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Canadian Women Playwrights: Their Exploration of a Feminist Aesthetic

Yvonne Hodkinson

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ABSTRACT

Canadian Women Playwrights:
Their Exploration of a Feminist Aesthetic

Yvonne Hodkinson

This thesis analyzes the work of four Canadian women playwrights who are in the process of creating a new vision in Canadian drama, based on the recurrent themes of wilderness, immigration, and imperialism. The women playwrights selected for this study typify the way in which women writers have transformed these themes into a female dramatic mythology. 'Wilderness' becomes a metaphor for female inner consciousness; the 'immigrant' symbolizes women's sense of exclusion, and 'imperialism' is transformed into women's powerlessness in the face of patriarchal control.

An in-depth study of five plays by Margaret Hollingsworth, Aviva Ravel, Betty Jane Wylie and Cindy Cowan will demonstrate how these playwrights incorporate the national literary search for identity into the female quest for self-definition. This thesis is a response to women's creative contribution to Canadian drama, which so far has gone unrecognized in the field of Canadian literary criticism. This study attempts to synthesize the five plays into a structural vision exploring the national literary imagination as well as a feminist consciousness.

In loving memory
of my grandmother, G.-trude,
who took me to my first play.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to my readers, Kathy Waters and Harry Hill, and the committee members. I sincerely thank my mother, Elizabeth, without whose encouragement this thesis would never have been finished.

My gratitude goes to my thesis advisor, Audrey Brune. Her deep insight into literature and her power of analysis propelled my own ideas into action. Her patience and generosity inspired me to continue my research, and her critical approach forced me to search for a deeper awareness of my own potential.

I am deeply grateful to my grandmother, Gertrude, who inflamed my childhood imagination with poetry, and instilled in me an everlasting love of theatre.

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Introduction

This thesis makes the claim that women playwights are in the process of articulating a new voice in Canadian literature. Through their pursuit of a female imagination and a "feminized space,"[1] they relate cultural myths to the notion of gender and female identity. Although writers such as Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence have explored the relationship between female identity and national identity in fiction, and have been the topic of studies by critics like Marian Fowler and Coral Ann Howells, this thesis offers the first critical attempt to place women playwrights in a Canadian literary context in which "myths and legends of landscape"[2] symbolize self-discovery and the quest for an aesthetic as well as a socio-political feminized space.

This study examines the creative contribution to dramatic literature of Margaret Hollingsworth, Aviva Ravel, Betty Jane Wylie and Cindy Cowan, focusing on five plays which dramatize Canadian cultural mythology from the standpoint of the female imagination: Ever Loving and Islands by Margaret Hollingsworth; The Twisted Loaf by Aviva Ravel; A Place on Earth by Betty Jane Wylie, and A Woman from the Sea by Cindy Cowan.

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1 Howells, Coral Ann. Private and Fictional Words: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 1980s, London and New York: Methuen, 1987. p.18.

2 Ibid. p.30.

In their search for identity, these playwrights have transformed the literary myth of wilderness, the struggle for survival as immigrant, and the "colonial mentality"3 into a dramatic female mythology. By identifying 'wilderness' as the metaphorical female psyche, the 'immigrant' as a symbol of women's sense of marginality, and the 'colonial', 'imperial' mentality as suppression through patriarchal tradition, these playwrights add a new dimension to modern Canadian drama in the context of the search for national identity.

These plays, written in the 1970's and 1980's, represent the emergence of women playwrights on the Canadian dramatic scene at a period when the feminist movement was a potent influence on the awareness of women writers. The five selected plays exemplify the creative consciousness of Canadian women playwrights and stress the need for a critical study that will place their work in both a literary and feminist framework. Canadian critics such as Northrop Frye, John Moss and Margaret Atwood; dramatic critics like Anton Wagner and Karen Malpede; feminist critics like Shulamith Firestone, Elizabeth Janeway and Adrienne Rich provide the thematic referents for analyzing the plays.

It will be demonstrated that although the exploration of regional characteristics has occurred frequently in Canadian

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3 Atwood, Margaret. Survival, Toronto: Anansi Press, 1972, p.39.

drama, these four playwrights use regionalism to represent a female consciousness. Regional tendencies in Canadian drama have become symbolic representations of cultural myths, the "unchartered 'iconography of the imagination.'"4 Thus, regionalism to these women playwrights is related to female identity, as the setting becomes a metaphor for the unexplored territory of the female imagination.

The discovery of the inner psyche is the focus, and the external setting becomes a backdrop for the internal landscape and the realization of a female sense of place. In addition, while these five plays are realistic on many levels, they also experiment with dramatic structure in their depiction of the fragmented, changing consciousness of many of their female protagonists. The characters in the plays express the psychological and emotional struggle of their search for self-identity through the use of monologue, flashbacks and the breakdown of time and space. Fragmented and experimental techniques are applied as a metaphor for the inner emotional and psychological state of flux.

Ever Loving and Islands explore the female inner self in connection with the inherited colonial tradition and the inherited patriarchal tradition. Women's sense of isolation

4 Wagner, Anton. quoting James Reaney in "Introduction" to Contemporary Canadian Theatre: New World Visions, ed. Anton Wagner, Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1985, p.16.

and the need for self-recognition relate to both the national struggle for identity in the post-colonial age and the female struggle for identity in the traditions of patriarchy. These plays express how women playwrights explore the association of national identity and female identity on many levels. The portrayal of the immigrant is used to further emphasize the female sense of isolation and marginality. As foreigners, the female immigrants in Ever Loving are severed from their roots and must struggle in an unfamiliar setting. They are shown to be marginalized in two ways: as immigrants and as women.

