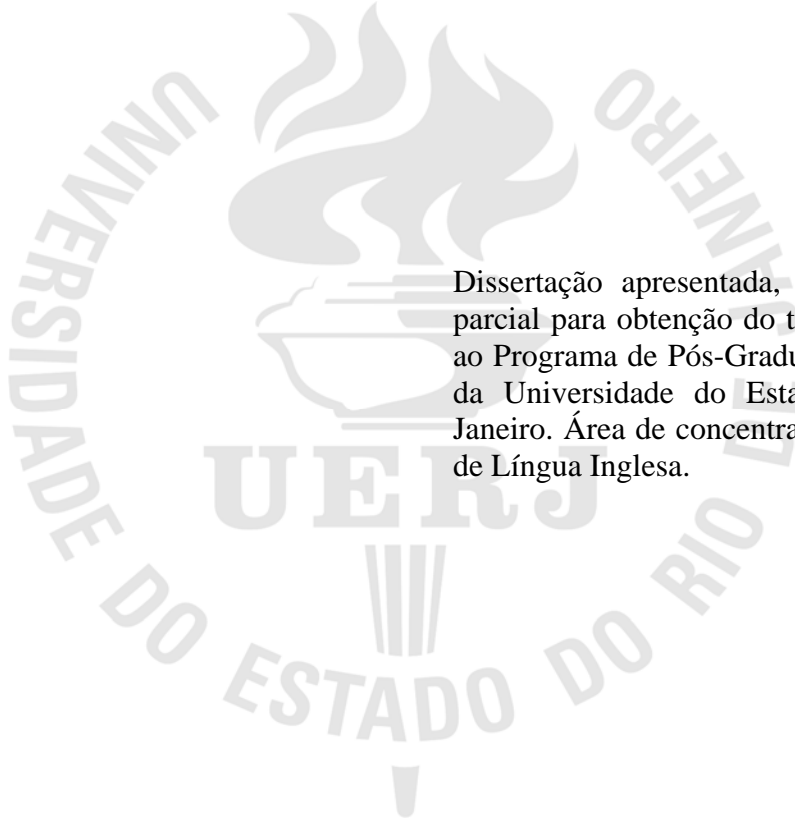
**Divining for meaning and searching for a female literary identity in Alice
Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners***

Rio de Janeiro

2014

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof^ª. Dra. Peonia Viana Guedes

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DEDICATÓRIA

Dedico esta conquista à pessoa que sempre estará comigo – minha mãe.

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RESUMO

SARDENBERG, Ana Luiza. *Divining for meaning and searching for a female literary identity in Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women and Margaret Laurence's The Diviners*. 2014. 88f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2014.

Esta dissertação tem por objetivo investigar como Alice Munro e Margaret Laurence se apropriam de gêneros canônicos, especificamente do *Bildungsroman* e do *Künstlerroman*, para subvertê-los e representar versões diferentes do sujeito feminino através de romances de cunho autobiográfico escritos por mulheres. A investigação é focada em dois romances: *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), escrito por Alice Munro, e *The Diviners* (1974), escrito por Margaret Laurence. No romance de Alice Munro, as estratégias de apagamento das fronteiras entre gêneros, a ideia de que perspectivas de realidade mudam de acordo com a experiência e a memória de cada indivíduo, como também a ênfase no desenvolvimento da protagonista enquanto pessoa e escritora, são assuntos amplamente discutidos. No romance de Margaret Laurence, a ênfase no aspecto subjetivo da memória, a desconstrução de estereótipos de gênero e a renegociação da representação do sujeito feminino para o alcance de uma identidade feminina autônoma na vida e na arte são os principais assuntos investigados. Em vista disso, esta dissertação visa mostrar como a representação da identidade feminina é redefinida por duas escritoras canadenses que se apropriaram de discursos dominantes para subvertê-los e, então, reescreverem suas histórias.

Palavras-chave: Memória e identidade. Apropriação e reescritura. *Bildungsroman*. *Künstlerroman*.

ABSTRACT

SARDENBERG, Ana Luiza. *Divining for meaning and searching for a female literary identity in Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women and Margaret Laurence's The Diviners*. 2014. 88f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2014.

This dissertation aims at investigating how Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence appropriate canonical genres, specifically the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman*, to subvert them and represent different versions of the female subject through autobiographical novels written by women. The investigation focuses on two novels: *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), by Alice Munro, and *The Diviners* (1974), by Margaret Laurence. In Alice Munro's novel, the strategies of the blurring of genres, the idea that reality perspectives change according to the experience and memory of each individual, as well as an emphasis on the development of the protagonist as an individual and as a writer are matters amply discussed. In Margaret Laurence's novel, the emphasis on the subjective aspect of memory, the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and the renegotiation of the representation of the female subject to the achievement of an autonomous female identity in life and art are the main issues debated. This dissertation intends to show how the representation of the female identity is redefined by two Canadian writers who appropriated dominant discourses in order to subvert them and then, rewrite their histories.

Keywords: Memory and identity. Appropriation and rewriting. *Bildungsroman*. *Künstlerroman*.

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INTRODUCTION

I studied literature because I've always been interested in it, and because it seemed to me that the things around literature, so to speak—philosophy, music, history, political science, and sociology—enabled one to be interested in a number of other human activities.

Edward W. Said

One of the reasons that encouraged me to get a Master's degree was that the study of literature had always been a pursuit in my personal and professional life. Literature has fascinated me ever since I was a child and I believe it will always be a good companion. The second reason, which is as fundamental as the first one, is that the professors I studied with in the graduation course in English Literatures at UERJ contributed greatly to my academic development. Actually, the decision to study Literature as an academic discipline was taken in 1994, after I started working as a teaching assistant at UERJ's LAG Department of English Literatures. As soon as I graduated in 1996, I started, at the same institution, Specialization studies in English Literatures in a two-year course which I concluded in 1998. After this, I interrupted my formal studies and spent a number of years working as an English teacher in language schools as well as in state and municipal schools. After a period that lasted longer than a decade, during which I acquired teaching experience and kept on reading literary texts, I decided to study literature in more depth and contact the UERJ professors I had studied with years before.

Thus, before I took the exams to start my Master's, I audited professor Peonia Guedes's classes and she suggested that I should read some Canadian women authors who I had not read before. The reading of some Canadian authors opened new perspectives in my field of interest which influenced the course of my academic research. As a result, I got deeply interested in different kinds of autobiographical narratives written by women and I finally decided to choose Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* for my investigation. Therefore, the present work aims at investigating how Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence appropriated the canonic *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* in order to subvert traditional literary genres and rewrite new perspectives of the female identity which were concealed in the palimpsest of patriarchal versions of women.

It is relevant to mention that the 1960's were a period when Canadian writing achieved high visibility at home and abroad as Coral Ann Howells emphasizes in *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, "[...] since the 1960's (a period which includes changing social and cultural contexts as well as opportunities for publication) and, mostly importantly, by looking at the texts themselves." (HOWELLS, 2004, p. 194). There was a Canadian "lit boom" and women writers saw this period as an opportunity to explore new dimensions of the female subject by calling into question traditional discourses that framed women's identity into patriarchal stereotypes. Accordingly, Canadian women writers were concerned with their role in redefining the literary cultural scene. They acknowledged their female literary inheritance handed down by their predecessors, as for example, Susanna Moodie and her sister Catherine Parr Traill, and the need to keep on doing what these writers had begun. In her essay, "*Entre Dois Gêneros e Duas Culturas: Subjetividades Femininas e Personalidades Transgressoras em The Woman Warrior*," professor Peonia Viana Guedes argues that there is a trend in feminist writing which attempts to construct a matrilineal lineage in women's fiction and trace their literary heritage as a means to give voice to women who were silenced by patriarchal discourses. It is pertinent to highlight that, since the lit-boom period, women writers have moved beyond a literary tradition that established fixed notions of reality, identity and gender stereotypes. Accordingly, Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence managed to open new literary spaces that offered them the possibility of tracing women's own literary history.

Another relevant issue that has been deeply addressed by postmodern Canadian writers is the question of the Canadian identity. Because actions are believed to be influenced by environment and people have their identity also shaped by the place they live in, the question of a national identity to represent Canada has always been troublesome. According to Dean Baldwin and Patrick J. Quinn, in *An Anthology of Colonial and Postcolonial Short Fiction*, Canada was settled by six different ethnic groups: the Arctic People, the Sub-Arctic Tribes, the Eastern Woodland Tribes, the Plains People, who settled in the areas that constitute the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and parts of Eastern Alberta. There were also the Plateau People who populated British Columbia and the Northwest Peoples who settled around Vancouver and along the coast of Alaska. The Inuit people arrived later than the various North American Indian tribes. By 1250, there were 25,000 Inuit peoples in the Arctic regions of Canada. Throughout a couple of centuries, the presence of various indigenous peoples as well as of French settlements in the East and English settlements in the

West, have contributed to the formation of different Canadian social groups forming the amalgam of a rich multicultural identity as well as establishing two official languages, English and French. (BALDWIN; QUINN, 2007, p. 319-327). Among the different peoples that form the multicultural identity of Canada are the Métis, on whom Margaret Laurence based the creation of some characters in *The Diviners*. The designation of Métis, both in Canada and in the northern part of the USA, applies to people of mixed North American Indian-European descent. In the colonization period, the term applied basically to the offspring of aboriginal women and European fur traders. The Métis married both among themselves and interracially and established distinct communities with their own culture, language, way of life and nationhood. Throughout history, the Canadian Métis have acted collectively to protect and fight for their rights, lands, and survival as a distinct people and nation within the Canadian federation.

The two novels I investigate show Alice Munro's and Margaret Laurence's subversive appropriation of the dominant patriarchal discourses and the rewriting of them in order to legitimize more heterogeneous female discourses. Thus, the postmodern strategies of subversion Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence employ in their novels will be under scrutiny in the development of my argumentation. In the first chapter, I identify and discuss the postmodern theoretical concepts that have served as a basis for the development of new writing strategies which allowed women to write their own *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*. Some of the postmodern strategies I discuss in this theoretical chapter are the blurring of genres between fiction and reality which elucidates the very concept of factual truth and the way different subjects attribute cultural meanings to it. The appropriation of dominant discourses and of their subversive rewriting, often with the use of parody and irony are also discussed in this chapter. The question of verisimilitude and self-reflexivity will merit my attention as well. Besides the investigation of the postmodern strategies of subversion employed by women writers to have a literature of their own, I establish a point of reference in the history of the *Bildungsroman* and of the *Künstlerroman* and mention some literary works that integrate the early canon of the genre. The chapter highlights the importance of parody in response to a controversial cultural heritage that needs to be renegotiated by women writers. I also offer a few examples of literary works produced by women in nineteenth-century England which I compare with the development of the genres in their contemporary forms. Because postmodern discussions have sought to call into question official versions of history that established hierarchical social values throughout time, some of the ideas that

characterize postmodernism will also be under consideration in the first chapter. Accordingly, issues that concern the postmodern subject are debated with the theoretical support of critic Linda Hutcheon.

I begin the second chapter with some biographical notes about Alice Munro and I start my investigation putting emphasis on how the development of the narrator's writing process unfolds. Therefore, the related tensions between memory and imagination are brought to the fore in order to illustrate the way in which experiences can be transformed into representations of reality with the aid of imagination. I carefully go over each chapter of the novel trying to strike a balance between the amount of theoretical references and the narrative fragments exemplified in the selected citations. In order to tackle issues concerning the development of autobiographical fiction I have selected authors of theoretical books and articles, among them, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, who put special emphasis on different forms of life writing, to support my arguments. I also take into consideration the narrating voice in the novel, given that in some passages the language used evokes the vocabulary, perspective and imagination of a young girl, whereas in some others it evokes the accounts of an older narrator. Another important point I debate in the chapter is the intertextual web of references the narrator provides in order to illustrate how the female *Bildungsroman* and *Künstlerroman* renegotiate early paradigms which originated the seminal models of the genre. In order to emphasize the strategies of subversion used by the narrator I establish a parallel between the text and its dialogic references. Issues on gender stereotypes and sexuality are discussed in this chapter with examples taken from the text as well as fragments taken from theoretical books and articles.

In the third chapter, I focus on Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*. My investigation starts after the introduction of some brief biographical notes about the author. I put emphasis on the way Laurence writes about women's experiences and I argue that there is no such a thing as a single homogeneous experience because experiences are necessarily multiple and heterogeneous, given that they not only concern the collective, but also the individual. There is an emphasis on the issue of identity and its complexities due to the fragmentation processes identities are subject to. I support and illustrate this point departing from Stuart Hall's proposition in *The Question of Cultural Identity*, in which he develops the concept that identities are not fixed but antagonistic to the very notion of fixity suggested by monolithic cultures and discourses. The role memory plays in the shaping of one's identity is also debated with a meticulous investigation of the polyphonic voices of the splitting "I" that is

present in the different narrative modes for the representation of the narrator's consciousness. The significance of the river trope in the beginning of *The Diviners* as both image and metaphor is debated as well. Issues of race, class and sexuality are important questions to be addressed given that *The Diviners* is a work of epic dimensions and deals with gender bias as well as social and racial prejudices.

Finally, the last section presents my synthesis of the novels' investigation as well as some brief comments about the blurring of the boundaries between the genres, intertextuality, and the representation of the female identity in *Lives of Girls and Women* and *The Diviners*.

1 A DIFFERENCE TO STAND ON

It is always a critical reworking, never a nostalgic return.

Linda Hutcheon

All literary texts have some theory and ideology in their discourse. Readers who are aware of such an argument, question the text, its context and semantics to eventually start working on its interpretation. It is a matter of fact that readers might limit their critique by trying to have the nearest approximation to the original intention suggested by the author. Such investigation would try to understand the historical and sociological circumstances in which the literary text was produced as well as its contemporary readers' response. On the other hand, readers might also try to understand the sense of a text by having an interpretation that would be more related to their ontological experience and cultural identity. As a result, they would investigate the literary work in a broader context, one that would offer more possibilities of sense and meaning given that it would always come under the scrutiny of a more flexible theory which would not be limited to discuss the text according to its original meaning, better saying, according to the author's original intention.

Furthermore, the very meaning of a text is not only related to its author's intention, but it is also linked to the reader's reading experience, consequently his/her personal reading. It is important to point out that the relation between a literary text and its readers described in the above lines does not claim that readers are hierarchically placed above the author of a text. Actually, what may be inferred is that the author with his/her text leads readers to ponder upon the text they have been reading. Thus, an author not only stimulates readers to carefully consider a text, but he/she also motivates them to produce some sense of what has been read. Such a sense may be closely related to the author's intention or not. In other words, the author's intention does not determine a definite sense of his/her work, provided that the text is offered to the reader's appreciation and such a fact does not mean that the author will be forgotten either. On the contrary, the author is still important, he/she remains.

Therefore, literature plays a fundamental role in the construction of the identity of the one who writes and the one who reads. Besides, the identity of an individual can never be fixed because it is always subject to change. An individual cannot be dissociated from ontological questions which may be raised in order to destabilize his/her notion of reality and

detach him/her from what was once accepted as true. Accordingly, identities are in a constant process of fragmentation and transformation. Moreover, ontological questions always add another dimension to an individual's certainties making him/her redefine his/her own experience of identity. One concept that may be called into question concerns the word subject. Is the subject a result of his/her choices or is the subject a result of someone else's choices? The very word subject implies a certain ambivalence, once the subject is the agent as well as the one who is subjugated, that is to say, an individual has his/her identity fragmented due to the fact that he/she will always be related to his/her subjectivity as well as the other's in historical, geographical, cultural and sociological dimensions. Hence, literature provides readers with information about different aspects of the existing culture of a country as well as its national identity, which does not mean that it is unified and stable, but fragmented and ever changing. Concerning the role of literature, Margaret Atwood states:

What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as our literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here, because here is where we live. For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive. (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 26-27).

On the one hand, identities are shaped by one's sense of belonging to a place and its culture, on the other hand, identities are also shaped by one's awareness of undergoing constant changes and of being different. In an interview to Roger Pol-Droit, the philosopher Michel Foucault stated: "do not ask me who I am and do not tell me to remain the same" (POL-DROIT, 2006, p. 21).¹ Foucault's statement shows that there cannot be any fixed paradigms of identity because identity implies identification and distinctiveness, better saying, an individual needs some extent of identification with his/her community to share a sense of belonging, but he/she also needs some distinctiveness in order to realize a feeling of being authentically different. Besides, the feeling of belonging is directly related to place, community and history, but places and communities change as history unfolds in the continuity of time, which is something that suggests that one's identity is flexible and it paradoxically involves ideas of sameness and difference. Similarly, there is the "I" who sees and the "I" who is seen, and this interrelation is always changing the ways an individual

¹ Original text: "Não me perguntem quem sou e não me digam para continuar o mesmo."

experiences his/her identity. The notion that identity is something which goes through constant processes of transformation is discussed by Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, who asserts:

Identity becomes, in our cosmopolitan world a process in flux, a temporary belonging rather than a unifying concept. It affects and is affected by transnational movements, and in turn modifies both subjects in transit and those that remain static, as well as the way contemporary subjects conceive their identities and construct their subjectivity. (ALMEIDA, 2006, p. 81).

Hence, identity has been a relevant issue addressed by contemporary writers, since the self is not single but multiple, as a result, contemporary writers have challenged their readers to see the world differently taking into consideration new perspectives to approach history, literature, language and culture. Literary and cultural texts also provide a site for public debates. Thus, one of the central critical discussions in Canadian literature is the shift of cultural values in self-reflexive narratives from a hierarchical centralized model to a situational model of representation that allows minority voices the possibility of inclusion. So, the local and the different are what matter rather than the universal. However, dominant groups and discourses establish their cultural paradigms as universal overlooking multicultural differences. As a consequence, the question of the Canadian identity has always been tackled as a rather complex matter due to the large geographic proportions of the country as well as the large number of its different ethnic groups. Accordingly, the idea of a unified Canadian nationhood is incompatible with Canada's multiculturalism, which goes beyond the essential experience of being Anglo-Canadian. Margaret Atwood addresses the issue of cultural identity in *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*:

Canada is an unknown territory for the people who live in it, and I'm not talking about the fact that you may not have taken a trip to the Arctic or to Newfoundland, you may not have explored – as the travel folders have it – This great land of Ours. I'm talking about Canada as a state of mind, as the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It's that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost. (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 26).

Another important aspect to be taken into consideration is that perspectives change according to one's subjectivity due to the fact that they are interpreted by different individuals. This is one of the influences of the postmodern condition on the politics of representation. As a result, postmodernism triggers off debates on how meaning and representation are transformed into culture. Likewise, postmodern texts question what reality

means and how it is understood, whether it is understood as meaningful and coherent or simply unverifiable. Thus, contemporary texts tend to show some tension between what can be real and what can be fiction as well as their interrelations. In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, the Canadian theorist and critic Linda Hutcheon, PhD in English and professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto, argues that postmodernism has challenged traditional representational forms because they can not only be a privatized experience of the author or simply a mimetic mirroring of one's subjectivity:

At this juncture, a study of representation becomes, not a studying of mimetic mirroring or subjective projecting, but an exploration of the way in which narratives and images structure how we see ourselves and how we construct our notions of self, in the present and in the past. (HUTCHEON, 1991, p. 7).

Thus, one of the roles of postmodern theories is to discuss the concept of the fluidity of identity and how it is represented in postmodern fiction. Bearing such a concept in mind this chapter aims at discussing some strategies of subversion which have been chosen by women writers in order to challenge totalizing discourses present in canonic literary works. Firstly, it is important to highlight a few characteristics attributed to postmodernism which are paramount to the understanding of the influence of postmodern theories in various fields of knowledge. Linda Hutcheon explains in *The Politics of Postmodernism* that according to some descriptive accounts, "(...) postmodernism works to de-doxify our cultural representations and their undeniable political import" (HUTCHEON, 1991, p. 3). Accordingly, the postmodern politics of representation show a significant degree of incredulity toward totalizing narratives and question the validity of imperialist or patriarchal discourses which offer just one version in their literary representation, essentially the version that agrees with Eurocentric perceptions and values. Critic Douglas Kellner states:

Postmodern theory also rejects modern assumptions of social coherence and notions of causality in favour of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy. In addition, postmodern theory abandons the rational and unified subject postulated by much modern theory in favour of a socially and linguistically decentred and fragmented subject. (KELLNER, 1991, p. 4-5).