In Islands, the protagonist withdraws to a secluded island in British Columbia. Escaping from social expectations, she isolates herself from human companionship and must battle alone with the incertitude of her existence as a woman and the uncertainties of the wilderness upon which she projects her process of self-discovery.

The immigrant concept is portrayed in The Twisted Loaf where an old Russian-Jewish woman, on the verge of death, reflects upon her life of struggle and self-sacrifice for her family in a new and foreign country. In solitude, the old woman achieves a meaningful connection with her past and a deeper understanding of her difficult responsibilities as a Russian-Jewish immigrant, wife and mother.

In A Place on Earth, the dramatic use of monologue is used to express the process of self-discovery, as an elderly rape

victim strives for survival in an urban wilderness. The old woman's sense of exclusion and oppression is symbolized by her lonely rooming house and her only source of contact--a puppet she talks to. The struggle for autonomy is portrayed as the protagonist's decision to press charges on her attacker, thus confronting her external environment.

The recognition of a female past in relation to a female definition is explored in A Woman from the Sea. The historical mythology as a symbol of nature and fertility is revealed, incorporating the dramatic use of fertility rituals, "the origins of drama,"5 when women created fertility rituals and played the part of the Mother Goddess. Mythology and ritual are used to connect the protagonist in the play with women's creative past, thus expressing the female playwright's search for her own dramatic roots.

Canadian women playwrights are in the process of "writing themselves into existence,"6 a term used by Robert Wallace to describe the artistic consciousness of Canadian dramatists. By writing themselves into existence, women playwrights are charting out new territory in the realm of Canadian drama. By

5 Malpede, Karen. ed. Women in Theatre: Compassion and Hope, New York: Drama Books Publishers, 1983, p.5.

6 Wallace, Robert. "Writing the Land Alive: The Playwrights' Vision in English Canada Contemporary Canadian Theatre, Conolly, ed. p. 80.

creating this map, they are developing the "tools of analysis"7 that will enable Canadian women to recognize a female consciousness from within an aesthetic and national framework.

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7 Lushington, Kate. "Fear of Feminism," Canadian Theatre Review, 43, (Summer 1985) p.10.

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Ever Loving

Margaret Hollingsworth, through her exploration of the concepts of wilderness, the immigrant, and colonialism, delves into the complexities of Canadian female experience. Pivotal to her establishment as a key figure in Canadian drama is her scrutiny of cultural mythology in quest of a female aesthetic. Her plays articulate women's search for cultural, social and psychological identity in their struggle to achieve an external and internal sense of space.

Dislocation and the search for integration in Hollingsworth's plays are revealed through the metaphors of wilderness, in which the landscape symbolizes woman's individual incertitude, her isolation as immigrant in a foreign setting, and her low status in a male dominated society. Critics like Marian Fowler and Coral Ann Howells have discussed how Canadian women's fiction has transformed the myth of wilderness to represent a female consciousness.

> The wilderness as the pathless image beyond the enclosure of civilized life was appropriated by women as the symbol of unmapped territory to be transformed through writing into female imaginative space.1

Margaret Hollingsworth explores in dramatic terms the relationship between the female imagination and the metaphorical images of wilderness. The heuristic effect of her

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1 Howells. p. 15.

perception of female isolation and displacement, and the search for individual locality is enhanced by Hollingsworth's own position as a playwright, a British immigrant, and as a woman.

> Home comes in again and again in my work. It's about relating to the place that you're in and finding a place for yourself in a foreign environment, which is what I'm doing. Feeling out of context, out of place, motivates me and informs my work.2

In Ever Loving, produced in 1980, Hollingsworth interweaves the complex issues of national identity, immigration, and female alienation, in relation to colonialism and the experience of the exile. Critics like John Moss use the term "colonial mentality "3 to describe the dislocating effects experienced by both the immigrant and the native-born Canadian. This results from "being born in exile, of accepting foreign experience as more valid, more relevant, than one's own."4 The physical displacement of "immigrant exile,"5 on the other hand, intensifies the feeling of being an outsider, of being subject to "conflicting orders, of alien conditions, of established chaos."6

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2 Wallace, Robert and Zimmerman, Cynthia. eds. The Work: Conversations with English-Canadian Playwrights, Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1982, p. 93.

3 Moss, John George. Patterns of Isolation in English Canadian Fiction, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974, p. 13.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

Hollingsworth gives the colonial mentality and the immigrant exile concepts further significance by relating them to gender. The three men in Ever Loving, as native-born Canadians, are prey to feelings of inadequacy and dislocation in the face of British control and European influence. The women's sense of alienation, however, stems from their position as immigrants which is further amplified by their marginal position in the structure of patriarchy.

Their overwhelming sense of being exiled from their familiar European setting is emphasized by the vastness of the landscape. The wilderness, the unchartered territory, is used by Hollingsworth as a backdrop against which feelings of apprehension and estrangement are played out in different ways. The impenetrable wilderness initially encroaches upon the individuality, the psychic sense of place, of all three women. Circumscribed by primeval nature, limited by colonial and patriarchal expectations, they must learn to cope with profound loss of self-esteem. Severed from their roots, they experience fragmented states of consciousness as they attempt to adapt to what they perceive as ostracism and banishment. Coral Ann Howells offers a succinct explanation of the female experience in patriarchy in relation to the imperial control of Canada.

> There are close parallels between the historical situation of women and of Canada as a nation, for women's experience of the power politics of gender and their problematic relation to patriarchal traditions of

> authority have affinities with Canada's attitude to the cultural imperialism of the United States as well as its ambivalence towards its European inheritance.7

As colonialism is an inherited tradition, and shown to be inadequate in defining the Canadian experience, so, too, can patriarchy be perceived as an inadequate and foreign tradition in defining the female experience. Thus the sense of effacement and dependency of the three women is increased by their immigrant status, and by their position dictated by "sexual politics." For, as Kate Millett observes, "status, temperament, and role are all value systems with endless psychological ramifications"8 within the traditions of patriarchy.