If postmodernism is pluralistic in its essence allowing oppositional perceptions and discourses the possibility of inclusion, it is imperative that distinct forms of representation be required. It is important to emphasize that postmodernism is more a philosophical exercise rather than a fixed set of rules on rhetorical practices. It destabilizes concepts that seek to

assert epistemic certainties and other truths. The term entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979 with the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by François Lyotard. Under the umbrella term postmodern, there are different linguistic and cultural lines that are put into question, and the way they are approached and discussed depends on whom is dealing with them. According to Linda Hutcheon, postmodernism has brought about the emergence of distinct minority cultures into a broader public view because its interest has been on the particular, the local, whereas its focus has been put on the marginalized, or, as she defines, the ex-centric of the cultures. In the introduction to her study *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*, Linda Hutcheon investigates the ex-centric position in postmodern culture, more specifically in the Canadian context:

Canada's own particular moment of cultural history does seem to make it ripe for the paradoxes of postmodernism, by which I mean those contradictory acts of establishing and then undercutting prevailing values and conventions in order to provoke a questioning, a challenging of 'what goes without saying in our culture'. Whether postmodern writers be Canadian or Latin American, British, American, Italian, or German, they are always in a sense 'agents provocateurs' – taking potshots at the culture of which they know they are unavoidably a part but that they still wish to criticize. This almost inevitably puts the postmodern writer into a marginal or 'ex-centric' position with regard to the central or dominant culture, because the paradox of underlining cultural 'universals' (of revealing their grounding in the 'particular') implicitly challenges any notions of centrality in (and centralization of) culture. Since the periphery or the margin might also describe Canada's perceived position in international terms, perhaps the postmodern ex-centric is very much part of the identity of the nation. In postmodernism, though, the centre and the periphery do not simply change places. Nor is the margin conceived of as only a place of transgression. The periphery is also the frontier, the place of possibility. (HUTCHEON, 1988, p. 3).

Postmodernism has cut across race, class, gender and ethnic concerns and has created conditions for the production of alternative discourses which challenge the very notion of universal truths and fixed identities. Likewise, postmodernism generates conditions for the individual, the writer, the intellectual, etc. to express himself/herself. So, the question of racial oppression, the question of gender biases, the question of human rights and many other questions that may constitute the concerns of contemporary individuals are debated. Postmodernism challenges cultural dominants that have exclusionary practices as well as totalizing discourses. However, in order to challenge totalizing discourses on history, science and culture, postmodernism signals its dependence on such discourses given that it uses the cannon to show rebellion against it. So, it is necessary to appropriate such discourses in order to reformulate them. It is important to highlight that canonic literature was originally constructed by the white dominant male culture which framed women in gender stereotypes. Therefore, women writers realized that one of the strategic ways to subvert imposed

conventions was to appropriate traditional male genres, mostly the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman*, and to rewrite them into texts that represented the female subject. Because the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman* were developed by male authors establishing a tradition that excluded women, it seemed perfectly reasonable for women writers to borrow these genres from the canon and renegotiate their prescriptions.

Consequently, in order to reformulate canonical classics, it is important to understand their development and concept. Thus, a detailed explanation of the origins of the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman* is necessary to understand how they were originally created and eventually subverted by women writers. The *Bildungsroman* was firstly developed as a literary genre in eighteenth-century Germany and it narrated a young man's life as well as his journey of self-discovery. Thus, the *Bildungsroman* was traditionally a novel of male development. Although the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman* describe the life of a character until he achieves adulthood, there is a slight difference in the development of the genres. According to *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, the *Bildungsroman* is a novel in which the protagonist, after some wrong starts, makes the right choices that will lead him to grow into a mature man. The *Künstlerroman* is defined as a novel that shows the development of a male protagonist into an artist (GARLAND, 1997, p. 495). The *Künstlerroman* may be classified as a specific sub-genre of *Bildungsroman*. This kind of narrative, usually in a novel form but with autobiographical elements, also had its origins in 18th century German literature. The *Künstlerroman* narrates the central character's development as an artist, his or her conflicts against the expectations and values of society, chronicling the artist's life from humble beginnings to artistic maturity. In 19th century poetry in English, William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805) is often considered a poetic *Künstlerroman*. In early 20th century novels in English, D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914) are well-known examples of *Künstlerroman*.

According to *The Oxford Companion to German Literature*, the *Bildungsroman* was developed in 1765, by Wieland and his *Agathon* (GARLAND, 1997, p. 87). However, in another source of information, Ellen McWilliams refers to Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* as a reference to the origins of the *Bildungsroman*. According to McWilliams, the political and social developments that took place in eighteenth-century Germany brought about the changes that marked the cornerstones of the modern era in German society. Such developments provoked a turn in German literature that engendered the

development of the *Bildungsroman* as a distinct literary genre. So, *Wilhelm Meister* established a turning point in the origin of the genre and it influenced all subsequent models of *Bildungsroman*. Ellen McWilliams debates that “If *Wilhelm Meister* is the blueprint for the *Bildungsroman*, then it can be argued that every subsequent manifestation of the genre engages with the original of the species.” (MCWILLIAMS, 2009, p. 6).

During the nineteenth century, still in Germany, the *Bildungsroman* began to appear in the form of parodies, most notably, *The Life and Opinions of Tomcat Murr* (1820 – 1822) by E. T. A. Hoffmann, which ironically teased the genre. An equivalent satiric model appeared in the twentieth century in the form of Robert Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*, which Musil began writing in 1924. What is relevant to say is that the *Bildungsroman* was a genre that influenced the writing works of other national literatures as well. Another important aspect is that the genre has been challenged in its very core by parodic versions, for this reason, some critics have argued whether the term *Bildungsroman* should be relegated to the past. However, the fact that a work subverts its original form does not mean that the genre does not exist. On the contrary, it does exist given that its form should be acknowledged in order to be subverted. Ellen McWilliams argues:

[...] a “sustaining presence” seems to imply consciousness on the part of the author in deliberately mirroring and simultaneously challenging, subverting, and recasting the established structures of the genre. It is impossible to determine this level of consciousness, as there is no straightforward answer to the question of whether the author determines the generic paradigms within which s/he chooses to work or whether the work is equally guided by the invisible but powerful influence of history and the canon of the genre. It is perhaps more useful to think of this “sustaining presence” in terms of signifiers or indicators that bear a relation to the genre. (MCWILLIAMS, 2009, p. 11).

It is important to emphasize that before the female *Bildungsroman* began to appear in twentieth-century Canadian literature, other forms of life writing had already been developed in the early history of the country. In *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson consider life-writing as “[...] a general term for writing that takes a life, one’s own or another’s, as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical or explicitly self-referential and therefore autobiographical.” (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 4). The term life writing has been associated with the genres of memoir, autobiography, diary, biography, letters and travel-writing. Nevertheless, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain that even

though life writing and biography are examples of narrating life, they are not interchangeable. They explain that there are crucial distinctions in how these works narrate a life. They assert:

In biography, scholars of other people's lives document and interpret from a point of view external to the subject. In life writing, subjects write about their own lives predominantly, even if they write about themselves in the second or third person, or as a member of a community. As they write simultaneously from externalized and internal points of view, taking themselves as both subject and object, or thematizing that distinction. (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 5).

Concerning autobiography, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain that this mode of narrating life had already been developed in self-referential writings such as *Confessions* written by Saint Augustine in 397 A.D. The term autobiography was coined in the eighteenth century as it is explained, "But the relatively recent coinage of the term autobiography does not mean that the practice of self-referential writing began only in the later eighteenth century." (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 2). However, the term has been associated with canonic examples of life writing that appeared in the Enlightenment and strengthened a traditional practice that began to be developed in the West and, as a result, was consolidated in the western canon. Because the canonic model describes one's life as the most successful achievement of individuality in western civilization, it establishes a politics of exclusion in relation to the various forms of life writing that do not strictly follow canonic standards. For this reason, postmodern and postcolonial theorists argue that the term *autobiography* is inadequate to define the large range of life writing practices:

Early twentieth-century theorists installed this master-narrative of "the sovereign self" as an institution of literature and culture, and identified a canon of representative self life writings. Implicit in this canonization, however, is the assumption that many other kinds of life writings produced at the same time have lesser value and were not "true" autobiography—the slave narrative, narratives of women's domestic lives, coming-of-age and travel narratives, among others. (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 3).

Smith and Watson also observe that people tend to confuse life writing and fiction. They stress that even though first-person novels feature autobiographical elements, they refer to a fictional narrator as well as a fictional narrative. So, in order to avoid misunderstandings, first-person novels that feature autobiographical elements should be referred to as novels of

autobiographical content. Also important is that there is a contract of identity which is signed by the proper name of the author. If the work is autobiographical, its author's name is identical to the narrator's, which is something that attests the truth of the signature and makes readers acknowledge that author and narrator are indeed the same person. This distinguishing mark of autobiography is established by Philippe Lejeune's essay entitled "The Autobiographical Pact" in which he states that, "Autobiography is a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality." (LEJEUNE, 1989, p. 4). Smith and Watson add that,

For Lejeune, two things indisputably distinguish autobiography and, by implication, a wide range of life narratives, from the novel: the "vital statistics" of the author, such as date and place of birth and education, are identical to those of the narrator; and an implicit contract exists between author and publisher attesting to the truth of the "signature" on the cover and title page. (SMITH; WATSON, 2010, p. 11).

Life writing began to appear in Canada with European explorers and their main purpose was to provide sources of information about the Canadian landscape and The First Nations the Europeans encountered. In Canada, the early manifestations of these works documented lives that modeled specific values, which were mostly Eurocentric, colonial and masculine. Concerning the first examples of life writing produced by women writers, Henry J. Morgan's *The Canadian Women and Men of the time* (1898) is worth mentioning due to its entries to women's sketches. Although the entries consist of only three percent of their total number, the women's sketches show that women had "[...] major interests and/or careers outside the home." (EGAN; HELMS, 2004, p. 217-218). In relation to nineteenth-century women writers, the most important references are the sisters Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, who immigrated to Canada with their Scottish husbands and settled in the backwoods of where is now Ontario. The history of their lives has been associated to the mythology of Canada and their works continue to be read as an important source of information about Canadian history. Their work also provided relevant pieces of advice to prospective immigrants who did not know anything about pioneer life in the intimidating Canadian wilderness. Susanna Egan and Gabrielle Helms state that

[...] Moodie and Traill were part of the commodification of Canada, their personal experiences becoming an early

Canadian export. Their lives, of course, have become part of the mythology of Canada, but only in retrospect, long after they had ceased to figure largely in England. Their lives are part, too, of conventional wisdom about the Canadian landscape and climate as large and hostile for the isolated human figure (though Traill's enthusiastic botanical studies provide some intimacy). (EGAN; HELMS, 2004, p. 220).

Another issue that needs to be discussed concerns the early history of the *Bildungsroman*, critic Elliane T. A. Campello argues that the lack of a traditional history in the development of the female genre can be explained by the fact that the literary canon was formed by works written by male authors who perpetuated the hegemonic values of patriarchal societies in their writing. Nevertheless, Elliane T. A. Campello lists five literary works that are the precursors of the genre: Frances Moore Brooke's *The Excursion* (1777), Helen Maria Williams's *Julia* (1790), Madame de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807), George Sand's *Consuelo* (1842) and Geraldine Jewsbury's *The Half Sisters* (1848). Besides these novels, Elizabeth Barret Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856) is an epic poem/novel which is also a reference to the first examples of female *Künstlerroman*. Among the writers aforementioned, two are French novelists: Madame de Staël and George Sand. Elliane T. A. Campello argues:

These narratives were not significantly acclaimed as *Künstlerroman* examples by traditional critics, even though they have been remembered by some of them. Nevertheless, there is little, but relevant critique on one of these precursor works carried out by the feminist literary criticism which brings to the fore the heroine-artist and prevents these narratives from being forgotten for good. (CAMPELLO, 2003, p. 75).²

One of the objectives of literary criticism developed by women has been to challenge radical positions that have excluded women from literary history. Another important aspect is that the nineteenth-century novel of female development, whether it was written by women writers or not, depicted female characters that fit an image of women in conformity with the roles established by gender stereotypes. In *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that "Both in life and in art, we saw, the artists we studied were literally

²Texto original: Essas narrativas não receberam uma valorização significativa sob a ótica de sua natureza enquanto romance de artista pela crítica tradicional, embora tenham sido lembradas por alguns teóricos. Entretanto, existem poucas, porém valiosas incursões analíticas da crítica literária feminista, que enfocam a heroína-artista em algumas dessas obras precursoras, resgatando-as do ano anonimato a que foram condenadas.

and figuratively confined.” (GILBERT; GUBAR, 2000, p. xi). So, nineteenth-century women and women artists were inevitably trapped in male-dominated society and the literary constructs formed by patriarchal discourses. Eliane T.A. Campello adds:

When the woman writer chronicles an artist-heroine who does not manage to conciliate personal integration with social integration, most frequently her destiny is death (suicide being the most common means), madness, physical and emotional mutilation or alienation. (CAMPELLO, 2003, p. 69).³

Because of the intricate relations between history, ideology and power, everything that is historical is susceptible to judgment and change. Therefore, women writers started to realize that male writers had always framed the female subject within traditional patriarchal stereotypes which limited their perspectives and intellectualism. Therefore, female characters were framed in narratives whose settings and context curtailed their chances of becoming independent individuals. Female characters had their happy ends within the institution of marriage so that their role of housewives was fulfilled. Thus, in traditional patriarchal discourses women were conceived to get enough education to find a husband and raise a family. Although some nineteenth-century women writers and their novels of female *Bildungsroman* challenged patriarchal stereotyped versions of women by showing different perspectives of the female subject, their female protagonists either succumbed to the demands of a patriarchal society or committed suicide, as for instance in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899). Thus, nineteenth-century novels of female artistic development were riddled with obstacles that led to the heroine’s abnegation and sacrifice. Critic Ellen McWilliams states:

As with the female *Bildungsroman*, the novel of development of the female artist in the nineteenth century is riddled with pitfalls that seem to deem the downfall of the protagonist inevitable. (MCWILLIAMS, 2009, p. 18).

Despite the fact that some early-twentieth-century women novelists portrayed their female protagonists struggling to succeed as artists, their heroines’ life was limited by Victorian conventions which demanded that a woman should be docile, self-sacrificing, polite acquiescent, pious and domestic. In sum, what Virginia Woolf explained in her paper *Professions for Women* as the angel in the house. Virginia Woolf is an example of a writer who was concerned about how women were regarded in Victorian society and how they

³ Texto original: Quando a escritora nos coloca frente a uma heroína-artista que não consegue conciliar integração pessoal com social, muito frequentemente seu destino é a morte (sendo o suicídio o meio mais comum), a loucura, a mutilação física e emocional ou a alienação.

regarded themselves (DAICHES, 1979, p. 2045-2046). In *To the Lighthouse*, 1927, for example, Virginia Woolf depicts a female protagonist, Lily Briscoe, who is an artist that believes her painting is not worthy because she feels threatened by men's opinions of women as artists. Although the Victorian culture had already seen the decline of its social values when *To The Lighthouse* was published, some obsolete cultural conventions prevailed and women were still regarded as outsiders. For this reason, the best examples of the female *Bildungsroman* in literary works originally written in English language began to abound after the first half of the twentieth century when women writers managed to portray new perspectives of the female self which had been concealed in patriarchal versions of femininity. Concerning the appropriation of the genre and its subversion, Mc Williams observes that "More than any other narrative of development, it dismantles a genre trammled by an exclusively patriarchal heritage and becomes the means of its perpetuation in a new context." (MCWILLIAMS, 2009, p. 16).

Therefore, in the second half of the twentieth century, women writers saw in postmodern period an opportunity to emancipate themselves from a patriarchal discourse that had long limited their possibilities. In Canadian literature, for instance, the 1960's witnessed the Canadian lit boom, which opened new literary spaces to the ones who had always been placed on the margins of the dominant culture, that is to say, the western male culture. As a result, women writers started to redefine the politics of representation by playing a rather cunning language game. They began to speak the language of the dominant, which allowed them to be heard, and then subverted the same language using postmodern strategies in order to redefine literary representations of the female self. According to Linda Hutcheon in an interview with Katleen O'Grady published in *Donna: Women in Italian Culture*, by Ada Testaferri, the blurring of boundaries that distinguishes fact from fiction, the use of irony and exaggeration, intertextuality and self-reflexivity, appropriation and subversion and parody or parodic intertextuality were some of the strategies used by women writers in order to deconstruct the one-version dominant male discourse. The following paragraphs will focus on the subversive potential of the aforementioned strategies to call into question totalizing narratives that were accepted as the only truth. The first to be discussed is the use of parody or parodic intertextuality.

In the *Cambridge Encyclopedia*, parody is defined as "an imitation of a literary work, or form, usually for comical and satirical purposes. Good parody requires both skill and sympathy with the target" (CRYSTAL, 1990, p. 910). Nevertheless, this is not the only

definition of the term given that so much has been said about parody that its connotations and meanings have had controversial and complicated accounts. For this reason, it seems impossible to frame the term parody in just one single explanation without taking into consideration the wide range of postmodern parodic cultural forms that defy any attempts of precise definitions. Thus, postmodern parody should be understood in its broadest sense. It presents intertextuality since a hypertext changes a hypotext, that is to say, the hypotext or original one is the source upon which the hypertext produces its parody. Moreover, because of the relation between a hypotext and a hypertext, parody requires a lot of skill given that it involves the imitation and transformation of someone else's words. In this sense, parodic intertextuality involves appropriation and subversion. Linda Hutcheon states:

It seems to me that, like Canadians, women are often in the position of defining themselves AGAINST a dominant culture or discourse. One way to do that, a way with great subversive potential is to speak the language of the dominant (which allows you to be heard), but then to subvert it through ironic strategies of exaggeration, understatement, or literalization. (HUTCHEON, online).⁴

Besides, parody can be conservative because it may reinforce what has been originally said in the hypotext, but it can also be subversive because it may contradict what has been previously stated. Accordingly, either might parody make honorable allusions to previous texts showing some sympathy toward them, or it might subvert precursor texts showing a more controversial attitude toward them. Another important aspect is the fact that parodic writing does not necessarily have to be solely comic because writing is serious in its intention, so parody can also be serious to a certain extent. In addition, there are various ways through which parody can sound more comic and less serious, or exactly the opposite, less comic and more serious. That will depend on the choices of discourse elements, which may include a touch of irony, exaggeration, bitter irony, made by the writer to approach the hypotext. What is important to highlight is that although a literary work may feature parodic intertextuality in its text, it does not necessarily mean that the entire text can be read as parody as Linda Hutcheon states, "While it is obvious that parts of a work may be parodic without the entire text being so labeled [...]". (HUTCHEON, 1985, p. 18).

Another important strategy that shows a way to come to terms with the historical weight of the past and change it into something meaningful and less intimidating is the appropriation of the voice of the dominant and its subversion. In this sense, some emphasis is

⁴ Available at: bailiwick.lib.uiowa.edu/wstudies/hutcheon.html Accessed on 25/01/2014.

put on what was left behind as legacy so that it can be changed and reorganized. It implies imitation and transformation, which is something that suggests a double-coded complexity because it appropriates previous discourses, installs and subverts them. It expands the past into the present showing that difference comes from continuity, so it involves a certain degree of repetition with critical investigation. Moreover, what was left behind as historical and ideological discourses, for example, is legacy that an individual cannot get rid of so easily because the past is always echoing its influence in present time, for this reason, one of the best forms to deal with that legacy is to evaluate what should be appropriated and written upon. In this sense, readers are reminded, whether they like it or not, that they have a past which they should respectfully consider investigating and recycling to the better understanding of present time. On the dimensions of historical past and its influences in literature, Edward Said points out:

Nearly everywhere you look—let's say in the novel, although it's also true in poetry, but let's just look at the novel—geography, landscape, and setting are paramount. You can't have a novel without the setting and the setting is there; it's immediately evident. The analysis of the literary work, [...] is to elucidate the setting, which puts the work in touch with this larger historical experience of domination and being dominated, [...]. Then it becomes a rather interesting and intricate thing to try (I won't say to synchronize the two with each other, but,) somehow, to make them work together contrapuntally. (SAID, 2002, p. 193).

It must be highlighted that a text should be investigated with critical distance. Thus, if readers do not share any ideological values which they have been reading in a literary work, they will either give up reading it or they will keep on reading it with critical distance. One of the resources that might help readers establish critical distance from a text is to read it with some irony, better saying, is to read the text and to respond ironically. Similarly, when readers feel that there is something in a text that needs to be recontextualized in present time, they might do their reading of the text by writing their interpretation of it in an ironic way. Thus, irony is one of the rhetorical elements that writers use to subvert the original idea intended by the author. For this reason, it takes a careful and learned decoder to manage to invalidate and transform primary forms of literary works. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of parody* states that "(...) the experience of literature involves a text, a reader, and his and her reactions, which take the form of systems of words that are grouped associatively in the reader's mind." (HUTCHEON, 1986, p. 23).

Another important resource used by contemporary writers in their writing is metafiction. It not only creates fiction but it also comments about the creation of fiction. Therefore, any narrators who address their readers by making references to their writing as well as to their attempt at verisimilitude, are in fact deploying self-reference to remind readers of the importance to question the several possible discourses of representation that are either selected or declined by the teller. Self-reference stresses that literary representation is to choose appropriate words to portray an object according to one's experience. Thus, representation is alteration. Needless to say, metalanguage also establishes some sort of relation to other texts. Therefore, self-reference puts emphasis on controversial forms of representation, oppositional ideas and dialectical ones. The complexity of these strategies of language representation is discussed by Patricia Waugh in *Metafiction*:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (WAUGH, 1984, p. 2).

Hence, readers might ask why some forms of representation are validated whereas other forms are excluded. Accordingly, learned readers are aware that it is relevant to consider how literary representations must have been legitimized and why writers must have chosen to exclude some particular facts before they started their recording. It is important to highlight that memory is fundamental in acts of representation. Had it not been for memory, humankind would not have had any legacy to investigate and restore. However, it should be emphasized that memory is selective, so it chooses to remember but it also chooses to forget. Depending on the one who remembers, memory chances favorable circumstances to register its recollections. Thus, recollections might be conveniently fortuitous to the ones who remember. Taking this into account, it might be said that the appropriation of the voice of the dominant and its subsequent subversion is the one strategy used by women writers to scrutinize cultural dominants in backgrounded texts and confront them with contemporary social conflicts. In addition, individuals construct their past by their internalization of a historical past, once one cannot remember something which he/she did not experience. Concerning collective and individual memory, writer Patrick Hutton points out:

Collective memory is an elaborate network of social mores, values and ideals that marks out the dimensions of our imaginations according to the attitudes of the social groups to which we relate. It is through the interconnections among these shared images that the social frameworks of our collective memory are formed, and it is within such settings that individual memories must be sustained if they are to survive. (HUTTON, 1993, p. 38).

Bearing in mind that individual memory departs from collective memory and that individuals remember what is relevant to their groups, one should acknowledge that narrating stories about one's past also implies the recognition of the manipulations of collective memory. Thus, in order to elaborate on the manipulations of collective memory, contemporary women writers have chosen to appropriate some canonic genres as a means to subvert representational discourses. Likewise, many contemporary women writers have chosen the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman* as framing structures to write about their female identities according to their point of view. As a result, from the second half of the twentieth century on, women authors have found other happy ends to their characters which have not been necessarily sealed in marriage and family. If in eighteenth and nineteenth century novels, female characters got enough education to be able to make sense of their talking, in the second half of the twentieth century, women writers decided that their female characters should get enough education to be able to make sense of their writing. Consequently, something has been repeated and something has been changed as the genres have been imitated and the context and contents have been differently represented. In relation to this practice, Ellen McWilliams argues:

More specific to the female *Bildungsroman* is the question of why the genre has been appropriated and granted new currency in contexts apparently remote from its origins. Also at issue is the recurring query of what might be said to comprise or represent this new revitalized idea of *Bildung*. (MCWILLIAMS, 2009, p. 29).

In "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision" Adrienne Rich had already argued that

"Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival." [...] "writing as revision" serves as an appropriate part of departure for looking at possible strategies for reclaiming female literary history. This has involved rediscovering or addressing writers of every period in literary history who have been lost, ignored or deliberately excluded in the process of canon formation. The process of excavating new meaning and creating a new female context for studying literary history is vital not just

to the politics of feminism but to any attempt to categorize woman-centred literature. (RICH, 1979, p. 35).

Furthermore, by challenging the status of representational forms, the appropriation of voice and its subversion brings new possibilities to represent reality. One of the postmodern narrative characteristics which is also used by contemporary women writers in their works is the blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction. It is a strategy mostly used in fictional works as well as non-fictional ones. The blurring of boundaries helps writers to change their readers' focus on reality by shifting their attention to the tricks of literary representation. Even in non-fictional narratives, a writer may use this blend to lead his/her readers to be suspicious of what they have been reading given that memory fails because of its loops as well as its voluntary or careless forgetfulness. Moreover, by blurring the boundaries between genres, writers manage to throw some doubt on what their readers acknowledge as factual truth. Consequently, cultural dominants may also be subtly deconstructed when fictional accounts of reality and non-fictional ones swap places and make history and fiction merge in representation. Concerning this blurring of boundaries, Linda Hutcheon explains:

In challenging the seamless quality of the history/fiction (or world/art) join implied by realist narrative, postmodern fiction does not, however, disconnect itself from history or the world. It foregrounds and thus contests the conventionality and unacknowledged ideology of that assumption of seamlessness and asks its readers to question the processes by which we represent ourselves and our world to ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we make sense of and construct order out of experience in our particular culture. (HUTCHEON, 1991, p. 53-54).

However, the past is a time as much difficult to be deciphered as the future. Individuals have their unhistorical past intertwined with a historical past which is somehow shared by everyone. As individuals recollect and share a determined historical past they also retain its meaning in present time. Another important point is to question to what extent such historical past interferes with an individual's particular actions and life. To what extent has the historical past an individual knows of contributed to define the person he/she is in the present moment? Such questions do not aim at obtaining a precise answer. Actually, they instigate critical thinking about granting meaning to past experiences. To interrogate how one has come to know a specific historical fact leads one to call into question the very meaning of such fact and acknowledge how it has affected his/ her present time. Scholar Annette Kuhn states:

The past is gone forever. We cannot return to it, nor can we reclaim it now as it was. But that does not mean it is lost to us. The past is like the scene of a crime: if the deed itself is unrecoverable, its traces may still remain. From these traces, markers that point towards a past presence, to something that has happened in this place, a (re)construction, if not a simulacrum, of the event can be pieced together. Memory work has a great deal in common with forms of inquiry which – like detective work and archaeology, say – involve working backwards – searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deductions, patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence. (KUHN, 2007, p. 232).

On the one hand, it might seem rather difficult to look back into the past and try to find precise answers that would explain how present time ended up being a particular present. On the other hand, postmodern readers might realize that the solution to better understand their present cultural dominants does not consist of scoring the right answers, but it surely consists of making the right questions. However, when one poses intriguing questions about one's historical past, it is better to give serious consideration to answering them even though some of the queries might not be answered at all. Besides, discourse and language may suffer historical sedimentation and one of the ways to challenge their arbitrary stability is to deconstruct such certainties by alluding to the elusive quality of meaning. Another point to be considered is that a certain deferral in time is necessary when one intends to divine a difference given that the written word defers in meaning. In an online interview, Jacques Derrida argues:

You can't control everything because once a certain work, or a certain sentence, or a certain set of discourses are published, when the trace is traced, it goes beyond your reach, beyond your control, and in a different context, it can be exploited, displaced, used beyond what you meant. (DERRIDA, online).⁵

Hence, language is susceptible to deconstruction and re-signification and every time one attempts to stabilize fixed meanings, he/she realizes that such meanings will eventually be dialectically interpreted and consequently subverted. In this sense, one's historical, cultural and literary discourse is always susceptible to being appropriated and subverted. Accordingly, binary oppositions are also unverifiable given that they lead to arbitrary assumptions and

⁵ Available at: www.johnljerz.com/superduper/.../id1328.html Accessed on: 28/01/2014.

establish dichotomies which do not allow different perceptions to exist. Conversely, the notion of difference destabilizes the very center of closed systems of signification creating new spaces for multiplicity to take place. For women writers, one way to assert the specificities of their writing has been through their literary interaction with dominant traditions. Thus, the practice of repeating with difference, that is, of installing a dominant discourse in order to subvert it has been one way women writers have chosen to re-write different perspectives of the female self changing the course of their personal and literary history to unpredictable unfoldings.

2 PLURAL REALITIES IN *LIVES of GIRLS and WOMEN*

She shifted the can to her other hand and directed him; and, as she held out her reeking withered right hand under its fringe of shawl, he bent lower towards her, saddened and soothed by her voice.

‘Thank you’.

James Joyce

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Alice Munro shows through Del Jordan, the protagonist narrator, the way in which texts may be imagined and how experiences can be changed into representations of reality. Although the narrative is told through the point of view of Del Jordan, a multiplicity of voices and perspectives reveals several possibilities of interpretation and meaning, showing different layers of reality, which on the one hand may be rather plain and almost tangible, but on the other hand may be unconventional and unfathomable. Accordingly, the title of the novel itself implies that the accounts given by Del Jordan reveal several facets of lives of girls and women, showing multilayered perceptions of reality, which lead readers to acknowledge multiple meanings as well. Thus, this chapter focuses on Alice Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women* and it aims at investigating how Munro legitimates challenging ways of writing about women’s experiences, the complexities of their subjectivities as well as the indeterminacies and unsettling characteristics in the writing of a female *Künstlerroman*.

It is important to point out that even when connections are made between memory, experience and imagination, there are gaps and mysteries which remain secret and are meant to be so because meaning also has a certain elusive quality due to the unsteady relation between language and experience. It is with this multiplicity of perspectives that Alice Munro builds up the narrative structure of *Lives of Girls and Women* as Coral Ann Howells states in *Alice Munro: Contemporary World Writers*, “Told from Del’s point of view, the stories make connections between different perceptions of reality, slipping from every day ordinariness into imagined worlds and the hidden topography of fantasy” (HOWELLS, 2007, p. 31). It is this ordinariness of daily life in a small fictional town named Jubilee, in the province of Ontario, which the narrator Del Jordan writes about. Del peers into the interstices of Jubilee’s prosaic reality and links them with her imagination to start writing her fiction. By dealing

with peripheral characters from *The Flats Road*, which is on the outskirts of town, Del Jordan surprises her readers when they come across disparate perceptions of reality. Thus, the narrative shifts from familiar ordinariness into unexpected strangeness, which is a relevant characteristic of the way Alice Munro has Del Jordan write her autobiography. Critic Coral Ann Howells observes:

Both realism and fantasy are revealed as narrative conventions for translating reality into words [...]. In Del's storytelling method both kinds of discourse are present. Indeed they are interchangeable, so that the familiar and the unfamiliar are both contained within the same narrative structure. In *Lives of Girls and Women* everything is in the plural for the stories enclose disparate and often contradictory views within the same fictional space [...] (HOWELLS, 1998, p. 32).

Therefore, it is a *Künstlerroman* written by a female writer who is more concerned about revealing possible truths rather than presenting a precise depiction of reality. Besides, one cannot forget that reality is a construct which needs to be interpreted with some distance and deferral in time so that one's understanding of an experience can be better expressed when it is translated into language. Similarly, deferral of meaning is a postmodern strategic way to question what reality means and how one may come to know it, which is something that also brings about challenging questions on the art of representation. Because language is ambiguous, a text can conceal and also reveal destabilizing sources of meaning, which somehow may lead readers to esthetically experience a sense of strangeness as well as incompleteness. As a result, there is a growing awareness of the limits on the politics of representation suggesting that language deconstructs reality when it aims to portray it. Consequently, readers may acknowledge their own acceptance of a disturbing uncertainty that pervades postmodern narratives. In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon argues:

The postmodern, as I have been defining it, is not a degeneration into 'hyperreality' but a questioning of what reality can mean and how we can come to know it. It is not that representation now dominates or effaces the referent, but rather that it now self-consciously acknowledges its existence as representation — that is, as interpreting (indeed as creating) its referent, not as offering direct and immediate access to it. (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 34).

Bearing in mind that representation needs interpreting, Alice Munro manages to appropriate and to subvert a canonic genre created by male writers, the *Bildungsroman*, by

having a woman-protagonist become the author of “herstory”, hence a female *Künstlerroman*. Therefore, the male *Künstlerroman* as, for example, James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, cannot be truly considered a representational model by women writers given that it applies only to male experiences described by a male protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, whose discourse is characterized by individuality and self-absorption. Thus, by means of keeping the traditional *Künstlerroman* framework and changing its contents, in other words, by means of repeating with difference, women writers have recreated themselves in their own literary space. Besides, it is quite a different matter to have one’s history be written about and to have an individual write his/her own version of a fact when gender is the question. Because women’s writing experience is historically different from that of men’s, when it concerns gender, writing and reading are differently produced and experienced. It is clear that appropriation and subversion become a strategic way for postmodern women writers to produce a writing of their own, a different one, which is plural, as Linda Hutcheon explains in *Feminism and Postmodernism*, “Difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, not the binary opposition and exclusion suggested by the idea of otherness.” (HUTCHEON, 1989, p. 32).

It is this sort of difference that Alice Munro talks about when she posits a language of the female body as a strategy to allow other female subjectivities to take place rather than any homogenizing influences of traditional representations of otherness which establish binary systems that endorse fixed stereotypes. Furthermore, In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Alice Munro shows through her peripheral characters that their being different and off-center is exactly what expresses a new ethos which allows subjectivities and identities to be fragmented and multiple. Accordingly, Munro’s writing is also idiosyncratic. The author links the stories in the novel in a peculiar way which offers readers two reading possibilities. Readers can read the book linearly as an episodic novel following the chapters in the sequence they are presented, or they can have a more fragmented form of reading given that the chapters are composed of self-contained episodes, which is something that allows for the reading of the book as a collection of short stories. In addition, by blurring the boundaries between the two genres, Munro also alludes to the discontinuities and fragmentations which characterize going through an experience, remembering it and writing about it. Concerning the form chosen by Munro, professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, Neil K. Besner, suggests that

To indulge in speculation for a moment, this turn to the short story form and to related forms like the novella, the book of linked stories, and the novel that is composed of seemingly self-contained episodes may be a sign of a related perceptual shift — or, to borrow another overused term from the social sciences, a paradigm shift—reflected in Canadian writing as well as in writing from other cultures and languages. Perhaps many contemporary writers are finding that these less monolithically unified, more fragmented forms, traditionally more sharply focused on the significance of intense but isolated moments, of sudden but fleeting insights, or on the half-promise of vital revelations, might be forms better suited than the novel to reflect the radical discontinuities of our contemporary experience. (BESNER, 1990, p.19).

Although the chapters can be read as independent short stories, the current argumentation aims to deal with *Lives of Girls and Women* taking into consideration the novel form given that it investigates the protagonist's growth and change until the moment she becomes a writer. For this reason, a more linear sort of reading seems to be more appropriate even though the events described in the narrative do not follow a precise chronological order due to the shifting perspectives in the protagonist's narrating voice, which is a relevant detail in the way Munro unfolds the story. On the discussion of *Lives of Girls and Women* as a Künstlerroman, critic Ailsa Cox points out that early in her literary career, Alice Munro "traces her own literary career" and that in *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro "declares her artistic manifesto" (COX, 2004, p. 9) Cox also argues that "our consciousness of ourselves is generated largely through our relationship with others" and claims that "In *Lives of Girls and Women*, re-imagining other lives emerges as the artist's task, undertaken in the knowledge that 'real life' will always escape definition" (p.18).

Before the investigation of the novel develops, it is important to know a little about Alice Munro's life and career. Alice Munro was born Alice Ann Laidlaw on July 10, 1931, in Wingham, Ontario, Canada. She started writing in her teens. She attended the University of Western Ontario, where she studied journalism and English, but left the school before she graduated and married her first husband James Munro in 1951. The couple moved to Victoria, Vancouver, British Columbia, where they opened a bookstore. While Alice Munro raised her three daughters and helped her husband with the business, she began her writing career having short stories published in magazines.

In 1968, Alice Munro first collection of short-stories entitled *Dance of the Happy Shades* was published and it achieved a great success in Canada, including Munro's first Governor General's Award for fiction. In 1971, she published *Lives of Girls and Women*

which won the Canadian Booksellers Award. In 1974, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* was published. Then, in 1976, Alice Munro divorced and returned to southwestern Ontario with her second husband, Gerald Fremlin. Since then, Alice Munro has published several collections of short stories including *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978); *The Beggar Maid* (1978); *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982); *The Progress of Love* (1986); *Friend of my Youth* (1990); *Open Secrets* (1994); *The Love of a Good Woman*, which was published in 1998 and won the Giller Prize. *Queenie a Story* (1999); *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* (2001); *Runaway* (2004); and *The View from Castle Rock* (2006).

Alice Munro's *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage* was adapted into a film named *Away From Her*, which was directed by Sarah Polley and released in 2006. Alice Munro has also written a number of television scripts. Munro received the second Governor General's Award in 1998, for *The Progress of Love*. In 2009, Munro won the Man Booker International Prize and in the same year she published the short-story collection *Too Much Happiness*. In 2012 she published *Dear Life* and in 2013, Alice Munro was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for her body of work, with the Swedish Academy lauding her as "the master of the contemporary short-story. The biographical information included in the previous paragraphs can be found online.⁶

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, the first chapter entitled "The Flats Road" opens with the description of the Wawanash River, a place the narrator enjoys as a child. Hence, the point of view evokes the vocabulary and perspective of a young storyteller. The first paragraph presents adjectives like "muddy", "marshy" and "juicy" which appeal to the sensory ways children experience the world which surrounds them. It is important to point out that Del's description of the river and the bucolic landscape of the countryside is in consonance with the imagination of a naive child who shapes her dwelling place according to her lack of experience and limited understanding of it. As Uncle Benny, her neighbor, puts it, the Wawanash River is mysterious and risky for children who are Del's age:

He said there was quicksand hole in there that would take down a two-ton truck like a bite of breakfast. (In my mind I saw it shining, with a dry-liquid roll—I had it mixed up with quicksilver.) He said there were holes in the Wawanash River that were twenty feet deep in the middle of summer. He said he could take us to them but he never did.

He was prepared to take offense at a glimmer of doubt.

⁶ Available at: <http://www.biography.com/people/alice-munro-9418218> Accessed on 29/01/2014 and http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2013/bio-bibl.html Accessed on 29/01/2014.

“You fall into one of them, then you’ll believe me.”
(MUNRO, 2001, p. 4).

Although Uncle Benny tries to prevent Del Jordan and her brother, Owen, from getting into the river by telling them the river is his, the children do not listen to him. Del — with all her lack of experience — is a child who wants to touch and feel the landscape she sees, so she does not worry about Uncle Benny’s warning and steps into the water. Despite the fact that Del is still a child, she does not let an adult limit her experience by setting boundaries to her spatial relations with the vast geographic expanses which lie there in the open. She intuitively knows that the river cannot have divisions and does not want to be confined to its margins. However, Del understands what Uncle Benny means when he says the river belongs to him, so she does not argue with him. She somehow acknowledges that there is a sense of local knowledge in his words which is non-negotiable. Although Del claims she has never thought of that idea of time and rootedness, she has an insightful thought when she hears Uncle Benny’s words. For Del, the river belongs to everyone and its waters cannot be divided but shared, as she recalls:

Though he never turned around he knew if we put a foot in the water.
“You kids want to splash in the mud and scare off the fish you go and do it someplace else, get off of my riverbank.”
It was not his. Right here, where he usually fished, it was ours. But we never thought of that. To his way of thinking the river and the bush and the whole of Grenoch Swamp more or less belonged to him, because he knew them, better than anybody else did. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 4).