Women playwrights like Gwen Pharis Ringwood articulate the link between colonial domination and male control over women. Lament for Harmonica, (1959) by portraying the exploitation of a native woman by a white man, is the first play to associate imperial rule in Canada with patriarchal authority over women.

Margaret Hollingsworth's play Ever Loving expands this vision of imperial male domination to represent the multi-faceted psychological and social ramifications of female dislocation as experienced by three immigrant women in Canadian post-war society. Three war brides, Luce, Ruth and Diana arrive

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7 Howells. p. 2.

8 Millett, Kate. Sexual Politics, Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1970, p. 54.

in Canada after the second world war to join their Canadian husbands. Although Luce comes from Italy, Ruth from Scotland, and Diana from England, they are excluded from the imperial power structures because they are women. The men in the play, although they are shown to be victims of the colonial mentality as native Canadians, are able to identify with the imperial male power structures because of their superior position within the patriarchal tradition.

Hollingsworth's portrayal of the socio-political structures of patriarchy encompasses the essence of the 1970's feminist movement in which female oppression and male dominance are perceived as the products of mass "socialization."9 Feminists like Kate Millett, Adrienne Rich and Elizabeth Janeway claim that social conditioning has led to an ideology of gender, a "social mythology" in which a set of beliefs dictate male and female experience based on biology. Kate Millett writes,

> Sexual politics obtains consent through the "socialization" of both sexes to basic patriarchal polities with regard to temperament, role, and status. As to status, a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female.10

In Ever Loving, Hollingsworth incorporates the feminist search for female definition with the Canadian literary search

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9 Millett. p. 26.

10 Ibid.

for identity. The archetype of the "immigrant as exile,"11 so prevalent in Canadian literature with writers like Brian Moore and Henry Kreisel, has come to express a national sense of alienation, for there is a sense that, as Atwood claims, "we are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here..."12

In Ever Loving, Hollingsworth affiliates the displacement of the immigrant in a foreign country with the denial of female authenticity in a male dominated environment. Thus the notion of gender is incorporated into the depiction of "national exile."13

The play has often been compared with John Murrell's Waiting for the Parade, but where Murrell's play is about the isolation of women left at home when their husbands go off to war, Hollingsworth's play deals with the complexities of trying to feel at home in an alien land, and more significantly, with the socio-political fabric of patriarchy.

The structure of the play develops in an unchronological fashion. The breakdown of time and space and the shift from one woman's experience to another, create a fragmented perception of the three women's development in Canadian society. The play begins in 1970 with the established lives of Ruth, Diana and

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11 Moss. p. 83.

12 Atwood, Margaret. "Afterword," The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 62.

13 Moss. p. 84.

Luce as they are gathered together in a restaurant in Niagara Falls for the first time since their arrival in 1945. On the surface, the three women have achieved very different identities in Canadian society. Diana appears to have been assimilated into Canadian life, and talks of soon retiring to the west coast with her husband Paul, because the milder temperature is better for his "old war wound." (35) Ruth lives with Dave in Hamilton where he is a security officer. Nothing is revealed of Luce at this stage. She is shown sitting at a table alone while her former husband, Chuck, sings.

Through the dinner conversation of the two couples, the external reality begins to fade as the memories of the past visualize into being.

> DIANA: Well...it's been a long time eh? A heck of a time. Too long of course...Yes...well, nothing comes easily does it? I can't say I'd've changed anything though--looking back. It's extraordinary really. I don't know where the years've gone. (37)

Through Diana's consciousness, the play shifts back to 1945. Luce, Diana and Ruth have just arrived in Canada. Luce sits at the train station in Halifax alone and waiting, and Ruth and Diana take the train to meet their husbands. The journey through the wilderness gives the women their first impression of Canada and leads them to reflect upon the future of their own lives in an unfamiliar setting.

> DIANA: Fir trees.
> RUTH: Aye. And do you know they're full of bears. Dave told me. I wonder what the cows eat? It's all trees.

DIANA: Lovely colours. They must be maples...See...those red ones. That's their national tree.
RUTH: National tree? [Thinks.] We've got the thistle.
DIANA: They call autumn fall.
RUTH: It feels...different. Creepy. Foreign. [Pauses, has no word to express her feelings.] Big.
DIANA: Don't look at it.
RUTH: I can't help it.
DIANA: [Irritated.] Well don't.
RUTH: Don't shout at me. [Pause. RUTH is near to tears.]
DIANA: [Sighs.] It's going to take time isn't it? Getting the hang of...[Makes an expansive gesture.] (39)

The wilderness becomes the first image in the female characters' imaginations, personifying their state of inner disarray, expressing their uncertainty in a foreign and male-oriented country. The image of wilderness in the play takes on a double meaning. On an internal level, wilderness personifies the disordered, unformed female self; one that is a reflection of the women's inner emotional world. On an external level, wilderness is a metaphor for the social world of male experience; one the women feel overwhelmed by. As a backdrop for the women's inner world, the wilderness brings to the surface Ruth and Diana's subconscious feelings of anxiety and fear, an experience Kreisel calls "the impact of the landscape on the mind."14 In the wilderness, the boundless forest also seems to trigger the undiscovered elements of their own beings, and appears to awaken "an awareness of unknown psychic territory within."15 Diana reveals how everything seems so

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14 Kreisel, Henry. "The Prairie: A State of Mind," Contexts of Canadian Criticism, ed. Eli Mandel, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, p. 257.

15 Howells. p. 15.

"untouched." The untamed nature surrounding them appears to offer limitless possibilities. "Space. That's what Paul said. A blank page just waiting for us to write on. [Shakes her head.] I thought I understood him." (41) Diana has an ambivalent perception of herself in her new environment: the forest is both frightening and inspiring. It is all so rejuvenating after the horrors of war, but it is also terrifying in its wildness and unfamiliarity.

> It's all...untouched. London's horrible now...ugly. Here everything's so splendidly...untouched. No bombing... nothing destroyed...mile upon mile...well, there's nothing to bomb is there? There's no one to kill. (41)

Like the wilderness, Diana's untapped inner resources remain untouched. In metaphorical terms, wilderness in the play expresses the undiscovered potential of female consciousness, one that is both terrifying and exciting. Diana finds nothing that is conformable; even the familiarity of war is not to be found here, for, ironically, there is nothing to destroy.

The boundless forest also fills Diana with doubt, as it also implies disorder and chaos. Northrop Frye writes about the "tone of deep terror in regard to nature,"16 and how it affects the imagination.

> The human mind has nothing but human and moral values to cling to if it is to preserve its integrity or even

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16 Frye, Northrop. The Bush Garden, Toronto: Anansi Press, 1971, p. 225.

> its sanity, yet the vast unconsciousness of nature in front of it seems an unanswerable denial of those values.17

Hollingsworth's depiction of the impact of wilderness on the human consciousness redefines Frye's analysis by incorporating the notion of gender. The threat of the wilderness accentuates the protagonists' feelings of vulnerability and dependency as women. They suddenly realize that they have little control over the development of their future lives placed in the hands of men they hardly know. The women are unable to articulate a sense of identity in their new environment, as Diana reveals. "It's going to take time isn't it? Getting the hang of...[Makes an expansive gesture.]" (39) To Ruth and Diana, the wilderness becomes a reflection of the male social environment in which they are without place and which they cannot fully comprehend. For just as they have no access to the trackless wilderness, they are powerless within the confines of their husbands' social environment.

Hollingsworth uses the fragmentation of language to emphasize the women's psychological displacement and lack of control. The wilderness evokes feelings within the women which seem to surface for the first time; feelings that are so unfamiliar they cannot fully communicate them. Both Ruth and Diana try to convey their sense of disorientation through inarticulate images which reveal the lack of coherence of their

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17 Frye. p. 225

inner worlds in relation to the outside world. Ruth tries to express her own perception but her thoughts, too, disintegrate into incoherent utterances. "...It's all so...so..." (42)

To escape from the feeling of helplessness evoked by the wilderness, Ruth and Diana cling to the security of domestic life. Ruth perceives the retreat into the domestic realm as a refuge. "Oh, it'll be all right--as soon as I see Dave--as soon as I see my house. He's going to love Rita." (39-40) Diana also escapes into the sanctuary she imagines marriage will be. "They'll be waiting for us--as long as we love them nothing else matters." (42)

The reliance on romantic love and the refuge of domesticity is a reiteration of the feminist claim that women, by internalizing male propaganda, have helped to maintain their exclusion from public society. In so doing, Janeway observes, women have "bought in" to the social mythology whereby they trade "private power in return for public submission. This is the regular, orthodox bargain by which men run the world and allow women to rule in their own place."18 For Ruth and Diana, this belief in the comfort and security of domesticity is an escape from the outside world in which they have no place.

However, all three women find their husbands do not offer protection and security, but isolation and domestic oppression.

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18 Janeway, Elizabeth. Man's World Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mytholgy, New York: Morrow, 1971, p. 56.

Ruth has come to Canada with the intention of assimilating into Dave's world. She finds, however, that Dave is without a job and they are forced to live in his mother's house. Dave is uncomfortable around the new baby and sees her as Ruth's responsibility. When Ruth tells him about her three a.m. feedings, he replies, "Well, just as long as you do it quietly." (75)

The play shifts back in time from the train ride in 1945 to the three women's lives in Europe prior to, and during the war. The year is 1938, and Ruth, Diana and Luce reflect upon the future of their lives. The shared consciousness of the three women is explored as the structure of the play dissolves into inner reflections through overlapping dialogue. Ruth reveals her secret desires for romantic love. "When I get married, I'll have a bedroom with a dressing table with three mirrors..." (47)

The use of inner monologue and stream of consciousness expresses the private emotional level of female experience, adding a dimension of fantasy to the realism of the play. By revealing her inner world, Diana shows that her daydreams are without focus. On one level, she dreams about the excitement of being a pilot, like her brother. "Now Hugh's been called up...I wouldn't mind being a pilot, if he can do it why can't I?" (46) She then slips into dreaming about foreign men, and the excitement they offer, like the men she met in Heidelberg.

"...frightfully...masculine...in that sort of...German way." (47) Both Ruth and Diana's retreat into romantic love exemplifies the feminist notion that romantic love, as "the pivot of women's oppression",19 prevents women from achieving a state of autonomy. Luce, on the other hand, believes in her own destiny, and states, "I want to go to America!" (47) where she believes she can become a singing star.

The three women express different levels of female experience: Ruth exemplifies female identity waiting to be shaped by male experience, as she associates inner fulfillment with obtaining a husband. Luce represents the potential for female autonomy and the belief in individuality outside the boundaries of social expectations. Diana displays characteristics of both women. She possesses the desire to develop her potential, but she retreats into dreaming about exotic men as a way of achieving her identity. Ruth and Diana's inability to construct an identity outside romance expresses Shulamith Firestone's depiction of "inauthentic"20 female experience, "so saturated with male bias."21

When Diana meets Paul in England in 1941, she is intrigued by the fact that he is a communist and wants to end "bourgeois tyranny." (51) Paul personifies the excitement of the exotic

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19 Firestone, Shulamith. The Dialectic of Sex, New York: Morrow, 1970, p. 126.