The ideas of rootedness and belonging are subtly discussed in the first chapter. Del locates the Flats Road as a world apart from that of the town of Jubilee and the idea of displacement is suggested. Actually, Alice Munro displaces the Flats Road when her narrator says that “The Flats Road was not part of town but it was not part of the country either. The curve of the river, and the Grenoch Swamp, cut it off from the rest of the township, to which it nominally belonged”. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 9). Strangely, the characters from the Flats Road seem to suffer a sort of influence from the environs they live in. They are outcasts whose geographic rootedness has been mapped off, consequently, they are excluded and their lives seem to succumb to a prosaic reality of plain daily existence. On the other hand, there is always a certain touch of peculiar strangeness in each character Del Jordan describes which makes readers realize that they are not as superficial as they seem to be. Actually, such superficiality lies only on the surface of the realistic depiction of the characters’ unpretentious

ordinariness, but what remains in between this descriptive language is the challenge of the untold but subtly implied; a certain psychological realism and the multi-dimensional layers of the characters' peculiarities. When Del Jordan writes about Uncle Benny's world, she speaks of this prosaic reality that is simultaneously dull and unusual:

So lying alongside our world was Uncle Benny's world like a troubling distorted reflection, the same but never at all the same. In that world people could go down in quicksand, be vanquished by ghosts or terrible ordinary cities; luck and wickedness were gigantic and unpredictable; nothing was deserved, anything might happen; defeats were met with crazy satisfaction. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 30-31).

Thus, Del Jordan refers to place in her narrative not only as a geographical point on a map, but also as a site in the imagination of the other characters showing what sort of relation they have with the environ they live in. Besides, the vastness of Canada's physical space defies any writing attempts to convey a Canadian national identity given that the tension between the regional and the national remains a complicated phenomenon that has puzzled the Canadian literary imagination. In *Margaret Atwood and The Female Bildungsroman*, Ellen McWilliams argues that "There is a clear tension between the drive towards a totalizing discourse of Canadian national identity and one more appreciative of the possibilities of thinking, [...] in the plural." (MCWILLIAMS, 2009, p. 51). It is important to emphasize that the idea of belonging derives from place, community and rootedness. According to Susanna Egan and Gabrielle Helms in *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, in Canada, the idea of belonging has had something more to do with its geographical landscapes and history of particular regions. The geographical features of the country have been of great importance in the division of Canadian regions contributing to the ways in which writers think of space and to the ways they relate themselves with it:

Ironically, belonging in Canada has had almost more to do with the land and the history of particular regions than with the relatively new and consistently unstable concept of Canada as a whole. The geographical features of place, from climate and economic opportunity, have obviously played a significant part in the division of Canada into distinctive regions, contributing to the ways in which writers conceive of space and thus to the ways in which they identify themselves in it. (EGAN; HELMS, 2004, p. 221).

Besides Uncle Benny, Del Jordan describes other characters whose lives are circumscribed by a certain sameness due to the ordinary circumstances of daily routine. They all live on the Flats Road, as for example Charlie Buckle whose store and its goods remind Del of the very edge of town, where civilization ends. Among Del's neighbors, she mentions Mitch Plim and the sheep raisers who are also bootleggers that sometimes get violent because of their drunkenness. There is also Sandy Stevenson, who marries a woman and has a nervous breakdown due to the annoying disturbance of a supposedly jealous ghostly husband who wants his widow, Stevenson's wife, to remain a widow for good. It is important to point out that Del weaves her narrative with the other characters' stories in order to not only enliven the text but also to add a touch of local color to it. As a result, the verisimilitude of the text is built up. Accordingly, the narrator makes a point of telling her readers about each dweller on the Flats Road even though some of the characters' stories remain intriguingly mysterious and unfinished. In addition, some of the characters in this chapter are introduced in so brief a paragraph that readers are led to think the narrator is wrestling with her memories in order to put them onto paper. Similarly, when Del Jordan speaks of the idiot Frankie Hall and of Irene Pollox, she associates them with a rhyme she does not figure how she has come to know:

So her house too was a dangerous one to pass, and there
was a rhyme to say, that everybody knew:

Irene don't come after me
Or I'll hang you by your tits in a
crab-apple tree.

I said it when I went past with my mother, but knew
enough to change *tits* to *heels*. Where had that rhyme come
from? Even Uncle Benny said it. Irene was white-haired,
not from age but because she was born that way, and her
skin also was white as goosefeathers. (MUNRO, 2001, p.
10).

In addition to introducing The Flats Road and its peculiar dwellers in the first chapter, Del Jordan talks about her parents, her brother and the family dog, Major. However, apart from Del's family, Uncle Benny, who works for Del's father, is the character who somehow contributes to Del Jordan's writing development by telling her and her family unusual stories like the spooky one about Sandy Stevenson, the widow and her deceased husband. Moreover, Del's first contact with the grotesque is made by her reading Uncle Benny's newspapers. The unimaginable and inconceivable newspaper headlines are an enticing invitation to a world of letters that is radically different from the one Del's parents read in the city newspaper in which most frequent news is about World War II and the local political events of Jubilee. As Del reads Uncle Benny's newspaper, she has her first esthetic experiences with the grotesque

and its absurdities, and, as a result, her imaginary world is gradually shaped by her sensible evaluation of what might or might not be real. Thus, Del's sense of reality begins to develop when she starts questioning the validity of whatever piece of news she comes across as she either gets rid of what sounds like nonsense or she reasonably reorganizes what sounds like absurd possibilities:

I would sit and read on the edge of the sagging porch, my feet brushing Sweet William that Uncle Benny's mother must have planted. Finally Uncle Benny would say, "you are welcome to take those papers home if you want to. I'm all done reading them."

I knew better than to do that. I read faster and faster, all I could hold, then reeled out into the sun onto the path that led to our place, across the fields. I was bloated and giddy with revelations of evil, of its versatility and grand invention and horrific playfulness. But the nearer I got to our house the more this vision faded. Why was it that the plain back wall of home, [...] should make it seem doubtful that a woman would really send her husband's torso, wrapped in Christmas paper, by mail to his girlfriend in South Carolina? (MUNRO, 2001, p. 8).

Not only does Uncle Benny tease Del's imagination by offering her some sort of unusual reading, but he also challenges her by asking if she knows how to write in order to reply to an advertisement for a husband in the newspaper. Del is willing to help Uncle Benny with a reply and she also shows concern with the form of the letter and its opening salutation given that she wants to know the addressee's name, which is left out in the advertisement. Actually, what Del wants to show Uncle Benny is that she is intelligent enough to face the challenge of writing. So, when he says that he just wants to see how she can do any sort of writing before she gets down to business, Del precisely writes down Uncle Benny's name in full followed by his address. Because Del meticulously informs Uncle Benny's address, he defies her and speculates where his living place may be located in relation to "Heaven". Surprisingly, Del's tenacious will to survive the task shows that the birth and development of the artist and the development of a talented writer have already begun. This passage also suggests Alice Munro's parody of some lines from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in which Stephen Dedalus writes his name, hometown, country, continent, in a spiraling word web. Del Jordan writes:

Mr. Benjamin Thomas Poole, The Flats Road, Jubilee, Wawanash County, Ontario, Canada, North America, The Western Hemisphere, The World, The Solar System, The Universe. He read over my shoulder and said sharply, "Where is that in relation to heaven? You haven't got far

enough. Isn't Heaven outside of the universe?" (MUNRO, 2001, p.14. *Italics in the original*).

Del Jordan helps Uncle Benny with the letter writing and she also dedicates some paragraphs in her narrative to fictionalize the episode of his dicey union to a mad woman named Madeleine. Actually, what happens is that Madeleine's family is trying to get rid of this mad relative and of her illegitimate little baby, as Del Jordan's father says, "It looks to me as if the brother is pretty willing to get rid of her." (MUNRO, 2001, p. 17). However, Del Jordan finds enough motivation in this mad woman's strangeness, so she creates a character and writes her bizarre and gothic story. According to Del's story, Madeleine and Uncle Benny are trapped in a wedding ceremony which frames their future hopes. Nevertheless, what Uncle Benny does not imagine is that his wife may not fulfill his hopes. Although Uncle Benny decides to take care of Madeleine and of her little baby, Daiane, he fails to do so because Madeleine is completely untamed and she unexpectedly flees with her baby Diane as well as with some pieces of furniture. Madeleine disappears without leaving a trace. Although she later writes Uncle Benny a letter asking him to pack Diane's blanket and send it to her new address, Uncle Benny cannot track her down. Del finishes her first chapter with the unfinished story about Madeleine, who, having escaped before being labeled mad, must be standing somewhere struggling to be a free woman:

Uncle Benny could have made up the beatings, my mother said at last, and took that comfort; how was he to be trusted? Madeleine herself was like something he might have made up. We remembered her like a story, and having nothing else to give we gave her our strange, belated, heartless applause.
 "Madeleine! That madwoman!" (MUNRO, 2001, p. 32).

Del Jordan unfolds the second chapter, "Heirs of the Living Body", with lots of stories about her relatives Uncle Craig and her aunts Grace, Elspeth, Moira and Helen as well as those about her cousin Mary Agnes. It is important to highlight that the stories are all fragments of Del's recollections, so they are not chronologically narrated given that memory tries somehow to arrange logically what time has persistently disorganized into confusing layers of past. Moreover, Del's accounts of her past, which overlaps with other people's pasts, are marked by the intricacies of her subjectivity in relation to the other characters' inner selves. Besides, Del's narrating voice evokes a child's memories but it also shifts to a more mature voice evoking the memories of an older narrator. However, what really matters is that

Del's experiences are enriched by her insightful perceptions of other people's realities. Accordingly, when Del Jordan speaks of her aunts and uncle, she explains how their coexistence at home has been clearly defined by gender lines, which have been stretched over the household chores since Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace were little children. Del describes her aunts' attitude towards these gender lines from the perspective of an adult who knows how to transform, with a little bit of irony, the divergent memories of a child into perspicacious readings of a grown-up:

They respected men's work beyond anything; they also laughed at it. This was strange; they could believe absolutely in its importance and at the same time convey their judgment that it was, from one point of view, frivolous, nonessential. And would never, never meddle with it; between men's work and women's work was the clearest line drawn, and any stepping over this line, any suggestion of stepping over it, they would meet with such light, amazed, regretfully superior laughter. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 38).

Another relevant point is that the aunts, Elspeth and Grace, are enthusiastic storytellers and they share amusing moments with Del when they tell her about the tricks they used to play on Uncle Craig when all of them were children. Thus, Del's aunts give her inspiring examples of the storytelling craft. Besides the aunts, Uncle Craig also provides Del with his example of a historical manuscript he has written, even though Del does not consider it as a good example of how to start writing. When Uncle Craig dies, Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace give Del the manuscript and plead with her to keep on writing it. However, Del Jordan understands that she has her own ways, which are rather different from Uncle Craig's, and she does not want to be assigned such task. At this point, her understanding of the writing craft is considerably meaningful given that she ponders on the primary role of a writer as she says, "They were talking to somebody who believed that the only duty of a writer is to produce a masterpiece." (MUNRO, 2001, p. 70). Although Del Jordan recognizes that Uncle Craig has put a lot of effort on his work in order to document the history of the Wawanash County and its people, she does not keep the manuscript in the same place where she stashes her writings away and she explains why she does so:

I didn't want Uncle Craig's manuscript put back with the things I had written. It seemed so dead to me, so heavy and though and useless, that I thought it might deaden my things too and bring me bad luck. I took it down to the cellar and left it in a cardboard box. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 70).

Del Jordan realizes how different she wants her writings to be, so it is difference rather than sameness which motivates Del to write. Therefore, Del's perceptions of reality are constantly changing because she considers other people's apprehensions of reality and learns with them, so it is by this awareness of otherness that she makes her difference. Accordingly, in this same chapter, Del describes the various ways she experiences and deals with death. As an example, when Del and Mary Agnes, her cousin, go for a walk along the riverbank, they see a dead cow lying in the water, which attracts Del's attention. As soon as Del sees the cow, she feels an urge to poke its eye just to satisfy her curiosity as she wonders what mysteries death might conceal. Nevertheless, Del Jordan is a resourceful observer and she knows that death is an unresolved mystery, so she transforms this emptiness into a meaningful experience by getting a stick and imagining that the cow's hide is a map with continents. The map she draws helps her deconstruct the threatening presence of death and imagine the mapping of a new topography for her subjectivity. However, Del Jordan does not have the same reaction when her mother demands that she attend Uncle Craig's funeral. In spite of the fact that Del writes about it outstandingly, Uncle Craig's funeral is a harrowing and bizarre episode for young Del, who does not want to see her uncle's motionless body within a coffin. She eventually remembers Mary Agnes spiteful suggestion:

“You come and—*see*—Uncle Craig.”

I dropped my head and got her arm in my open mouth, I got her solid downy arm just below the elbow, and I bit and bit and broke the skin and in pure freedom thinking I had done the worst thing that I would ever do, I tasted Mary Agnes Oliphant's blood. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 62).

In “Princess Ida”, the chapter which follows “Heirs of the Living Body”, Del reports on her mother's life accounts and creates her own version of a character formerly created by Lord Alfred Tennyson in his long poem, *The Princess*. Since Tennyson's poem deals with the need for women's education, “Princess Ida” seems a very appropriate title for a chapter in which readers learn that Addie Morrison, Del's mother, ran away from home because Del's grandfather did not want his daughter to go to high school. After Addie had left home, she went to a boarding house where she worked as a maid in the kitchen so that she could afford her studies. Del adds that Addie had to clean chamber pots to get her education as she reports her mother's words, “I have cleaned chamber pots to get my education!” (MUNRO, 2001, p. 88). Consequently, some of Addie's stories, which Del Jordan reports, bring her a twinge of disappointment and embarrassment, as for instance, when Del takes part in her mother's

business trips to sell encyclopedias around nearby towns. Del narrates it with a little bitterness as she remembers her mother telling her to recite lists of American presidents in chronological order in order to have a positive effect on the clients and persuade them to buy. On the other hand, Del also has soothing feelings when she considers those trips of knowledge and freedom a kind of zany on-the-road joint venture business:

Approaching dark, cold air coming up through a hole in the floor of the car, the tired noise of the engine, the indifference of the countryside, would reconcile us to each other and make us long for home. We drove through country we did not know we loved—not rolling or flat, but broken, no recognizable rhythm to it; low hills, hollows full of brush, swamp and bush and fields. Tall elm trees, separate, each plainly showing its shape, doomed but we did not know that either. They were shaped like slightly opened fans, sometimes like harps. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 77).

It is worth mentioning that Del Jordan reshapes her mother's past so that she can have a better understanding of whom Addie Morrison is. Besides, Del vicariously assesses her mother's experiences so that she can boldly go through her own individuation process and commence her quest for selfhood. As Del recollects her mother's stories, she either identifies with Addie or she takes distance from her. So, on the one hand Del quotes Lord Alfred Tennyson and calls her mother Princess Ida after a character Addie admires to pay homage to both of them. On the other hand, the implicit irony suggested by the word "princess" shows a clever choice provided that the narrator selects it because the heroic Ida prefers studying to getting married, but ends up accepting her fate and giving up any resistance. Similarly, when Del talks about Addie's chances and choices she points out that her mother's self "[...] might at times appear blurred a bit, or sidetracked, she kept her younger selves strenuous and hopeful [...]" (MUNRO, 2001, p. 83). Accordingly, Del Jordan identifies herself with some of her mother's revelations, but she also rejects a few others because she cannot recognize herself in them. As professor Neil K. Besner states "[...] this process reflects the tensions we might expect between a mother and daughter who will eventually find themselves at odds over what constitutes a girl's or a woman's identity, vision, and story." (BESNER, 1990, p. 52). By experiencing her mother's revelations and changes, Del learns about herself. Concerning experience, the Scottish psychiatrist Dr. R. D. Laing argues:

I cannot avoid trying to understand your experience, because although I do not experience your experience, which is invisible to me (and non-tasteable, non-touchable, non-smellable, and inaudible), yet I experience you *as*

experiencing. I do not experience your experience. But I experience you as experiencing. I experience myself as experienced by you. And I experience you as experiencing yourself as experienced by me. And so on. (LAING, 1975, p. 16).

In addition to the psychological dimensions of experience emphasized by Dr. Laing, another important point that has to be taken into consideration is that writing is essential to the construction of a woman's selfhood since the autobiographical self is constructed through a process of self creation which cannot exclude the interdependent existence of other selves. Because of the diversity of women's experiences as well as their several interwoven layers of meaning to be considered, heterogeneity and fragmentation become relevant aspects that shape one's identity. Similarly, Del not only learns how to deal with collective experiences, but she also improves her ability to translate fragmentation into autobiographical storytelling. Del Jordan realizes that the autobiographical self cannot be an individualistic expression of a sole subject since the shaping of one's identity is intrinsically linked with difference from other fragmented identities. Besides, the development of one's self is formed through its interaction with others and a continuous shifting from identification to difference, which is a process that requires the presence of the other as a frame of reference. This coexistence shows that it is impossible to conceive an autobiography as the expression of isolate selfhood as Susan Stanford Friedman argues in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*:

Autobiography is possible when "the individual does not feel *herself* to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community...[where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being." (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p. 74-75).

Moving forward to the fourth chapter, entitled "Age of Faith", readers get to know how Del experiences God. She starts the chapter describing Jubilee's churches as well as their religious rituals. She speaks of the United Church masses she attends in the company of her neighbor Fern Dogherty. Although Del Jordan has already discussed the issue of faith in previous chapters by revealing what her mother thinks of God, Del wants to focus on her insights and inquiries concerning religion and faith. She opens the chapter evoking her past and the house she used to live on the Flats Road with the whole family given that she has thought of such ontological questions since her childhood. Del and her mother have been living in town for some time now. Del recalls her past on the Flats Road because she also

wants to focus on the development of her ontological hesitations. She not only reveals her thoughts about God and mortality but she also shows how she has learned to adapt herself to the disillusionment of what can only be philosophical speculation. Consequently, Del addresses the issue of faith in a humorous and ironic way when she refers to her mother's agnostic belief saying that "She believed in burglars." (MUNRO, 2001, p. 102). As a result, readers may infer that Del Jordan alludes to her grandmother's religious fanaticism, which is reported in "Princess Ida":

"Do you know what she did? I told you what she did? I told about the money?" She draws a breath to steady herself. "Yes. Well. She inherited some money. Some of her people had money, they lived in New York State. She came into two hundred and fifty dollars, not a lot of money, but more than then now and you know we were poor. This is *nothing* to how we were poor. The oilcloth on our table, I remember it, it was worn through so you could see the bare boards. It was hanging in shreds. [...]"

"Well. My mother took her money and she ordered a great box of Bibles. They came by express. They were the most expensive kind, maps of the Holy Land gilt-edged pages and the words of Christ were all marked in red. *Blessed are the poor in spirit*. What is so remarkable about being poor in spirit? She spent every cent. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 85).

Del Jordan explains that she first decided to go to the United Church with Fern Dogherty just to bother her mother. However, Del acknowledges that she wants to visit other churches too because she is in search of God. As a result, when Del hears the Anglican church bells, she is driven by her curiosity and she starts attending the church services secretly. Nevertheless, Del does not get the answers to her ontological speculations and she acknowledges that she will not find them in church masses. What Del concludes is that she is left with more puzzling questions than definite answers, and, as a result, she tries to find a balance between her attempt to adhere to the abstract existence of God, which is only possible through faith, and her paradoxical disbelief. When Del synthesizes her inevitable disappointment in God, she becomes more understanding towards her mother's atheism. Del concludes this chapter narrating the episode involving the family dog, Major, which kills a lamb. As a result, Uncle Benny and Del's father decide to shoot Major because they cannot afford to keep a sheep killer in their yard. When Owen becomes aware of his father's decision, he desperately asks Del Jordan to teach him how to pray. At this point, Del acknowledges that she has given up on faith and God:

"How do you do it?" said Owen stubbornly. Do you have to get down on your knees?"

"It doesn't matter."

But he had already knelt down, and clenched his hands at his sides. Then not bowing his head he screwed up his face with strong effort.

“Get up, Owen!” I said roughly. “It’s not going to do any good. It won’t work, it doesn’t work, Owen get up, be a good boy, darling.”

He swiped at me with his clenched fists, not taking time out to open his eyes. [...] Seeing somebody have faith, close up, is no easier than seeing someone chop a finger off. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 128).