20 Ibid. p. 166.

21 Ibid. p. 157.

and foreign which Diana longs for, expresssing Canadian nationalist sentiment and the rebellion against colonial domination. "When this war's over there's a few things gonna change...it's the end of imperialism, all that stuff's dead. Canadians aren't licking any more boots..." (52) Although Paul envisions an end to tyranny, he does not include the power structures of patriarchy as part of imperialism. Nor does he question the limitations of patriarchy in his search for Canadian freedom from imperialism.

Hollingsworth appropriates the insight of Susan Mann Trofimenkoff who claims that because nationalism is "a political idea,"22 within the patriarchal framework, it has historically excluded women. Trofimenkoff shows how historians like Carl Berger focus on Canadian nationalism within a pastoral and patriarchal context.

> These men saw wheat and soldiers springing full grown out of the Canadian prairies. It did not occur to them that the evolution of liberty and self-government, so much admired, might entail women. Nor did they spot any women among the factories and the slums of the industrial order they so much despised. Perhaps there is more than the first world war to explain the gradual irrelevance of imperialism in Canada.23

As Canadians fighting the war, Chuck, Dave and Paul perceive their country as the land of opportunity within the pastoral

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22 Trofimenkoff, Susan Mann. "Nationalism, Feminism and Canadian Intellectual History," Canadian Literature, 83 (Winter 1979) p. 16.

23 Ibid. p.11.

dream, a recurring theme in the Canandian imagination, as Frye witnesses.

> The nostalgia for a world of peace and protection, with a spontaneous response to the nature around it, with a leisure and composure not to be found today, is particularly strong in Canada.24

Paul's enthusiasm sparks Diana's imagination as she herself is searching for excitement. But as she lacks self-awareness and has no authentic goals of her own, this leads her to live vicariously through men like Paul. Diana tells Paul that she wanted to be a pilot in the WAF, so she could explore the Amazon, but her mother convinced her to join the police force as it was "safer." Diana had been enrolled in a secretarial college hoping to become a foreign secretary, but the school closed down during the war. She is desperate to get away from England and find something meaningful in her life. "I mean who wants to stick around here all their life?" (50)

When Diana meets Paul three years later, in 1944, he proposes marriage to her. She realizes that marrying Paul and going to Canada would mean breaking ties with her family and eradicating her past. "I can't. You don't understand. They'd never forgive me. My parents ... I could never come back here." (72) But Diana does marry Paul, thus giving up her past identity. Although Diana is afraid of severing the ties with

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24 Frye. p. 239.

her family, she also sees marriage to Paul and emigration to Canada as a means of escaping the limitations of her social milieu.

To all three women Canada represents the chance to start a new life. But Canada, with its colonial connection to Britain, is equally dominated by patriarchal tradition. For the three women characters, Canada becomes the inversion of the pastoral myth. Contrary to the male immigrant's quest for prosperity through conquering the land, what Northrop Frye calls "the vision of a social ideal,"25 Ruth and Diana are drawn to Canada by their belief in the myth of eternal marital happiness; hence the title "Ever Loving." Both Ruth and Diana's pastoral image of Canada embraces the myth of romantic love. The women come to Canada hoping they have found "prince charming" and will live "happily ever after" in a land of peace and protection. So for Ruth and Diana, the vast unspoilt Canadian environment exudes opportunity and escape from constraint. However, the desire for escape ends in further confinement, because the pastoral myth and the quest for "opportunity" sought in the New World is designated for men. Thus all three women in Canada find themselves assuming their husbands' identities and their social status.

Like Diana, Ruth also meets her future husband, Dave, in

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25 Frye. p. 238.

1941. Ruth is in England pruning bushes as part of the war effort, when she meets Dave who paints an idyllic portrait of life in the Canadian wilderness. Ruth's imagination is fired by his description of endless summers at the cottage by a lake, and she starts to fantasize about Canada as the pastoral dream. She imagines an abundance of roses growing around their cottage door, and roasting a moose Dave trapped. Her pastoral dream is connected to romantic love, envisioning Dave as an adoring husband. "I can't take my hands off you. You're the best wife a man could have." (58)

Before they emigrate, Canada is a symbol of potentiality and opportunity. Luce, an upper-class young woman, dreams of going to America to become a singing star. To marry an American seems a way out of Luce's Italian sexist society where she has no sense of place. It is through Chuck, a Canadian of Italian descent, that Luce has the opportunity to discard her old identity and pursue her dream of becoming a singing star in New York. However, Luce is unaware that Canada is not part of the United States and that Halifax is a far cry from New York City. Luce is seduced by Chuck's description of Canada which incorporates the American dream of success with the myth of romantic love. "Canada's where it's happening. You better belive it. I'll show it to you, listen, I'll go and see your papa. Listen--you're gonna sing. You better do it over there." (65) Chuck then romantically puts his arm around Luce. "You're

a nice quiet Italian girl, with a sense of humour. You're a beautiful girl, you know that?" (66) Luce falls for Chuck's glamorous depiction of Canada, igniting her desire to escape from the restrictive position of women in Italian society.

> Luce: Here women is making only bambini, more bambini! Is nothing other to make. In America...[Dreams herself into perfect English.] For Christ's sake tell those people to stop following me...and there is no one can tell me I can't smoke. It is my voice. Mine. My apartment. My manager. I'm just too busy. And I don't give autographs! (47)

But what she does not realize is that Chuck also has a stereotyped perception of women. Although he jokes about his father's advice: "You marry nice Italian girl, Carlo, you never have to clean your own shoes again," (65) Chuck is shown to possess the same perception of wifely duties. Luce, instead of attaining the American dream of stardom, ends up in an Italian ghetto in Halifax living on top of her father-in-law's pizza business, confined to a one-room apartment where she is expected to be a traditional Italian wife.

Luce differs from the two other women immigrants in her belief that, through the American dream, she can achieve success as a singer. But as her perception of the American dream is intertwined with the myth of romantic love, she believes that she can attain her success by marrying an American. "I marry with American man. You come to bed, Yank?" (47) However, Luce's fantasy is short-lived, as she finds that marriage with Chuck entails submission to the conventional

duties expected of a wife. She realizes she must reject both her patriarchal marriage and motherhood in order to become a success.

All three women find frustration and insecurity in their marriages, and are unable to adapt to their husbands' social setting. As in Mary Humphrey Baldridge's Photographic Moment, the unhappy marriages of the three women accentuate their loss of place. As part of the "immigrant exile" motif in Canadian literature, the female characters struggle against an environment that produces disappointment and failure. Atwood makes reference to the "swelling ranks of Canadian victims"26 found in works of fiction like Adele Wiseman's The Sacrifice, John Marlyn's Under the Ribs of Death, and Brian Moore's The Luck of Ginger Coffey. As part of the immigrant's sense of alienation and exile, "Canada stands always ready not only to manufacture and export failure but to attract it and provide for it an appropriate setting."27

What makes Margaret Hollingsworth's interpretation of the alienation and failure of the immigrant unique is that it is clearly linked to gender. Thus for Ruth, Diana, and Luce, failure is shown to be induced by their inferior positions as women, dominated by unambitious and parochial men.

As an expression of the pastoral dream, Paul sees Diana as the traditional farmer's 'help-mate', imagining Diana in his

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26 Atwood. Survival, p. 151.

27 Ibid. p. 157.

grandmother's apron baking her recipes for bread. Paul's pastoral utopia includes the identification with patriarchal power: the divine wisdom of the fathers.

> Us and the land. I'm talking about the land. My father knew that all the time--I wouldn't listen. Well, I'm listening now. [Pause.] When you've been here a bit longer you'll see. It's the key to Canada. This is peace... (77)

Like all three men in the play, Paul takes for granted that Diana will accept his choices as her own. Just as he must conquer and mold the land, so he assumes that he can shape Diana's identity. Illustrating the "Nature-as-Woman"28 metaphor in the Canadian literary imagination, Paul perceives the land as a "patient lover", (77) waiting to be shaped by male experience. Henry Kreisel sees the exploitation and conquest of the land as an expression of individual identity.

> To conquer a piece of the continent, to put one's imprint upon virgin land, to say, "Here I am, for that I came," is as much a way of defining oneself, of proving one's existence, as is Descarte's cogito, ergo sum.29

In a further analysis, Kreisel makes an analogy of conquering nature as an act of rape:

> The breaking of the land becomes a kind of rape, a passionate seduction. The earth is at once a willing and unwilling mistress, accepting and rejecting her seducer, the cause of his frustration and fulfilment, and either way the shaper and controller of his mind, exacting servitude.30

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28 Atwood. Survival, p. 202.

29 Kreisel. p. 260.

30 Ibid. p. 261.

Although Kreisel does not make any reference to male domination of women as a way of achieving male superiority and power, his analogy makes this association quite evident. Nature as woman exists to fulfill and replenish male desire, and both nature and woman accept and reject their conqueror as a "willing and unwilling mistress." It is only when 'Nature-Woman' resists male power that she becomes unnatural, with "a sterile virginity"31 associated with frigidity and death, like Hester in Ringwood's Still Stands the House, and Greta in Sheila Watson's The Double Hook.

To Diana, the male desire to dominate the land and produce fertile ground is a foreign idea, for all she sees is "Dead grass."(76) Forced to be part of the reality Paul has chosen, Diana sees the wilderness as a symbol of her dislocation and isolation. Cut off from her past, she is unable to find a sense of definition in a lifestyle not of her own choosing. "Anything else but not this--it's just wilderness." (77) Realizing that Paul is in a position of power over her, she becomes disturbingly aware of her own helplessness and entrapment. "I don't know what I'm going to do...please... please...I can't go back Paul. I'd never be able to hold my head up." (78) Hollingsworth's depiction of women's oppression in relation to the prairie pastoral dream is an original restatement of Adrienne Rich's analysis of patriarchy as the reign of "the fathers."

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31 Atwood. Survival, p. 201.

> Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men--by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.32

Paul, however, by his lack of success as a farmer, fails to live up to the patriarchal tradition of the Father he worships. Although Diana is without economic power, she is the one who has the ambition to make the farm a success, and it is she who does the manual labour on the farm when Paul would rather go bowling.

> DIANA: I wanted to clean the truck tonight. I haven't had time to--we can't all sit around dreaming of the perfect farm. Somebody has to do the work! (82)

Diana would like to have a child but they have been unable to have one. Diana sees motherhood as a way of finding meaning in her life and she has made inquiries about adoption. "If we don't then I...[Pause.] I don't see much point in slaving like this." (85) Paul is against adoption, associating children with his ancestral inheritance. But Diana cannot wait, as she feels motherhood will give her the structure and definition her life lacks. Unlike Luce whose rejection of motherhood increases her autonomy, Diana, stifled by her unfulfilled marriage, finds her childless position only increases her insularity.