In the following chapter, “Changes and Ceremonies”, Del Jordan speaks of hatred, friendship, love and sexuality. It is also in this chapter that we learn of Del Jordan’s insights into the nature of the connection between her life and her art, into the relation between literal and literary experiences. She remembers her school experiences as a young girl, her learning with Miss Farris, her school teacher, and the friendship with Naomi. Del opens the first paragraph digressing about the kind of hatred boys feel as well as comparing it to girls’ hatred. Del states that boys’ curiosity — especially their sexual curiosity — and hatred are dangerously aggressive like King Arthur’s sword. Thus, Del associates boys’ feelings with their sexuality when she chooses a phallic symbol to represent them. At this point in the narrative, Del’s sexuality is blossoming and she gets more and more curious about it. Actually, she is very much interested in the opposite sex, in the way boys express themselves, in what they think about and say about girls and in how they express their sexuality. For Del Jordan, boys are quite aggressive when they use nasty words to name the girls’ sexual organs, and to laugh derisively at them. Thus, Del realizes how gender roles frame female and male behavior and as a result define sexist stereotypes which imprison women’s identity. However, Del struggles towards her freedom and she will not allow her identity and sexuality to be locked in fixed stereotypes. As an example, Del and her friend Naomi do not feel intimidated when some boys provoke them. The girls reply with a spirited expostulation:

They would say softly, “Hello hooers.”

They would say, “Hey, where’s your fuckhole?” In tones of cheerful disgust.

The things they said stripped away freedom to be what you wanted, reduced you to what it was they saw, and that plainly, was enough to make them gag. My friend Naomi and I told each other, “Don’t let on you heard,” since you were too proud to cross streets to avoid them. Sometimes we would yell back, “Go and wash out your mouth in the cow trough, clean water’s too good for you!” (MUNRO, 2001, p. 129).

Del Jordan does not want to be stripped of her right to be as free as boys are and she does not allow this to happen. It is worth mentioning that Del feels free in the library town

where she can get to know about so many different worlds. Thus, when she and Naomi go to the library together, Del hands Naomi, Sigrid Undset's novel, *Kristin Lavransdatter*, whose main theme is motherhood and sexuality. Accordingly, as the narrator of a *Künstlerroman*, Del weaves her narrative with other works of fiction by quoting passages from them, showing that literary texts are "built from systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature." (ALLEN, 2000, p.1). It also shows that Del has been reading the world around her and acquiring knowledge, which she eventually shares with her friend Naomi. However, it is not only books that Del relies on for knowledge and freedom. There is also the school operetta which Miss Farris directs and produces. Del enjoys the operettas and she lets her reality be blurred with art so that she can enjoy her experiences with other classmates from a new perspective. Moreover, it is on stage that Del freely experiences hidden emotions, as a result, after the operetta ends, she says to Naomi that she fell in love with Frank Wales. Nevertheless, Del understands that the world of art and its operettas cannot become her only reality. She knows her life and the world of art have different organizing principles and even if they are worlds that may interpenetrate, they belong to orders of reality. Del does not make Miss Farris' mistake of allowing theatrical performances to order her life, as professor Neil K. Besner points out:

It is only within the exalted, theatrical confines of the operetta, in its enclosed structure and space, with its well-formed story, with laws and procedures, manners and morals all regulated, all directed and supervised, all orchestrated so that there is no mystifying gap between appearance and reality, that Del can safely fall in love with Frank Wales. [...] Del will not make the fatal mistake that Miss Farris does, of being forced to believe wholly only in one of them, and to live as if it were the laws of the world of the operettas that would order her life. (BESNER, 1990, p. 74-75).

Besides the operettas, Del Jordan is also interested in sharing information about the mysteries of boys' and girls' sexuality with Naomi, though it is in the next chapter, "Lives of Girls and Women" that Del's quest for sexual knowledge and experience is more clearly discussed. Del's curiosity about sexuality goes beyond the books she reads either in the library or in Naomi's house. Actually, the girls find out a book about the very same issue in Naomi's mother's chest. They not only read about the phallus but they also joke with the description they have. Consequently, Del and Naomi feel closer to each other given that they both have a common object of study which teases their curiosity and reminds them of its ubiquitous presence in their imagination. Although Del Jordan does not openly discuss the

subject with her mother, Del writes about her sexual experiences eloquently well. It is important to highlight that women writers who wrote about their sexuality in the nineteenth century were labeled immoral and had their writing overlooked by their critics. In spite of that, contemporary women writers began to change this strict cultural moral in order to unleash their body from cultural norms that endorse gender biases. In *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith discusses the cultural meanings of narratives of the body:

[...] an aspect of life writing sometimes neglected by critics who assert misleadingly that the body did not figure in life writing in the West until relevantly recently. For instance, respectable middle-class women up through the nineteenth century could not, and would not, tell explicitly sexual stories about their bodies because the cultural meanings assigned to those bodies had to do with myths of the corrupt nature of female sexuality. To speak sex was to shame and pollute oneself. (SMITH, 2010, p. 51).

Thus, when Addie is around, Del Jordan avoids talking about sex or she speaks figuratively about it with Naomi. For Addie, her daughter will naturally follow the course of nature and go with the flow as she anticipates that Del will have children. Although Addie says that Del will want to have children, she also quotes Tennyson to explain to Del that women get entrapped by men when they marry and have babies. In spite of the fact that Addie talks to her daughter about a possible upheaval in the lives of girls and women that will shatter any illusions about husbands and marriage probably nurtured by Del, she finishes her speech about Del's future foretelling that she will have her children anyway. Contrary to what her mother expects, Addie's speech sounds pointless to Del, who reflects, "Her speaking of my children amazed me too, for I never meant to have any." (MUNRO, 2001, p. 158). Whereas Del takes a pragmatic attitude to improve her knowledge about sex by reading novels which represent sexual experiences, Addie cites classic novels to show she does not approve of Del's reading choices, as she states, "Next day they will be telling about how they go to the toilet, why do they leave that out? There isn't any of that in *Silas Marner*. There isn't in the classic writers." (MUNRO, 2001, p. 192). As Addie goes on talking reproachfully about the books Del reads, Del dialogically thinks about the reading she enjoys:

I read about rich and titled people who despised the very sort of people who in Jubilee were at the top of society—druggists, dentists, storekeepers. I learned names like Balenciaga, Schiaparelli. I knew about drinks. Whisky and soda. Gin and tonic. Cinzano, Benedictine, Grand Marnier. I knew the names of hotels, streets, restaurants, in London, Paris, Singapore. In these books people did go to bed together, they did it all the time, but the descriptions of

what they were up to there were not thorough, in spite of what my mother thought. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 192).

Although Del Jordan always tries to be well-informed by reading modern authors who write about sexuality, she cannot avoid being disillusioned when she has her first experience with male sexuality. Accordingly, Del meets Mr. Chamberlain, who sometimes visits Addie for a chat, at home. As a matter of fact, Mr. Chamberlain has already been a subject of discussion between Naomi and Del who have speculated about his secret relationship with Fern Dogherty, Addie's neighbor. Thus, Mr. Chamberlain's presence arouses Del's awareness of her erotic fantasies and she puts her mother's gown on and imagines feeling seduced by him. Although Del Jordan has fantasies with Mr. Chamberlain, she also realizes there is something odd about him that leads her to think he does not have all the features that characterize men for her. Paradoxically, Del does not avoid Mr. Chamberlain and she even makes her presence felt by asking him to let her drink from his glass. Moreover, Del sounds even more provocative when Addie reprimands her behavior and the girl daringly makes a bargain over tasting Mr. Chamberlain's drink by mimicking a seal. Del's performance also shows that she is just a girl who staggers from moments of adult pragmatism to moments of childish naivety. Therefore, Del does not conceal her curiosity about Mr. Chamberlain when she states that she wants to discover what his drink tastes like:

“All I want is to find out what it tastes like.”
 “Well I can't give you a drink for nothing. I don't see you doing any tricks for me. I don't see you sitting up and begging like a good doggie.”
 I can be a seal. Do you want to see me be a seal?”
 (MUNRO, 2001, p. 176).

When Del drinks from Mr. Chamberlain's glass, Naomi asks her about its taste and Del's response baffles her. Actually, when Del says that the drink tastes like piss she hints that she has never had such experience before. However, she does not explain to Naomi what her answer means. Del holds it back because she needs to keep her privacy since she has just shared it with Mr. Chamberlain's quick hand on her breast. The next time Mr. Chamberlain visits Addie, Del clearly shows that she wants to have a sexual contact by making it easier for him to do something, as she eventually describes it, “He went straight for the breasts, the buttocks, the upper thighs, brutal as lightning.” (MUNRO, 2001, p. 178). At this point in her narrative, Del clearly writes the narrative of her body as she asserts, “[...] my body flowering with invisible bruises in those places where it had been touched.” (MUNRO, 2001, p.181).

Thus, Del acknowledges that she does not want to have her sexuality oppressed or passively experienced. On the contrary, she wants her body to be “the subject of her desire” drawing Sabrina Francesconi’s words from her article in the *Journal of the Short Story in English*, which is available online.⁷ Nevertheless, Del cannot prevent Mr. Chamberlain from changing her into a passive observer when he masturbates in front of her. In spite of her disappointment, Del learns with the experience and concludes that her dreamlike fantasies will not thoroughly match the real thing. Professor Besner asserts that,

At this point in her narration, Del is becoming more aware of two related but divergent processes, which can be formulated as a paradox: the process of turning experiences into stories, either in anticipation or in retrospect, and the process through which her narration leads her to insights into her experience. [...] Mr. Chamberlain has helped her to perceive the transition from one set of poses and gestures to another, a transition she can then generalize from to frame her understanding of both her fantasy and the reality of sexual experience. (BESNER, 1990, p. 88).

“Baptizing”, the chapter which precedes the last one, describes Del Jordan’s crucial changes from late adolescence to initial adulthood. Accordingly, it shows how Del’s relationships with other characters have affected her journey of self-discovery. So, it is by going through crucial changes that Del has some understanding of her fragmented and distinctive identity. The chapter starts with the end of Del’s friendship with Naomi due to the different paths they take and which will define their future lives. Naomi moves away from any academic ambitions and becomes a working girl whose intentions—marriage, homemaking and babies—fit perfectly well the social realm of Jubilee. Conversely, Del’s search for glory leads her to explore more creative possibilities for women’s lives which are not circumscribed by Jubilee norms, as she asserts, “Well-groomed girls frightened me to death.”(MUNRO, 2001, p. 196). It is worth mentioning that Del rewinds the narrative in flashbacks that merge with her understanding of them. Accordingly, she describes the experiences she has been through with Naomi before they have split up, as for example, when Del and Naomi get drunk at the Gay-la Dance Hall and venture themselves into a hotel room with two boyfriends: Clive and Bert Matthews. Because Del has different plans for her future life, she does not enjoy staying long in the room. Although she can barely walk, due to her drunkenness, she climbs down the fire escape and leaves all the rest behind:

⁷ Available at: <http://jsse.revues.org./1115> Accessed on:29/01/2014

We were on the third, or top floor, of the hotel. I stepped outside, tripped and nearly fell over the railing, then recovered, bent down and with great difficulty removed my sandals, which I blamed for making me trip. I walked down the steps all the way. There was a drop of about six feet at the bottom. I threw my shoes down first, feeling clever to have thought of that, then sat on the bottom step, let myself down as far as I could and jumped, landing on hard dirt, in the alley between the hotel and the radio station. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 210- 211).

Del loses her friend Naomi to the most ordinary entrapments in women's lives in the 1950's: a traditional wedding ceremony and a lifelong experience in good housekeeping. Nevertheless, Del still has a friend from senior high, Jerry Storey, who has the same intellectual aspirations as hers, as for instance, they both intend to get an academic scholarship. Jerry is the cleverest student in class and Del does not fall behind. As a result, they talk about their academic pursuits and somehow compete against each other in some sort of fair play. Thus, as Jerry assumes the opposite sex is not intelligent enough to have abstract thoughts, Del cunningly concludes Jerry is not brilliant enough to understand language subtleties such as metaphor and polysemy. In spite of their intellectual competition, Jerry and Del enjoy each other's company and their friendship is not based on sex. However, they both attempt to explore scientifically each other's body, but their experience is not fulfilled because Jerry's mother unexpectedly arrives home and almost catches him literally with his trousers down. Jerry, in an impulse of self preservation, pushes Del into the cellar and throws her clothes down the chute after her. Del finds a safe escape through the window and zaps home. In spite of her embarrassment and frustration, Del Jordan proves to be a talented writer by changing the whole episode into an authentic comic scene:

I ran home barelegged through the cold streets. I was furious now, to think of myself naked on that bed. Nobody to look at me but Jerry, giggling and scared and talking dialect. That was who I had to take my offerings. I would never get a real lover.

The next day at school Jerry came up to me carrying a brown paper bag.

"I beg yo' pardon, lady," he said softly in his Pogo dialect, "I think I got one of yo' personal-type possessions."

It was my garter belt, of course. I stopped hating him. Walking down John Street hill after school we transformed the night before into a Great Comic Scene, something jerky and insane from a silent movie. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 226).

After her frustrating experience with Jerry, Del concludes she will never get a real lover. However, Del's relationship with Garnet French, an uneducated man, unfolds right

after she finishes her affair with Jerry. Del meets Garnet French at a religious meeting and as soon as she lays her eyes on him she feels irresistibly drawn to him by a powerful physical attraction. As a consequence, Del starts on a new journey for sexual discovery and surrender. Thus, Del's unconscious eroticism is freely expressed in the narrative whose language is fully grounded in descriptions that appeal to physical sensations. So, Del's relationship with Garnet is a watershed that marks the beginning of her adulthood. As she becomes aware of her body, she realizes that Del, the girl, is shaping herself into a woman who is willing to experience a new phase in her life which involves commitment and surrender to herself. Accordingly, Del also feels that her lovemaking to Garnet is an act of wordless surrender to her body and to her desire, and, as a result, she changes her boyfriend into a lover and their lovemaking brings Del moments of self-awareness and glory. It is relevant to highlight that in this part of the chapter, Del addresses herself in the third person framing a double perspective that shows a blend of her fantasies and the real world:

I talked to myself about myself saying *she*. *She is in love. She has just come in from being with her lover. She has given herself to her lover. Seed runs down her legs.* I often felt in the middle of the day as if I would have to close my eyes and drop where I was and go to sleep. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 253. Italics in the original).

However, Del's moments of wonderment and joyful glory come to an end when Garnet asks her to marry him and also tries forcibly to baptize Del in the Wawanash River. The river, standing for Garnet as a means of spiritual salvation, has already played a more dangerous role as the site of Miss Farris's and of Marion Sheriff's suicides. Garnet not only wants to marry Del, but he also wants to submit her to his convictions, to convert her not only to his religion, but to his way of life, to the kind of life offered by Jubilee. As Del struggles to escape Garnet's grip, he pushes her down the water to the point that Del nearly gets drowned. Del, however, manages to escape and, as she leaves Garnet behind and walks back home, she recalls, "As I walked on into Jubilee I repossessed the world." (MUNRO, 2001, p. 262). Actually, when Del says she repossesses the world she realizes that the world she has just left behind is a world of fantasy which does not correspond to her real life. Besides, Del's desire was to have a lover whereas Garnet's desire was to submit Del to his will. Thus, there could not have been any agreement between them given that an individual has to desire what is also desirable to the other. However, it is not always that one realizes what the other wants. In this sense, Del's misconception of Garnet's desire provides her with insights into the ways one's autonomy is generated. Del's awareness of her different self is made when she realizes the

contradictions between reality and fantasy and takes a decision in response to Garnet's will. Concerning the development of one's autonomy, Jacques Lacan asserts:

[...] one must always distinguish between reality (the fantasy world we convince ourselves is the world around us) and the real (a materiality of existence beyond language and thus expressibility). The development of the subject, in other words, is made possible by an endless misrecognition of the real because of our need to construct our sense of "reality" in and through language. So much are we reliant on our linguistic and social version of "reality" that the eruption of pure materiality (of the real) into our lives is radically disruptive. (LACAN, online).⁸

Therefore, what Del has learned is that her fantasies will never clone the other's fantasies, let alone the materiality of reality. Although Del has not allowed Garnet French to take possession of her future, she has failed to win the academic scholarship because she has spent too much time with Garnet instead of poring over her schoolbooks. Nevertheless, Del does not yield to her painful disappointments as she reads the newspaper ads and looks for a job. She imagines leaving Jubilee with the mistakes of her past behind in order to get started on real life. But what possible real life does Del claim for herself if she keeps on idealizing chunks of reality as she states, "[...] like girls in movies [...]" (MUNRO, 2001, p. 264). In Del's case, the most effective way to face her real life is to stop daydreaming and take action. Garnet's attempts at baptizing Del did not succeed but, in a way, she had her baptism in the sense she got "cleansed" of the "mistakes and confusion of her past" and, as she says, is now ready "carrying a small suitcase, getting on a bus," "to get started on my real life." (MUNRO, 2001, p. 264). At this point in the narrative, the protagonist has already been through some of the various stages which characterize the structure of the *Künstlerroman*. Such structure is described by Eltiane Campello⁹:

When the *Künstlerroman* narrates the life of the heroine/artist, from her childhood to her adulthood, some characteristics that define the genre are highlighted, such as the protagonist's childhood, the limitations of her place of

⁸ Available at: www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/lacandesire.html Accessed on: 28/01/2014

⁹ Original text: Quando o *Künstlerroman* narra a vida da heroína/artista, desde sua infância até a maturidade, salientam-se algumas características definidoras do gênero (genre) tais quais a infância da protagonista, as limitações do meio de onde ela se origina, a sociedade exterior, os problemas de natureza amorosa, a auto-educação, a alienação, a luta por sua realização artística e a busca de uma vida independente.

birth, the external society, problems with love relationships, the quest for an autonomous education, a sense of detachment, the effort to accomplish artistic realization and the quest for an independent life. (CAMPELLO, 2003, p. 69).

Likewise, Del Jordan has already been through some phases in her life that have contributed to her development and maturity. However, it is in the following and last chapter, *The Photographer*, that Del Jordan changes her attitude and decides to start writing her novel. It is worth mentioning that Munro's stories are shaped in a realistic frame and the last chapter of *Lives of Girls and Women* is characterized by its self-reflexivity since Del Jordan compares writing to photography and thinks about what is real in fiction. It is not by chance that the chapter opens with a reference to the river which has so many hidden mysteries in its depth. As Del thinks of the enigmatic stories of the town people who died in the river, she begins to develop her fiction:

There were two suicides by drowning if you counted Miss Farris my old teacher. The other one was Marion Sheriff, on whose family my mother, and others, would linger with a touch of pride, saying, "Well, there is a family that has had its share of Tragedy!" One brother died an alcoholic, one was in the asylum at Tuperton, and Marion had walked into the Wawanash River. People always said she *walked into* it, though in the case of Miss Farris they said *she threw herself into* it. (MUNRO, 2001, p. 265-266).

As Del contemplates what future stories lie behind her questions and assumptions, she approaches the stark reality of her small country town from shifting perspectives. Accordingly, Del sketches her characters out in parallel with the people in Jubilee, as for instance Marion Sherriff, who is one of the river suicides. Del changes Marion into a character named Caroline who gets pregnant by a photographer and ends up drowning herself in the river. Also important is the description of Marion Sheriff's photograph which is hanging in the high school hall. As Del changes Marion Sheriff into a character named Caroline Halloway, she also changes the details in Marion's picture and creates another photograph for her character. In Del's fictional photograph, Caroline's eyes are white. The trope of photography in the novel represents the relation between fiction and reality. In photography, the past is partially revealed as if it were reflected in shards of a broken mirror in which its beholder confronts what is held incommunicado. In her fiction, Del intends to convey the same effect by contrasting the ordinary details of Jubilee's unappealing reality with its gothic mystery, which she can easily perceive but cannot grasp. Thus, whereas reality

stands still, representation, in its attempt to seize reality with precision, ends up portraying its puzzling distortions. On photographs, reality and fiction, professor Besner explains:

Real photographs, as Del is discovering about the photograph of Marion (and as we might discover, along with Del, about realist fiction), announce a paradox. On the one hand, they seem to represent reality in images that read like documentary, literal transcriptions, so that when we see a face in a photograph, we are apt to say, that *is* the person it represents. In other words, we do not usually read photographs with much attention to their artifice, to their representation of reality. But on the other hand, a photograph, by virtue of its seemingly perfect rendition of a part of reality — a face, for example — becomes impenetrable, impossible to interpret it, because it seems to offer no gap between that which it represents, — the original face — and the representation — the photograph. Realism, Del is in the process of discovering — and we have been discovering throughout this novel — performs a similar illusion. (BESNER, 1990, p. 108).