Like Diana, Ruth comes to Canada hoping to find identity in the security of a happy domestic life. And similar to Diana,

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32 Rich, Adrienne. Of Woman Born, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc. 1976, p. 57.

she finds that she must adapt to the social realm of her husband. But unlike Diana, Ruth passively accepts Dave's choices as her own without question. She tries to make the best of life, but it is in moments of solitude that Ruth expresses her sense of exclusion and her feelings of frustration. In one scene, Dave tells her she must lose weight so he can buy her a strapless gown and take her out.

By refusing to take Ruth out under the guise that she is too fat, Dave isolates her from the public realm and keeps her confined to the domestic realm because she does not represent his idea of female beauty. By separating Ruth from the public world, Dave is guilty of fostering "social and psychological segregation."33 Another form of Ruth's entrapment comes from Dave's stereotyped image of women, another "ancient instrument of containment,"34 which keeps Ruth further cloisterd in his limited perception of her. It is only in solitude that Ruth asserts herself, expressing ner helpless position in the domestic world and her disbarment from the social realm of power to which Dave has free access.

> [Sits for a moment, looking after him.] Lose weight? You try losing weight when you're always pregnant. [To the door through which he left.] You don't have a girlfriend, do you Dave? Dave? (82)

Ruth's experience of motherhood as a form of oppression expounds the feminist notion that under patriarchy "motherhood

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33 Storrie, Kathleen. ed. Women: Isolation and Bonding, Toronto: Methuen, 1987, p. 4.

34 Ibid. p. 9.

as institution"35 has undermined the possibility for female development. Through "the continuation of the species and the care of the home,"36 women like Ruth are doomed to "immanence"37 and subject to male volition.

As in the Old World they left behind, the three protagonists find it is difficult to shake off the inherited traditions of patriarchy, discovering that they are sundered from the public realm and the power it bestows. Through their insularity, the women are united by a shared inner world where their verbal imagery becomes an expression of their private selves, separate from the external worlds of their husbands.

DIANA: Don't go bowling tonight. [PAUL leaves.] You do still love me, Paul? Paul?
RUTH: You're not going out with someone else are you, Dave?
DIANA: The edge of the world. The edge... [Buries her face in her hands.]
RUTH: Don't leave me on my own.
LUCE: Why must I always be waiting? That is not why I came here. To wait. (83)

The partition of male/female experience in the play is related to the separation of "social landscape"38 by what

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35 Rich. p. 13.

36 Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex, New York: A.A. Knopf Inc. 1953. Vintage Books Edition, 1974. p. 480.

37 Ibid.

38 Storrie. p. 1.

Kathleen Storrie calls "the ecology of gender."39 The specific spacing of men and women has created what feminists like Kate Millett see as "two cultures,"40 male and female, both inhabiting different psychological and social spheres.

As in her plays The Apple in the Eye and War Babies, Hollingsworth explores the dichotomy of male/female realities--the external, unemotional world of the women's husbands, and the inner, private world the women escape to. The social landscape of Diana, Ruth and Luce is similar in that they are relegated to a powerless position separate from the external public realm of male experience.

It is only Luce who is able to reject the conventions of patriarchy and begin to forge her own definition of female selfhood in the New World. Only by breaking out of the realm of isolation Chuck has placed her in, does Luce begin to become part of the public domain. By going to Toronto and becoming a media figure Luce succeeds in breaking through the public/private boundaries, the "cultural dichotomy"41 of male/female experience. Because Luce is not hindered by the myth of romantic love the way Ruth and Diana are, she identifies with her individual self, and not with the imposed perceptions of what she should be. But Luce's first seven years in Halifax were spent living a life determined by her husband,

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39 Storrie. p. 1.

40 Millett. p. 31.

41 Firestone. p. 161.

Chuck. She dreams of achieving her own independent status, meanwhile feeling trapped in a life over which she has no control. Luce had left Italy to escape from the patriarchal conception of women only to find herself stifled by the same definition. "I cannot to go back to Italy-they also they keep me in chains. I cannot to leave." (88)

The notion of class and race in relation to gender offers a further dimension to the three women's experiences in Canada. Ruth is from a working-class background and is shown to be more overwhelmed by her husband's power than is Diana or Luce. As a working-class woman, Ruth has less knowledge and opportunity than Diana and Luce to achieve success within her social realm. Diana's upper-class background gives her the confidence to question her husband's authority, but not enough to repudiate his power. Thus both Ruth and Diana are depreciated by their husbands' chauvinistic attitudes and the male power they take for granted, although Ruth's oppression is shown to be greater than that of Diana.

Like Diana, Luce's upper-class background also leads her to question her husband's world, but it is her belief in herself as a singer that allows her to defy social expectations. Like Diana, Luce feels there is "no culture" in her husband's parochial social milieu. But Luce articulates a deeper understanding concerning the limitations of her husband, Chuck.

She touches on the notion that he himself is shackled by the traditions of patriarchy and is unable to perceive Luce other than subject to himself.

> LUCE: Many things I did not know how to say Chuck. No... was not language. Not English, not Italian...how to make you understand...How to make you hear when you do not know how to listen. [Pause.] Not listen to words but...[Reaches down inside herself, then gives up, shrugs.] Ach--the whole what you are is... Canadian. (92-93)

The fact that Luce does not speak English well intensifies her sense of exclusion. She is also ostracized as an upper-class woman living amongst working-class Italians. Because Luce resists integration with her social setting, she is seen as an outsider and called a "fascist" by the Italian peasant immigrants.