Finally, Del acknowledges that her writing of the novel should not be a clumsy attempt to reveal reality but to raise possible truths as she says, “The main thing was that it seemed true to me, not real but true [...]” (MUNRO, 2001, p. 270). Accordingly, when Del is walking straight past Bob Sheriff’s house one morning, he sees her and invites her over for a drink and a piece of cake. As Del enters the Sheriff’s place, she loses faith in her Halloway characters and concludes, “Caroline and the other Halloways and their town had lost authority; I had lost faith.” (MUNRO, 2011, p. 273). Del realizes what her role as a writer should be and she understands that she must not write the Halloway novel due to her own loss of faith in it, which is something that can definitely mar the verisimilitude of fiction. As a result, she admits that accuracy brings no hope at all. She states, “The hope of accuracy we bring to such tasks is crazy, heartbreaking.” (MUNRO, 2001, p. 276). Del keeps on talking to Bobby Sheriff and then he wishes her good luck and rises on his toes for her, a theatrical gesture which is a gift to Del. She cannot explain what Bobby’s weird performance means but she accepts his kindness because she confirms that reality melts before the witness’s eyes at any attempts to portray it accurately. However, Del does not merely thank Bobby Sheriff’s friendliness and recollections, but as if she were in a moment of suspension of disbelief, she sincerely acknowledges his gift with a generous “Yes”, a joyous affirmation of the possible contributions their conversation has had for the potential of her imagination and the development of her novel.

3 IN A CABIN BY THE RIVER

It's the job of a Storyteller to create chaos.

Maria Campbell

Literature plays a very significant role in the history of the formation of a country. It provides social, political, geographical and cultural pieces of information about the development of a nation. While History portrays just one version of a story — generally the official one — literature, particularly postmodern literature is expected to offer many other versions of it. Besides, the assertion of identity through specificity and difference has been a constant in postmodern thought. Therefore, postmodern literature has sought to rewrite the past in a new context in which the act of looking back allows for different accounts of events. Thus, one of the main concerns of many contemporary women writers is to denaturalize some of the dominant features of traditional monolithic cultures that do not leave room for fragmented identities and their authentic forms of expression. Accordingly, women writers have been opening up spaces which can offer them new perspectives to express their identities more freely. About fluid and fragmented identities, Stuart Hall argues that:

The subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity is becoming fragmented: composed, not of a single but several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities. [...] The very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, variable and problematic. This produces the postmodern subject, conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. [...] [Identity] is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent "self." (HALL, 2007, p. 598).

According to the chapter entitled *Contemporary Canada, 1985-Present* in the *Canadian Literature in English* by Cynthia Sugars and Laura Moss, the late 1980's and early 1990's were decades that were influenced by "many international developments in literary and cultural theory" (MOSS; SUGARS, 2009, p. 527). This period is often referred to as the "deconstructive turn" era due to the new theoretical approaches in various fields of knowledge such as Philosophy, Literature and Literary Theory, to name a few. In literature, women began to use some postmodern strategies to deconstruct fixed paradigms and trace a literary legacy of their own. One of the greatest Canadian writers who contributed to shape new

perspectives in the literature of her country was Margaret Laurence. In the *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, Laurence's fiction is referred to as having given "the life and landscape of Canada a new place in the nation's imagination while showing the complexity of the country's cultural heritage." (BENNETT; BROWN, 2010, p. 609). The Manawaka series, written in the last decade of Laurence's career, comprises a book of short stories and four novels. This chapter focuses on the last novel of the series entitled *The Diviners* and it investigates how Laurence portrays her protagonist's personal quest while simultaneously tracing a Canadian history for women's writing within a *Künstlerroman* frame. Before this investigation starts, it is important to highlight some biographical information about the author of *The Diviners*, which is available online.¹⁰

Jean Margaret Wemyss was born in Neewapa, Manitoba, in 1926. She lost her mother at the age of four. Five years after her mother's death, young Margaret also lost her father, who died of pneumonia. She was raised by her maternal aunt and grandfather. In 1943, she was granted a scholarship to attend United College in Winnipeg, which now is the University of Winnipeg. After her graduation in 1947, she took a job as a reporter for the *Winnipeg Citizen*. She married Jack Laurence, a civil engineer, in the same year.

In 1949, Margaret Laurence moved to England, where her husband took a job in the British Overseas Development Service. In 1950, Laurence went to the British Protectorate of Somaliland, now Somalia, to follow her husband. They also lived in the Gold Coast, which is currently known as Ghana. During her years in Africa, Laurence translated Somali poetry and prose. In 1957, the couple moved to Vancouver, where she wrote *This Side Jordan* (1960) based on Ghana's struggle for independence.

Laurence wrote three other books which depict African life and setting: *The Tomorrow Tamer*, *The Prophet's Camel Bell*, both in 1963; and *Long Drums and Cannons* (1968), which deals with the English-language writers emerging in Nigeria. In 1962, Laurence separated from her husband and moved with her two children to England, where she lived for ten years. There she started the first three Manawaka novels: *The Stone Angel* (1964) *A Jest of God* (1966) and *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969). *A Bird in the House*, a short-story sequence which is part of the series and also set in fictitious Manawaka, was published in 1970. In 1974, Laurence moved back to Canada and settled in Lakefield, Ontario, where, in a cottage by the

¹⁰ Available at: <http://canadian-writers.athabascau.ca/english/writers/mlaurence/mlaurence.php> Accessed on 28/07/2012.

Otanabee River, she wrote *The Diviners* which was published in the same year. *The Diviners*, which draws together characters and scenes from the four previous books in the Manawaka series, is said to be the novel which mostly mirrors Laurence's life. According to Nora Foster Stovel, Laurence put a sign which read "Manawaka" at her cottage by the Otanabee River and she sometimes referred to her hometown Neepawa "accidentally" as "Manawaka". (STOVEL, 2008, p. 160). Like *A Jest of God*, *The Diviners* won a Governor General's Award. After *The Diviners*, Laurence published children's stories and non-fiction pieces. She died in Lakefield, Ontario, in 1987.

According to the *Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, Margaret Laurence's fiction "gave the life and landscape of Canada a new place in the nation's imagination while showing the complexity of the country's cultural heritage" (BENNETT; BROWN, 2010, p. 609). Laurence chronicled a search for freedom and autonomy that can be associated with the social changes that were beginning to take place in her country in the 1960's and 70's. She left a legacy that contributed to shape new perspectives in Canadian Literature. Laurence is one of the most important and beloved writers in her country.

In *The Diviners*, Margaret Laurence employs "the appropriation of voice" as one of the resources to authorize her protagonist's discourse and assert her identity. This technique consists of the appropriation of dominant discourses in order to subvert them. Thus, it is necessary to know well in order to contest, or, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, "to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge" (HUTCHEON, 1991, p. 1-2). Hence, by appropriating a traditional male genre and subverting it, Margaret Laurence manages to create new perspectives of the female self for her protagonist-writer named Morag Gunn. Thus, in order to redefine new perspectives for women's identity and translate them into her fiction, Margaret Laurence looks back into women's literary history and develops her narrative deconstructing cultural stereotypes and simultaneously establishing a line of descent that goes against patriarchal forms of discourse. As a result, Laurence provides her readers with various alternatives to reinterpret past histories and convey other meanings to them. In this sense, women writers had to rewind their historical past and elaborate on manipulations of collective memory to write their version of facts and repossess their literary history. In relation to memory, Stephen Bertman asserts:

Memory is the construction or reconstruction of what actually happened in the past. Memory is distorted by needs, desires, interests and fantasies. [Memory] is

subjective and malleable rather than objective and concrete, memory is emotional, conceptual, contextual, constantly undergoing revision, selection, interpretation, distortion and reconstruction. [...] Personal memory represents the memory of a single individual, contained within a lifetime, often found on first-hand experience. [...]. Cultural or collective memory constitutes the collective memory of many people, encompassing generations. (BERTMAN, 2000, p. 27; 31).

Hence, the use of the memorybank movie passages as well as the metaphor of the river that flows back and forth in *The Diviners*, emphasize the fundamental role that memory plays in the construction of an individual's identity. Margaret Laurence starts the narrative with a protagonist-narrator who is constantly revisiting her past in order to understand her present so that she can pass something of value on to her future readers. Morag, the narrator, is a middle-aged writer who struggles to free herself from the restraints of patriarchal conventions so that she can rewrite "herstory" and assert her identity. For this reason, she has to re-visit her past to produce its re-telling. In order to scrutinize events in the realm of past for the production of meaning, Laurence has her narrator write the memorybank movie sections so that Morag can update past experiences. Such strategy makes it possible for the narrator to shift her reader's gaze from present time to past without breaking the fluidity of the narrative very much like the image of the river which seems to flow back and forth. The flow of the river waters also suggests that narratives which aim to reconstruct exactly what happened cannot provide a static vision of the past mainly because what happened long ago has been stretched to the present moment since its beginning with the aid of memory and the writer's effort to put it into words. Moreover, words cannot always fill out the gaps. Thus, Morag contends:

How could that colour be caught in words? A sort of rosy peach colour, but that sounded corny and was also inaccurate. *I used to think words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracle. But no, only occasionally.* (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 5 Italics in the original).

Therefore, the re-telling of past experiences is much too complex if one takes into consideration that its writing depends on intricate works of memory and imagination. This process of recollection shows how the boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred when they are described in the form of a text. Moreover, memory is full of contradictions and idiosyncrasies and what is stored is always subject to either selection or rejection depending on who makes the choices. In *The Diviners*, the narrator stresses the relevance of the act of remembering through the memorybank sections. In the first chapters, there are descriptions of

snapshots, which reveal frozen fragments of past, that help Morag access her memory. The discovery of the photos sets off a series of recollections that will be further developed into something similar to motion pictures. Another important aspect is that the snapshots call attention to some details that have been long forgotten by the narrator so as to emphasize that some fill-in-the-blank task must be done, as for instance; “ *All this is crazy, of course, and quite untrue. Or maybe true and maybe not. I am remembering myself composing this interpretation, in Christie and Prin’s house*” (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 9. Italics in the original). The first snapshot description shows Morag’s mother pregnant. In this photo the narrator is still an egg about to be developed and this fact emphasizes the idea that a mystery is concealed. It invites the observer to inquire about the past as well as about the future:

Morag Gunn is in this picture, concealed behind the ugliness of Louisa’s cheap housedress, concealed in her mother’s flesh, invisible. Morag is still buried alive, the first burial, still a little fish, connected unthinkingly with life, held to existence by a single thread. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 8).

Another interesting characteristic in Laurence’s writing style is the way she has her narrator break with traditional paradigms of temporality in order to bridge the gap between past and present. Because Laurence’s narrator is a woman, the author makes the protagonist redefine her way of self-representation by being peculiarly different. Therefore, whenever Morag digs into her past and tells her readers all about it, either through the photos or the memorybank sections, she shifts the narrative to simple present tense. So, her past is written in the present tense and this trick gives readers a sense of immediacy, which paradoxically is never expected to be noticed when one talks about the past. This backward and forward movement evokes the river waters and shows that Morag’s creative process develops at the same time as her readers follow the narrative. As a result, the narrator manages to change the past into a meaningful presence in the narrative, one that is subject to unconventional interpretation. In this sense, the narrator challenges traditional chronological narratives and legitimates the difference of her discourse. Although the movie sequences are organized chronologically, the choice of the verb tense makes readers read them at the same time as Morag writes them down:

Memorybank Movie: Once Upon a Time There Was

Mrs. Pearl from the next farm has come to Morag’s house. She is an old woman, really old, short and with puckered-up skin on her face, but not stooped a bit. Her face is tanned,

though, which makes her look clean. She makes dinner and swishes around the kitchen. The stove is great big black and giant_ oh, but good and warm. Summer now, though, and it is too *hot*. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 15).

Besides the idea that reading and writing take place simultaneously, the choice of the present tense for Morag's narration of past events also places reader and writer in the same time frame so that the distance between the character's fictional past and the reader's factual present is shortened, as a result Morag manages to persuade her reader to feel sympathy for her. As a writer, Morag needs this support from her reader because she is not only writing to inform, but also communicating in order to share. Consequently, the necessary emotional bonds between readers and narrator are tied up and the verisimilitude of the text is gradually built up. Also important is that the narrator uses the third person to report on her own experience but the dominant voice is the "I" of the subjective self. So, when Morag addresses herself as "she", readers acknowledge how the subjective "I" of the narrator recreates itself into "she", the character. In addition, this split between the "I" into the "she" calls attention to the fact that the traditional female archetypes of women's identity stressed by patriarchal discourse have been deconstructed by the writing of a *Künstlerroman* from a woman's point of view. This strategy also helps the narrator keep her reader in the picture and even when she confesses to not remembering everything that she writes about, the verisimilitude of the narrative is not jeopardized, on the contrary, due to its confessional tone, it is enhanced:

Now I am crying, for God's sake, and I don't even know how much of that memory really happened and how much of it I embroidered later on. I seem to remember it just like that, and yet each time I think of it, are there new or different details? I recall it with embellishments which don't seem likely for a five-year-old. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 20 Italics in the original).

Another important aspect of Morag's memorybank movie trances is that they are a reference to the very act of remembering. When Morag explains how they happen, she shows in fact the role of metafiction in her writing. The memorybank movie trances reveal how a writer can use metafiction as a means to bring down traditional distinctions between reality and fiction and blur the boundaries between them. Actually, Morag prepares her readers to acknowledge a shrewd thought, that is, the idea that reality is a construct and one of the ways to deconstruct reality is to fictionalize about it. Thus, Morag exposes to her readers how her creative process is developed in a self-reflexive manner changing her autobiography into an autobiographical metafiction. Moreover, Morag refers to her forgetfulness to suggest that

memory fails, so its recollections cannot be considered as a faithful depiction of reality. She informs, “*And after that, for one entire year, my memories do not exist at all. A blank. Nothing of what happened then remains accessible. Not until I was six*” (LAURENCE, 2007, p.33. Italics in the original). These shifts from forgetfulness to remembrance, from present to past and vice-versa remind readers of the description of the river in the opening chapter of the novel. The river that flows both ways is the “river of now and then” as Morag refers to it:

The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparent impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river-watching. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 3).

Laurence’s river shows that her writing is deeply rooted in Canadian landscapes which are vividly portrayed in the mythical microcosm of her fictional prairie town Manawaka. The river trope is a metaphor for psychological and chronological time. It represents psychological time and it triggers Morag’s memory so that her past come together with her present in her consciousness. The river waters drag her past memories to her present moment transforming them into virtual present; as a result Morag gets closer and closer to her most remote past. Conversely, the river shows a future dimension because of its continuous flowing, which is endlessly echoing in Morag’s mind. Besides psychological time, the river also represents chronological time given that the character’s memories are arranged in a chronological order. Thus, in their essay entitled *Life Writing*, Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms argue that the “river of now and then” reminds Morag that the “now” of writing necessarily inflects the “then” to be considered (EGAN; HELMS 2004, p. 217). So, Morag has to re-visit her past to change her present. Furthermore, Morag needs to become aware of what she has inherited from collective memory to select and adapt what needs to be adapted in her personal memory. According to Patrick H. Hutton in *History as an Art of Memory*, individual memory departs from collective memory:

Collective memory is an elaborate network of social morals, values and ideals that marks out the dimensions of our imaginations according to the attitudes of the social groups to which we relate. It is through the interconnections among these shared images that the social frameworks of our collective memory are formed, and it is within such settings that individual memories must be sustained if they are to survive. (HUTTON, 1993, p. 78).

The moments when Morag, in her mind, talks to Catharine Parr Traill are a good example of how collective and individual memory interact in the narrative. Catharine Parr

Traill was a botanist and also a writer who immigrated to Canada at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Trail wrote about her settling in the New World, her hardships as well as her achievements. Therefore, Trail is part of the history and mythology of Canada and Morag keeps her alive in her individual memory by changing her into a mythical character in her novel. Another woman writer who is also part of the Canadian collective memory that Morag refers to is Traill's sister, Susanna Moodie. So, not only does Morag want to keep those writers alive in her memory, but she also wants to keep them alive in the contemporary collective memory of Canada. By doing so, Morag rescues a past memory that shows that women have their own writing traditions and how important it is to remember them. Another relevant point is that Morag's *modus operandi* is rather different from Traill's and Moodie's. So, when Morag establishes a fictitious dialog with Traill, she stresses the differences between their lives, ways of writing and contents as well. Morag mentions the reasons for her worries about her daughter, Pique, and imagines Mrs. Traill's reply. These passages show how Morag's contemporary predicaments contrast with Traill's past ones. Actually, Traill is Morag's alter ego, advisor and reading guide:

Morag loped over to the bookshelves which lined two walls of the seldom-used livingroom. Found the pertinent text. In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one's hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing.

(*The Canadian Settlers' Guide*, 1855)

Morag: Thank you, Mrs. Traill.

Catherine Parr Traill: That my dear, was when we were at one time surrounded by forest fires which threatened the crops, fences, stock, stable, cabin, furniture, and of course, children. Your situation, if I may say so, can scarcely be termed comparable. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 112).

Laurence also appeals to collective memory when she draws on her factual hometown Neepawa, in order to sketch her character's hometown, Manawaka. Although Laurence establishes some connections with Neepawa, when she describes her character's hometown Manawaka, the fictional town can stand for any of the prairie towns in Canada as Nora Foster Stovel claims, "Manawaka is not so much any one prairie town as an amalgam of many prairie towns." (STOVEL, 2008, p. 155). Thus, the parallels between any real towns and the invented Manawaka are meticulously set so that readers can visualize bits of real geography and picture themselves inhabiting the place. Laurence also establishes a parallel between the fictional Wachakwa river and the Otanabee River since *The Diviners* is written by Morag Gunn after she moves to a cottage by the Wachakwa river, whereas it is written by Margaret Laurence after she moves to a cottage by the Otanabee River. As a result, Laurence

not only crosses Canadian national boundaries with her vivid geographical descriptions but she also appeals to her reader's collective memory by making them see the physical topography of Canadian landscapes in the text. So, the imaginary prairie town is historically and geographically authentic and its pictorial description exercises a certain dynamic on the person who is reading about it. Consequently, the microcosmic Manawaka reaches macrocosmic dimensions due to the magic alchemy of its mythical power. Concerning the art of make-believe and the mythical Manawaka, Stovel asserts:

A visitor to Neepawa may be surprised because Neepawa is identical to Manawaka in particulars: from the Brick House to the Little House, from the regal Café to the Roxy Theatre, from River Street to Mountain Avenue, from the cemetery on the hill to the river in the valley — it is all there, exactly as in the novels. But the actual town has none of the fiction's power. Neepawa is just an ordinary town or small town anywhere, entirely lacking the mythic power of Manawaka. (STOVEL, 2008, p. 156).

Hence, Laurence not only gives her readers a portrait of Canadian geography and culture but she also conveys a deep sense of how Canadian history, legends and culture were shaped. As an example, Laurence includes old myths and legends in the narrative and simultaneously subverts some of them given that they are told from a female point of view. There is also the transposition of oral folk legends into written form given that the protagonist enjoys listening to the adventure stories Christie, her step-father, tells her. In one of the memorybank passages, Christie, opens a drawer and brings out a book whose title is *The Clans and Tartans of Scotland*. Then, he tells Morag about his ancestors and she wants him to tell her the story of her ancestors. Morag needs those stories because she has lost her parents at an early age, so, a way to re-open this past that has been locked in her memory is through myth-making. According to Christie's version, there was a brave Scottish pioneer named Piper Gunn who had a beautiful brave woman named Morag Gunn. Supposedly, they are Morag's ancestors and she often asks him to tell her this tale so that she can create her own myths as well as a female counterpart to the folk heroes. Critic Gayle Greene explains how Laurence revises old myths:

Laurence's revision of these central myths establishes a new genealogy, a line of descent which is antipatriarchal and delegitimizing — or relegitimizing of those who have been disempowered by gender and race, conferring possession on the "dispossessed". Laurence shows power passing from a stepfather (the disreputable Christie) to a stepdaughter (the disobedient, unchaste, and unsilent Morag), [...] (GREENE, 1991, p. 149).

Thus, Morag never gets tired of listening to Christie's tales and she tells him to repeat them over and over. So, each time Christie tells her the tale of Piper Gunn, he adds a new detail. Since the story is orally told, Christie improvises on its sequence of events which is something that makes Morag more and more fascinated by the storytelling craft. Besides, Christie weaves his fiction with some historical facts of The Red River Rebellion saying that it was Piper Gunn who started all that. As a scavenger, Christie does not have much education, but he surely knows how to entertain Morag with his storytelling. She is not only having fun but also learning her craft. When Christie tells Morag that Piper was a man with "the voice of drums and strength of conviction" (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 57), Morag listens carefully. When Christie's story ends, Morag goes to her bed and rewinds the tale in her memory. Then, she decides to create her version of the myth. She thinks about the Piper's wife and makes up the beginning of her own tale. Although Morag does not know some of the words Christie has used in his story, she appropriates some of them and has her first adaptation, that is to say, her subversion or a female reconstruction of the myth:

Morag's First Tale of Piper Gunn's Woman

Once long ago there was a beautiful woman name of Morag, and she was Piper Gunn's wife, and they went to the new land together and Morag was never afraid of anything in this whole wide world. Never. If they came to a forest, would this Morag there be scared? Not on your Christly life. She would only laugh and say, *Forests cannot hurt me because I have the power and the second sight and the good eye and the strength of conviction.*
 What means *The Strength of Conviction*?
 Morag sleeps. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 59).

Thus, Morag changes Christie's story of a hero into her story of a heroine and creates her own myth so that she has a female character she can identify with. Because Morag's mother is dead, she needs to create her mythical feminine references, to grow up with them and somehow repossess the history of her family. So, Christie plays an important role in Morag's artistic development given that he teaches her how to mix historical facts with fiction so that myths can be created. Although Christie is the garbage collector who rides around town on a wagon pulled by a horse, he gives Morag a priceless heritage with his mythical tales. He teaches Morag how to do alchemy with words in spite of his lack of knowledge and schooling. On the other hand, Christie also tells Morag about his gift of "garbage-telling" and the indigestible eschatology of the town rubbish dump, which Morag refers to as "the nuisance grounds" in her novel. Morag remembers the day she and her classmate Jules Tonnerre, whose nickname is Skinner, ride back home from school on Christie's wagon. On

their way home, Christie speaks about the worst thing he has ever seen in the junk yard. As Christie talks about his close relation with the town's "muck", Morag thinks of the decaying side of life, its decomposition and rotten end so that she eventually changes it into a source of intertextual reference in her narrative. The nuisance grounds, which is the title of the second part of *The Diviners*, establishes a correspondence with T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* in which he depicts a land of rubbish and desolation with vegetation dying in winter to grow again in spring as it is described in the nineteenth and twentieth lines, "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow Out of this stony rubbish?" (ELIOT, 1979, p. 2268). T.S. Eliot evokes a land that needs the cyclical seasons to be resurrected. Morag shows how Christie's stories are linked to the pieces of debris and decomposed matter he finds in the nuisance grounds. She writes:

"Well", Christie says, "the lord only knows I could be better off keeping my trap shut. It was a newborn baby. Wrapped in newspapers, it fell out. Dead, of course. Hadn't gone its full term. It was that small, like a skinned rabbit."
 "What'd you do with it?" Skinner.
 "Buried her. It was a girl."
 "Where?" Morag cries, cries. "Buried her *where*?"
 "In the Nuisance Grounds," Christie says, spitting in to the dusty road. "That's what it was, wasn't it, a nuisance? Well, the hell with their consecrated ground."
 (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 87-88).

Although the memorybank passages refer to Morag's past experiences, some of them have future dimensions as well. Accordingly, what Morag imagines in some of these passages will be further described in other memorybanks as actually taking place. When she is at school for example, Morag considers leaving Manawaka: "But if you work, really really work, and get educated, something will come of it, maybe. Like being able to get out of Manawaka and never come back" (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 139-140). Then, a little further Morag's leaving Manawaka is described: "Alone in the coach, Morag Gunn, erstwhile of Manawaka, prudently goes into the john before she will allow herself to cry" (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 20). In the second part of the book, Morag starts a new life away from Manawaka, in Winnipeg. Her life changes and she wants her past to remain away. She goes to college and finds herself a room in a boardinghouse. Morag meets new friends, the Gersons, and feels what to be part of a family is like. Because she does not want her memories of Manawaka to catch up with her present she struggles to forget them. Consequently, when she tries to explain to Dr. Brooke Skelton, whom she marries, how she was brought up, she gets tongue-tied and she cannot say the names of her step-father and step-mother: "I don't have any

family, actually. I was brought up by_” By no one. She cannot speak Christie’s name, Prin’s name” (LAURENCE: 2007, p. 223).

Then, when Morag accepts Brooke’s proposal, she holds her past back. With Brooke by her side, Morag erases Manawaka to non-existence and in order to leave her past where it supposedly should belong she writes Christie a letter informing him about the wedding. Actually, she does not want this part of her past to be present in her wedding ceremony. Nevertheless, memory has its own tricks and the unconscious mind releases fragments of whatever past has been blocked or voluntarily erased. Accordingly, Judy Giles states that memories play a role in the individual’s struggle to construct a social and personal identity in a world in which subjectivity is both fragmented and fractured (GILES, 1996, p. 76). At first, Morag’s voluntary forgetfulness matches her husband’s ideal woman, so she decides to fit in the stereotype of the innocent maiden in order to make her husband’s idealizations come true. However, as Morag outgrows Brook’s ideal of her, she cannot help being in conflict with her marriage vows. Therefore, Morag is not able to hold her past back there, in Manawaka, because it is her roots and where her identity began to take shape. As a consequence, she ceases to forget. She even feels like speaking as Christie used to speak, using tough and offensive language:

Since Prin’s death, and the last site of Chistie, Morag has experienced increasingly the mad and potentially releasing desire to speak sometimes as Christie used to speak, the loony oratory, salt-beefed with oaths, the stringy lean oaths with some protein in them, the Protean oaths upon which she was reared. But of course does not do such thing. (LAURENCE: 2007, p. 298).

Thus, Morag’s acknowledgement that her marriage no longer suits her shows how her past interferes with her present so that her future also takes a different course. This realization comes up when she decides not to have her married name on the first novel she has written. When *Spear of Innocence* is finally published, Morag’s husband asks her why she has not chosen to sign her married name on it and it is her no longer forgotten past that replies: “Brooke — it wasn’t that. It was something quite different. It goes a long way back.” (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 307). From the moment Morag has her first novel published, she realizes she cannot do away with her past because her thoughts of it often strike her memory as well as her life. As a result when Morag meets Jules Tonnerre on the streets of Toronto, she inevitably comes to terms with her past. After she meets Jules, she feels her past should swap places with her present. So, this decision is irrevocably taken when she realizes she does not

want to meet her husband's demands anymore, as for example, she does not want to have her hair done at the hairdresser's. On the contrary, she wants to experience her identity authentically without any camouflage. Therefore, after she spends an adulterous night with Skinner, she tells her husband she wants to leave him:

“Brook. I can't explain. I get mixed up when I try, and then I feel I must be entirely in the wrong. But all I know is — I have to go. I can't stay.”

“I could understand it better if you could just give me one reason for what you've done.”

“What do you mean, exactly, what I've done?”

“How do you think I feel, Morag, knowing you've been with another man?” (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 325).

Although Morag is determined to leave her husband, she understands that she cannot go back in time and marry Jules. For this reason, she tells Jules that she intends to stay with him temporarily until she is ready to move away. Her stay with Jules is a brief interval, during which her past converges with her present to open a future perspective in her life. In fact, Morag gets a piece of her past and takes it to her future when she goes away. When she leaves Jules, she is pregnant. Pique, Morag's daughter, represents Morag's life in future dimensions and in this sense, their past, present and future are linked by the experiences they have shared together. There is a series of snapshots of Pique which also triggers Morag's memory. These snapshots are the resources Morag keeps to link her past with her future. She keeps them to show Pique the value of their memories. Besides, Morag wants Pique to know that she has her history and she can also construct her identity upon it. Morag does not know how much Pique can remember, so, the snapshots are kept to remind her that one has to look back in order to understand who he/she is. In addition, the snapshots remind Morag of the way she saw her daughter and how she was brought up:

(...) But now the colour prints are still pasted in, and the place and Pique's age written in white ink on the black page. *Pique, 5. Begonia Road*. Pique is a round-faced sturdy child, her pink apron-dress somewhat incongruously frilled at the shoulders. Pique, like Morag, is scarcely the frilly type, but at this stage she favours frills and Morag is afraid of inflicting psychic damage by discouraging this trait, out of which she will no doubt grow. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 394).

Besides the focus on the different ways memory can be accessed, the memorybank movie sections also focus on Morag's creation process. Thus, the memorybank passages are encoded in metafictional language. In addition to describing the protagonist's first writings, there are also the metafictional passages that explain how the development of her novels goes

on. Then, in her first novel *Spear of Innocence*, Morag creates a character named Lilac Stone who struggles to leave her hometown. Morag struggles with her moments of lack of inspiration and compares the writing process to a “seesaw existence”. Morag thinks about her writing development and concludes that “when actually writing, Morag is certain she is getting it across. When not writing, she is certain she isn’t. A seesaw existence.” (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 263). A little further, Morag’s second novel is described. She writes to her friend Ella and explains that she is drawing a parallel with Shakespeare’s work in her second book, *Prospero’s child*. The protagonist is a young woman who marries the governor of an island, but later, has to reject almost everything about him in order to let her inner Caliban run free. She says, “The novel progresses, slowly. It’s done in semi-allegorical form, and also it has certain parallels with *The Tempest*. Maybe I’m an idiot to try this, but it’s the form the thing seems to demand...” (Laurence, 2007, p. 386). Obviously, it is what she wants to do. Besides, Morag’s weaving synapses cannot resist the temptation of a good parody. Concerning parodic intertextuality, critic Simon Dentith states:

Intertextuality can be characterized as “the interrelatedness of writing, the fact that all written utterances — texts — situate themselves in relation to texts that precede them, and are in turn alluded to or repudiated by texts that follow.[...] At the most obvious level it [intertextuality] denotes the myriad *conscious* ways in which texts are alluded to or cited in other texts: the dense network of quotation, glancing reference, imitation, polemical refutation and so on in which all texts have their being. At a still more profound level, intertextuality refers to the dense web of allusion out of which individual texts are constituted — their constant and inevitable use of ready-made formulations, catch phrases, slang, jargon, cliché commonplaces, unconscious echoes and formulaic phrases.” (DENTITH, 2000, p. 5).

The first novel written by Morag, *Spear of Innocence*, mirrors her husband’s idealization of innocence. Brooke is the colonial man whose ideal of a wife is an innocent intelligent literary woman with tidy hair and nice clothes on who would always be docilely waiting for him with a glass of scotch on one hand and a punctual homemade dinner on the other; nothing less than this and nothing more either. On the one hand, Morag’s marriage to Brooke has sponsored her education, as she clearly puts it to Skinner, “He taught me a lot Jules—that was real enough.” (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 316). On the other hand, Morag’s marriage has silenced her authentic self and has changed her into a postmodern version of Shakespearean Miranda. In this sense, Brooke is a version of Prospero, who arrives home from work asking if Morag has been a good girl, a question that actually asks whether Morag

has taken the contraceptive pill once he does not want his wife to be a mother, but just his woman. However, Christie, who is antithetical to Brooke, has also been Morag's mentor and Morag's Caliban side takes after Christie, the scavenger. So her vulnerable innocence is crushed by her inner Caliban as she breaks free from the insufferable exile of her married life. Thus, Morag's second novel, *Prospero's Child*, reasserts Morag's inner truth. Critic Gayle Greene observes that Margaret Laurence not only carried out a reworking of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* but also of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

Laurence grafts *Tempest* allusions onto a pattern of loss and recovery which is her version of the fortunate fall, and suggests, in her reworkings, a sense like Shakespeare's and Milton's that redemption involves the loss of fragile innocence and a recreation from painful experience, and that this process requires faith. (That Laurence no more values a "cloistered virtue" than Milton does is clear from the portrayal of the innocents of this novel, [...] (GREENE, 1991, p. 156-157).

Morag describes her third novel, *Jonah*, as the story of "an old man, a widower, who is fairly disreputable and who owns a gill-netter in Vancouver" (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 427). The fourth novel described in the memorybank passages is *The Shadow of Eden*, which includes some historical passages and also mentions a piper. In a letter to Ella, Morag explains how some information in her novel does not match what Christie used to tell her years before. On the other hand, Morag emphasizes the concept of inner truth affirming that Christie was, to a certain extent, right because he knew what the concept meant. Actually, the historical facts refer to the Red River Rebellion which took place in the nineteenth century and marked one of the resistance movements against the Canadian government over its decision to transfer the territory of Rupert's Land to the New Nation of Canada in 1869. The communities of peoples that occupied part of the territory, among them the Métis, feared for their culture and land. According to the online *Canadian Encyclopedia*,¹¹ the uprising led to the establishment of the province of Manitoba and the emergence of the Métis leader and martyr Louis Riel. Christie, in his tales of adventure, mentions the aboriginal people and says that they were slain by Piper Gunn and his people:

(Did they fight the halfbreeds and Indians, Christie?)
Did they ever. Slew them in their dozens, girl. In their scores.
(Were they bad, the breeds and them?)
What? [...]

¹¹ Available at: http://firstpeoplesofcanada.com/fp_treaties/fp_treaties_confedandtreatieswest.html Accessed on 15/01/2014.

“No,” he says at last. “They weren’t bad. They were just there.” (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 98-99).

Thus, in *Shadow of Eden*, Morag writes about the history of the Highland Clearances in Scotland, which Christie recreates with his hero Piper Gunn, and weaves it with the history of the first native tribes in Canada paying a tribute to the Métis who peopled Manitoba as well as to Jules Tonnerre, her Métis lover and father of her daughter, Pique. Hence, Margaret Laurence uses metafiction to talk about the historical and cultural heritage of her country by linking history and fiction in order to give her readers an epic panorama of Canadian history and culture. According to Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism* telling stories can never be a privatized experience given that it generates a “communicational bond” between the storyteller and his/her readers which also involves a historical, social, political and intertextual context. All these contexts can never be overlooked in the writing of fiction given that fiction requires verisimilitude to convey meanings for the truths it communicates, and, as a result facts are required to back up whatever is being told. Linda Hutcheon asserts that “Narrative is indeed a ‘socially symbolic act’, as Jameson claims, but it is also the outcome of social interaction.” (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 50). Similarly, Morag also comments on the relation between history and fiction when she states:

I kept thinking about the tales Jules once told me, a long long time ago, about Rider Tonnerre. Which brings to mind a curious thing — something that must’ve come from Old Jules. Rider was called Prince of the Braves, Skinner said, and his rifle was named La Petite. In factuality (if that isn’t a word, it should be), those names pertained to Gabriel Dumont, Riel’s lieutenant in Saskatchewan much later on. That’s ok — Skinner’s granddad had a right to borrow them. I like the thought of history and fiction interweaving. (LAURENCE, 2007 p.487-488).

Concerning the interweaving of fiction and history in *The Diviners*, there are some characters, as for example the Tonnerres, whose lives have been thoroughly affected by history and its inequitable consequences. The Tonnerres are Métis and they suffer racial prejudice from part of non-aboriginal Canadians who consider them unruly second-class citizens. Jules Tonnerre, who was the young narrator’s classmate and boyfriend, is a character who sees his family totally fragmented as a result of suffering and despair. Thus, Jules grieves the loss of his family members, as for example his thirty-seven-year-old sister named Val, who dies in the streets of Vancouver and about whom he says, “She died of booze and speed, on the streets of Vancouver. As a whore” (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 502). Before Val’s death,

Jules also loses his brother who, according to Jules's words, is drowned; "My brother Paul, he was twenty-five, and he was a guide up north, and they say he drowned. Well he handled a canoe better than most, so I doubt he drowned" (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 501). So, when Jules Tonnerre is an adult and he occasionally visits Morag and Pique, who is his daughter, he tells them about his sorrows. As a singer and composer, Jules finds a way of preserving some integrity when he sings his loneliness and despair. Likewise, Jules tells Pique, who was named after another sister he had, about his losses:

"There's a lot you don't know," Jules says harshly. "Your mother probably didn't tell you that when my sister died in that fire, with her kids, she was stoned out of her head with home-brew, on account of she didn't give a fuck whether she lived or died, and she had her reasons" (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 500).

Jules Tonnerre is a character in *The Diviners* whose identity is fragmented by a sense of rootlessness due to his mixed heritage, his family losses and all the suffering that results from the tragic history of his fellow Métis. In spite of all his painful experiences, Jules is a character who shows resilience by writing lyrics that pay a tribute to his folks. Although Jules dies at the end of the novel, he struggles with his miserable existence and suffering up to the end. His songs are a kind of message he leaves to his daughter so she can learn how to be resilient enough and figure out how to move on. Moreover, Pique needs to learn her father's lesson. She also suffers with other people's prejudice at school because she is seen with disdain by some classmates as she is the daughter of a Métis man. Consequently, Pique feels humiliated at school because a classmate insults her by degrading her femininity and by objectifying her saying "[...] *you know halfbreed girls can't wait to get fucked by any guy who comes along*" (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 492. Italics in the original). In spite of all the harsh experience Pique has been through, her decision to leave her mother and go west shows that she has grown mature and is willing to face life without fearing its harshness. Besides, Pique has discovered how to keep on. Like her father, she learns how to sing her sorrows and transcend them:

PIQUE'S SONG
(Written by Pique Gunn Tonnerre)

"There's a valley holds my name, now I know
In the tales they used to tell it seemed so low
There's a valley way down there
I used to dream it like a prayer
And my fathers, they lived there long ago. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 537).

Pique understands that her personal past and the Canadian cultural heritage are inextricably bound up with each other. Although her ancestors have been dispossessed of their territory and of their homes, she acknowledges that she cannot get rid of her history. Then, by singing her songs, Pique takes possession of her history and sets out for Galloping Mountain where her father's people live. Pique wants to live with her uncle Jack, Jules Tonnerre's brother, to help him make a new community. Uncle Jacques and his wife Mary have four children and they also take care of the other children in the family whose parents have died. Pique feels like helping them to restore their culture, for this reason she rewrites their history in her lyrics which talk about oral history, history and her family lore. Pique appropriates all this cultural and historical heritage and rewrites the histories of her father's family. It is also important to mention that when Jules's sister, Piquette, and her two children die tragically in a fire, Morag is working for the local newspaper in town, the *Manawaka Banner*. Morag feels awkward because she is asked to report on that and she realizes that she cannot profit from other people's tragedy. So, Morag eventually includes Jules's and Pique's lyrics in a special section of her fifth book. It is Morag's way to pay homage to the Tonnerre family and change their history into myth.

LAZARUS

(Written by Skinner Tonnerre, for his father, Lazarus Tonnerre)

Lazarus, he was the king of Nothing;
 Lazarus, he never had a dime.
 He was sometimes on relief, he was permanent
 on grief,
 And Nowhere was the place he spent his time.
 (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 533).

Hence, Morag makes use of different kinds of texts in her book in order to legitimate the narrator's creation upon factual reality and mythologize it. Accordingly, Christie, the garbage collector, is changed into a mythical goldsmith, or the scavenger who picks clutter from the garbage dump and stores it at home. Christie collects junk objects which he changes into memorable stories, as for instance, when he gives Morag her first Christmas gift, a hunting knife with a leather handle and a sign burned into it, he tells her how he got the gift. Christie says that a young kid had traded the knife with him for a pack of cigarettes. He adds that the kid died when his truck crashed into a freight truck. When he finishes telling her the

story of the knife, Christie concludes that it is not a nice present to be given to a girl, but Morag politely replies that she has enjoyed the gift. Actually, she feels rather embarrassed by such a present, not knowing that it is an object that will connect her to the mythical story of her future lover's ancestors. The story of the knife turns out to be a surprising twist in the turn of events in the narrative. It unfolds when Jules Tonnerre shows his daughter Pique a silver brooch that belonged to Lazarus, Pique's grandfather. Morag sees the brooch, which she observes is a plaid pin, and Jules adds that young Lazarus traded his hunting knife for it. Jules explains that he would have traded it back if the guy had not died in a crash:

“Is that what you call it? Well, when my dead was just a kid, he used to horse around, sometimes, with his other kid called John Shipley, and Lazarus traded his knife for this brooch, thinking it'd be worth a lot of money, I guess, but then he was scared to try to sell it — people would've thought he'd stolen it, see? When I came back from the war, there, Lazarus gave it to me. I would've liked to get that Shipley guy to trade back again, but he'd been killed a few years before the war, Lazarus said, when his truck piled into an oncoming freight train.”

Morag stares in disbelief. These things do not happen. Oh, yes, they do though. Everything is improbable. Nothing is more improbable than anything else. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 503).

Morag emphasizes the contingency of the facts when she speaks of her disbelief. She simultaneously says that everything is improbable even though it is likely to happen. Actually, Morag is astounded by her incredulity not only in relation to Jules's narrative but also in relation to hers as well. When Jules speaks about the knife, Morag does not believe it can possibly be that old meaningless piece of junk she has kept in a drawer of her dresser only because it has been one of the few objects Christie left her. She realizes that the same knife links her past to Jules's past in a dialectical way. So, the knife is not as much meaningful to Morag as it is to Jules. She acknowledges that it is the same object with different stories, but no story is more valid than the other. Similarly, the plaid pin that belongs to Jules is not something of much sentimental value for him. As a consequence, Morag learns that each individual's experience is shaped by the community and culture he/she finds himself/herself in, so, each individual constructs his/her own historical past which is grounded in different perspectives. Morag understands that history is fragmented due to its discontinuity between now and then, between how the present knows the past it reports. As a result, she exchanges the knife for the plaid pin and does not keep either one or the other story, but writes about both of them as well as the first version told by Christie:

“Even if he hadn’t been killed”, Morag says, her own voice sounding detached from herself, “he wouldn’t have had the knife. He’d sold it for a package of cigarettes. To Christie Logan. Christie never mentioned the guy’s name, but he told me the story. Christie never knew whose the knife had been, or he’d have given it back to Lazarus. He gave the knife to me years ago. That, and a few books, that’s all I have of Christie’s”. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 503).

Although Morag has a few objects that belonged to Christie, she acknowledges that the most meaningful memory she has of him is his storytelling. Although Christie did not put his stories onto paper, Morag can remember his words which she changes into myth. As a writer, Morag cannot help emphasizing the importance of myths in the shaping of one’s identity as well as the shaping of a collective cultural heritage. Myths are created to fill the gaps of memory failures, that is to say, when an individual cannot remember something that he/she experienced in a distant past, he/ she needs to fill out the gaps that lie blank in the present with mythical stories, so that meaning can be divined for a better understanding of his/her present moment. Morag knows about the importance of myths with the strength of her conviction, for this reason, she can remember Christie’s tales, because they not only entertained her, but they somehow filled the empty space, which was left in her personal history after her parents had died, with a meaningful reference that helped her to carry on.

Another character who the narrator changes into a grotesque mythical figure is the snake dancer, Fan Brady, who is Morag’s landlady. Morag and her baby, Pique, have lived on the top floor of Fan’s house for some time and Fan has become a close friend of Morag’s as a result. Fan works during the night at The Figleaf, a nightclub, so she sleeps during the day. When Fan turns thirty-four, she buys a python and keeps it in the basement as a dance partner. Morag gets terrified at the presence of a snake in the house and argues with Fan saying she is a mad woman. However, Fan convinces Morag that Tiny, the snake, is no threat at all and she even manages to get Morag to create another name for her, which, after some hesitations, turns out as Eureka. Morag explains that she has thought of something before she suggests the name Fan approves of. Actually, Morag is fascinated by Fan and she even considers changing her into a character when she draws a comparison between the dancer and Lilac Stonehouse, the protagonist of her novel, *Spear of Innocence*. Morag’s suggestion also shows how the narrator’s creative process unfolds while myth-making is constructed. She concludes:

Later, upstairs, Morag thinks about Fan Brady. Lilac Stonehouse begins to look like pretty pale stuff in comparison. Could you get a Fan Brady down on paper?

Only an approximation. Even the name of the club, for heaven's sake, "The Figleaf" is much better than "Crowe's Cave". *And you think Fan Brady's crazy?* (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 369. Italics in the original).

Whereas Fan is the mad woman in the basement, Morag is the mad writer on the top floor who also challenges traditional stereotypes by writing about a grotesque snake-woman, who has caused a great shock after she has absent-mindedly confessed to having aborted five babies. Morag thinks about Fan's confession and concludes that the abortions must have been the harsh consequences of Fan's clueless adolescence. Thus, Morag does not ask Fan why she has let it happen, but wonders what sort of compulsion Fan may have had. So, instead of making indiscreet questions, Morag transforms Fan into Princess Eureka and even picks up adjectives such as "exotic" and "thrilling" to write a notice advertising Eureka's snake-dance. Morag creates a carnivalesque figure who performs a bizarre dance and challenges the paradigms of classic esthetics. Similarly, Eureka audaciously exposes her body making sinuous twists which simultaneously shape asymmetrical lines and disguise physical ageing as sensuousness. Accordingly, Eureka and her python represent the grotesque body which challenges the norms of obedience and self-control provoking a discomfoting attraction in the one who beholds it. Critic Mary Russo argues:

The classical body is transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical and sleek; it is identified with the "high" or official culture of the Renaissance and later with the rationalism, individualism, and normalizing aspirations of the bourgeoisie. The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple and changing; it is identified with non-official "low" culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation. (RUSSO, 1994, p. 8).

Besides the description of the four novels, the memorybank passages also refer to Morag's other literary works, as for example her book of short stories *Presences*. Therefore, the memorybank passages show how a literary work is developed in the mind of a writer, what modifications a writer sometimes is told to do in order to have his/her book published and the reviews of the critics when the book finally comes out. Nevertheless, there is one novel Morag writes which is not described in the memorybank sections. The fifth novel is written simultaneously to the reader's reading of it. The title of the novel is not mentioned, but it is subtly suggested by its writer and consequently inferred by readers. Whenever Morag refers to the writing of her fifth novel, she looks out of her kitchen window and observes the river; "Morag sat at the table in the kitchen, with a notebook in front of her and a ballpoint

pen in her hand. Not writing. Looking at the river.” (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 195). Morag needs to observe the river she lives by to be able to improve her writing skills as Gayle Greene observes, “Since water is a traditional symbol for consciousness, “divining” is an apt symbol for what Morag tries to do in her writing: to fathom people and the processes that make them what they are”.(GREENE, 1991, p.153). Morag’s river watching is the way she finds to exercise her wise passiveness and, as a result, understand her insights to express them meaningfully in her writing. Gayle Greene states:

Laurence’s use of “diviner,” then, draws on its full range of meanings: water finder, reader of omens, one who has skill in the reading of character and events, seer, soothsayer, prophet. The artist–diviner looks into “the river of now and then” to fathom life, time and the passing of generations, and through her understanding of the past, gains faith in the future. (GREENE, 1991, p. 154).

Hence, the image of the river follows Morag’s writing development. It is her source of inspiration as well. Morag never has the same view when she looks at the river because it is never the same color. The landscape also changes because of the changing seasons. As a result, Morag also notices the different birds that come in summer and fly away in winter. Thus, the waters in the river are never the same suggesting that it flows as Heraclitus of Ephesus’s river.¹² According to the Greek philosopher, “On those who step into the same river new waters flow”. Then, the river is the same, but the waters that flow are ever changing, which suggests that everything is constantly flowing, and one cannot ever repeat what has already happened because he/she has also been through changes. Accordingly, the “river of now and then” is Morag’s reminder that the art of representation cannot exactly grasp reality as something that is unchangeable and forever fixed within a frame. Thus, each time Morag looks out of her window, not only does she recognize a different landscape, but she also feels that it is a different woman who discovers unprecedented meanings for what she sees. Like Royland, Morag is a diviner, but her divining is a search for meaning:

“Why’re you so interested in Divining, Morag?”
She hesitated.
“I don’t know. I wonder why, myself. I guess with one part of my mind I find it hard to believe in, but with another part I believe in it totally.”
“It works,” Royland said. (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 29).

¹² Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/presocratics/> Accessed on: 07/07/2012

So, Morag shows interest in Royland's job because what he does is somehow similar to what she does. At least, it requires the same patience and intuition. Furthermore, both of them never know what the outcome of their divining will be. Morag does not know whether her fiction will be well accepted by her critics and readers, as much as Royland does not know whether water will be found under the soil. In this sense, Morag divines meaning in myths as much as Royland divines water under the soil. Another important aspect in Morag's writing development is that she also likes observing birds for natural information about cyclical time and life cycles. Besides, the observation of natural life cycles links Morag to chronological time as well as her present moment helping her make the most of it. This understanding can be identified when Morag describes the awesome scene of the blue heron taking flight, a scene which gives Morag a clue on how to master present time. The heron's serenity and mastery of wings epitomize the sublime in the narrative. The heron seizes the present moment with its spreading wings which master only present time. The heron does not hold the present, but it only masters it and when it flies away it regrets no past. According to philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche:

He who cannot sink down on the threshold of the moment and forget all the past, who cannot stand balanced like a goddess of victory without growing dizzy and afraid, will never know what happiness is – worse, he will never do anything to make others happy. (NIETZSCHE, 2007, p.103).

Although Morag does not forget her past, she does not regret it either because she has learned to be a diviner by “*looking ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence.*” (LAURENCE, 2007, p. 525). Morag has learned to “look ahead into her past” in order to come to terms with it and make memory matters matter in present time to finally fill out the future with the silence of the sublime. Thus, it is not by chance that Morag watches the river before she gets ready to start writing. Every day she starts a new paragraph in her latest novel, she is reminded by the river waters that everything is in constant flow. As a result, she realizes that her writing is susceptible to changes as well as her subjectivity. Then, in her quest to assert her identity, Morag understands that such task never comes to an end, unless one ceases to be. So, each time she goes back to her past and pictures herself in the memorybank movie scenes, she discovers something new, so that when she resumes writing, she feels that it is another Morag who writes. Accordingly, what the river echoes is the constant duration of changing which indicates that identities are never fixed as well as reality.

To conclude, what Morag emphasizes in her new novel is that reality mirrors back what one's perception believes to be real. As a good observer, Morag knows that reality is a construct, a make-believe game; so one of the ways to figure it out is to look at it as if through the rear mirror of a car, which is exactly what she does. When Morag writes, she subverts indisputable strictures and beliefs by defying them with challenging questions and disbeliefs. Thus, the female identity that has been framed within patriarchal stereotypes is deconstructed in Morag's narrative and replaced with more authentic perspectives of the female self. She also shows her readers that one of the alternative ways to challenge one's perception of reality is to suspect and start writing on the reverse.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

“In cases of emergency it is folly to fold up one’s hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror: it is better to be up and doing.”

Catharine Parr Traill

After the investigation carried out in this dissertation, I want to conclude it by putting some emphasis on the importance of the autobiographical dimensions in both Alice Munro’s and Margaret Laurence’s fictions. Although both works are novels of autobiographical content, that is to say, fictional narratives, both of them point to the indeterminacies of the multilayered perspectives that overlap when memory and imagination work together in an attempt to represent different perspectives of possible realities. The reading of the two novels has led me to acknowledge the multiple layers of meaning which are concealed in reality surfaces that only sensitive observers, such as Munro and Laurence, can grasp and, then, put carefully into words in order to translate their experience into meaningful language.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Alice Munro manages to write about women’s experiences from such a realistic perspective that readers cannot avoid realizing that writing from a woman’s point of view makes a significant difference in the art of literary representation. Women’s experiences, as, for example, their rites of passage, are different from those of men’s, and, as a consequence, when they are written about, gender differences are brought to the surface. Hence, when one writes about his/her experiences using autobiographical elements, gender difference matters given that the feminine imaginary has its particular characteristics which are intensively influenced by the way a woman sees the world and relates herself to it. Despite the fact that the discontinuity between experience and the attempt to represent it through language are a challenging gap to be mediated by the narrator, Alice Munro develops the narrative in *Lives of Girls and Women* from a female point of view and successfully shows the different perspectives of the female *Künstlerroman*. I cannot assert that Alice Munro writes her fiction bearing in mind only a gender perspective, on the other hand, I realize that the narrative in *Lives of Girls and Women* is deeply influenced by the female imaginary and the differences in the way women develop their histories.

In an interview published in Beverly J. Rasporich's book entitled *Dance of the Sexes: Art and Gender in the Fiction of Alice Munro*, which is available online¹³, when asked to what extent her characters are real to her, Alice Munro does not hesitate to reply that the female authorial "I" in her fiction has a lot to do with her personal life. She says, "Oh, very real because they are aspects of myself." (MUNRO, online). As the interview develops, Munro adds that the Flats Road, depicted in *Lives of Girls and Women*, shares some similar aspects with Wingham, her place of birth and where she grew up. Alice Munro says, "[...] there is sometimes an uneasy marriage of the kind of milieu I grew up in, which is the Flats Road of lower town, where you get the folk characters [...]" (MUNRO, online). As a matter of fact, in the same book, Beverly J. Rasporich states that "Real Life" was the title Alice Munro firstly chose for *Lives of Girls and Women*. Thus, being partially autobiographical, Munro writes about a world she interacts with as a woman and as a woman artist.

In her female point of view, which is expressed through Del Jordan's narrative, Alice Munro deconstructs traditional male representations of the female subject to present alternative facets of possible female identities. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del Jordan relies on her subjectivity because she is in quest of an autonomous female identity as well as a body which is empowered by her erotic fantasies that help her understand the changes girls go through till they become adults. Hence, the novel represents women's experiences as well as their psychological and physical realities. Language in *Lives of Girls and Women* is surely a philosophical and esthetic issue which requires special attention from the woman writer. Alice Munro not only offers women writers innovating alternatives to the writing of women's experiences, but she also deconstructs binary oppositions by dialogically addressing male authors from a dominant literary tradition through the presence of intertextuality in her narrative. So, the narrative in *Lives of Girls and Women* can be seen as one of a literary, social and esthetic exchange given that she appropriates a canonic genre, the *Künstlerroman* and changes its contents in order to write a "herstory".

In Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, the relevance of the ways memory works is brought to the fore. The river trope in Laurence's novel stands for the ways the narrator's memory works as well as for the narrator's attempt to divine meaning and attribute new signification to her individual past. Nevertheless, it is not only her individual past that needs

¹³ Available at:
http://books.google.com.br/books/about/Dance_of_the_Sexes.html?id=z6FU_BhecqAC&redir_esc=y
 Accessed on: 29/01/2014.

updating once the narrator's personal life is inextricably linked to a collective past, which she becomes aware of through the tales her step-father tells her as well as the historical facts and stories concerning the Métis people, which Jules Tonnerre, her lover and father of her daughter, tells her about. Another issue in *The Diviners* which Laurence emphasizes is that collective memory and individual memory are bound up with each other and, occasionally, the collective memory of a group needs to be elaborated by the individual. Dominant discourses that establish fixed paradigms as well as cultural practices and beliefs, which may be redefined by the individual, may constitute the collective memory of a group of people. As for example, the idea that women should get married, raise a family and live up to men's idealizations of them as good housewives and mothers constitute the collective memory of patriarchal societies. In *The Diviners*, the protagonist has to fulfill the role of a good wife and homemaker in order to manage a successful married life, which eventually makes her feel constrained and frustrated.

Margaret Laurence shows her readers that the appropriation of the voice of the dominant and its subversion is a good strategy to change discourses which frame women in gender stereotypes. By the appropriation of the canonic *Bildungsroman* and its subversion through the writing of the protagonist's *Künstlerroman*, Laurence offers new possibilities of women's identities, which do not fit gender stereotypes. Margaret Laurence also uses intertextuality in her narrative in order to build up the verisimilitude of the text and validate the discourse of her protagonist. Laurence draws on Shakespeare to emphasize the "Caliban" characteristics of the protagonist, Morag: a woman who strives to conceal her provincial and ordinary roots from her husband, a bourgeois scholar, but finally gives up trying to be Mrs. Skelton to be just herself, Ms. Gunn, which is her family name.

It is not only through rich intertextuality that Margaret Laurence manages to show her readers that women also have a literary legacy of their own. By commenting on the very processes of storytelling and writing, Laurence unfolds her plot at the same time readers follow its development. As a Consequence, readers realize how the protagonist's writing of the novel unfolds so that a female discourse can be developed and acknowledged. Laurence shows the artistic development of the protagonist putting emphasis on folk tales as well as on the blurring of the boundaries between fiction and factual events when she intertwines the tales of Piper Gunn with some historical facts that relate to the Métis people and their martyr, Louis Riel.

Another important aspect in *The Diviners* is the emphasis on the art of myth-making. Myths are incorruptible because they are created to be a source of meaning, that is to say, a source from which multiple meanings can be extracted. This is an aspect Margaret Laurence makes a point of stressing in her novel. So, myths are not created to establish universal truths, but to be a source of meaning to anyone who turns to them. Not only does Margaret Laurence emphasize the importance of myths in *The Diviners*, but she also writes about other women writers to show her readers that women have built a literary tradition of their own. As an example, Margaret Laurence changes Catharine Parr Traill, who is part of the Canadian literary legacy, into a mythical character in her novel when she creates dialogs between Morag and Traill.

Also important is the fact that *The Diviners* is a microcosm of Margaret Laurence's personal life. The novel is a *Künstlerroman* that mirrors the life of the author, thus it has autobiographical contents. In her book *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition*, Gayle Greene explains to what extent the fiction in *The Diviners* overlaps with Laurence's life. Quoting Laurence's words, she explains that Manawaka sounds as much true to the author as Neepawa, Laurence's place of birth, does. Greene adds that Laurence raised a sign which read Manawaka at her cabin by the Otanabee River where she wrote her last novel. Thus, the Wachakwa river in fictional Manawaka echoes real Otanabee river waters near Lakefield, Ontario. Hence, by creating the mythical Manawaka, Margaret Laurence chronicles the development of Morag into an artist putting emphasis on women's self-empowerment through their writing. Laurence not only offers her readers a mythical prairie town that can represent any other town in the Canadian plains, but she also creates new myths by referring to the country's history and by interweaving fiction and reality in order to make her readers aware of the place of women's writing in the Canadian cultural heritage. The narrative in *The Diviners* flows very much like the Wachakwa river waters, which seem to run to and fro, showing Laurence's work going on in two simultaneous ways, the real and the mythical, language and its multiple meanings. Laurence appropriates the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman* genres and writes upon them in order to convey alternative versions to the expression of female subjectivities and to open new literary spaces for women writers in the history of Canadian literature.

As a result of my investigation, I have realized that Alice Munro's and Margaret Laurence's novels show that literature is the very site in which the act of representation is not restricted to just a few groups of intellectuals. Actually, writing is the very space and

destination of the individual and the local. Whereas the appeal of history lies in its veracity, the appeal of literature lies in the dissemination of multiple meanings, which is something that is generously present in *Lives of Girls and Women* and *The Diviners*. In addition, both Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence present texts which are characterized by the intricacies of language, its idiosyncrasies and multiple meanings. Likewise, the river trope in both novels suggests that what is on the surface of an apparent superficial reality needs divining so that different possibilities of meaning can be revealed. The Wawanash river in *Lives of Girls and Women* and the Wachakwa river in *The Diviners* conceal mysteries of life and death which are partially revealed as time goes by in the narratives. Whereas Del Jordan, in *Lives of Girls and Women*, refers to some characters who chose to die in the Wawanash river, Morag, in *The Diviners*, refers to a character, Jules's brother, who supposedly died in the Wachakwa river. In this sense, the two rivers are the narrator's source of secrets to be thought about and written about. Besides, the Wawanash river and the Wachakwa river are referred to in different sections of the novels, which is something that shows the development of the two narrators into mature women. Thus, the mysterious secrets of the rivers puzzle the narrators and motivate them to commence their storytelling. As the river waters flow, the narrators write about their past and present experiences and bind them to an upcoming future, which may be inferred by readers as the writing of the novels. Likewise, both Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence use the river trope to refer to the ways time unfolds in past, present and future dimensions.

Hence, Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence also leave their readers a meaningful message which leads them to think about the role of women writers in literature. So, by writing *Lives of Girls and Women* and *The Diviners* Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence have effectively made their readers acknowledge different perspectives of the female identity.

If present time lasts less than an eye blink and reality melts before the eyes of the beholder, let writing be the means through which present, past and future coalesce when "wordsmiths" are at work.

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