Ruth and Diana, on the other hand, are in the privileged position of being bonded to British influence, but because they are constrained by their patriarchal marriages, gender becomes their greatest barrier to integration into society. Although Luce is limited by nationality because she is not British, she is not impeded by notions of gender. As she is unfettered by society's definition of female experience, this allows her, unlike Ruth and Diana, to leave her stultified existence and search for success in Toronto. However, because Luce is not British, she must struggle for access into English Canadian society, and begins in the marginal position as a broadcaster on an Italian radio station.

John Moss writes about the "Anglophone exile"42 as experiencing a distinct sense of dislocation different from other European immigrants:

> Their Canadian adaptation tends to appear as barbarous distortion, parody, ignorance, or contempt. His exile is further aggravated by the apparent indifference of the resident populace to the degeneration of values and desecration of ideals, as he sees them.43

The play augments this theory by proclaiming that the women's perception of Canadian society is influenced by gender. Thus the women's apparent disdain for Canada is linked to the frustration generated by their subordinate station as women bound to their husbands' low-ranking social positions. Both Luce and Diana's upper-class background makes them perceive Canadians as uncultivated and devoid of values. Luce has only contempt for Chuck and his native town of Halifax. "Is not even possible to drink wine in a restaurant, is possible smoke opium, but is not possible drink wine--is hypocrite town--no culture." (92)

Diana finds Lethbridge without sophistication and the community without the will to develop. "If only somebody had a sense of humour! They're not even interested in local politics, in getting anything done. They seem to expect to suffer." (84)

Ruth, on the other hand, does not criticize Canada's lack of culture or values, but, rather, scorns the unfriendliness and lack of joy she encounters. Ruth's idea of happiness is tied to

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42 Moss. p. 64.

43 Ibid.

her warm memories of Scotland, as she finds Canadians, like Dave and the local community, are without gaiety.

> RUTH: We haven't been out in six months.
> DAVE: Who's fault is that? Look at you-- you should make friends.
> RUTH: Who with? I can't even have people in... She...
> DAVE: Sssssssh.
> RUTH: Well, in Scotland you can just go and knock on anyone's door and they'll go down to the pub with you. You won't even dance now...In Scotland they're kicking up their heels 'til they're eighty. No one here even picks up a couple of spoons and clacks them. Where are your songs? (95)

As native-born Canadians, Chuck and Paul interpret their wives' criticisms of Canada as European superiority, perceiving the British and the European as what Moss calls the "agent of imperial consciousness."44 Chuck is threatened by Luce's disapproval of Canadian society: "You think you corner the market in sensibility because you're some high class dago bitch? Mussolini was an Italian." (93)

In her quest for self-realization, Luce finds inspiration through the affinity with successful actresses like Lotte Lenya and Marlene Dietrich. Chuck can only see these German actresses as a "bunch of spies," (88) saying that "Krauts aren't women." (88) He voices the inability to conceive a female definition of reality, an assumption that is clouded by a "male bias"45 in the spectrum of patriarchy. Luce confronts this preconceived notion, "No...they are women. They are success " (88) Chuck discloses

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44 Moss. p. 65.

45 Firestone p. 157.

his antagonism towards Luce's pursuit of individuality by tearing up the pictures of the women she venerates. For what they represent most for Luce is a reality outside the domestic abode, separate from Chuck.

This female parity echoes Firestone's belief in a "female reality,"46 as an alternative to the "sexually biased culture"47 in the patriarchal tradition that has left women with a tenuous self-awareness. Gerda Lerner envisions an end to female alienation through the alliance of women's universal recognition of a meaningful past:

> ...moving out from a world in which one is born to marginality, to a past without meaning, and a future determined by others--into a world in which one acts and chooses, aware of a meaningful past and free to shape one's future.48

Although careers as movie stars and singers can be considered stereotypical forms of success for women, the very act of achieving public recognition outside marriage and family disengages women, like Luce, from their conventional role.

Like Luce, Diana is propelled by the desire to succeed. Diana has great plans to go into fish farming and "change the economy of the region." (90) But Paul is made to feel inadequate by her inspirited self-motivation. He himself is unambitious and afraid to take risks and has cancelled their fish farming project

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46 Firestone. p. 167.

47 Ibid.

48 Lerner, Gerda. The Female Experience, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc. 1977, p. xxiv.

without consulting Diana. Because Diana is without economic power, she is prevented from continuing the project alone.

Paul then turns his attention towards the English flower seeds Diana has had imported from Britain, relating them to Diana's intrusion into the male domain of his prairie farm.

> PAUL: Where did you get these?
> DIANA: My mother sent them. I was planning to make a real English garden.
> PAUL: You're not supposed to import seeds, you know that?
> DIANA: Just a few flowers.
> PAUL: It's the law. It's the law of this country...
> DIANA: Since when were you such a great upholder of the law? (90)

On another level, the British seeds symbolize colonial interference, exposing Paul's own sense of insecurity as part of "colonial exile,"49 whereby the individual feels alienated by "the force of an external presence."50 From Diana's perspective, by growing an English garden she attempts to reshape the prairie wilderness to her own design. By cancelling the fish farm and opposing her plans for a garden, Paul denies Diana any form of power over the prairie farm. On the subject of women's public power, Stacey and Price observe:

> Increased autonomy for women threatens men not only by the increased competition from women seeking to enter the public domain, but also by a decline in the support and services that they expect as individuals from women in their families.51

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49 Moss. p. 54.

50 Ibid.

51 Stacey, Margaret and Marion Price. Women, Power, and Politics. London: Tavistock Publications, 1981, p. 7.

Diana affiliates her need to create a sense of place with the reclamation of her British past. Thus the archetype of the exile is given a further dimension: Diana becomes a symbol of colonial domination to Paul as well as the threat of female intervention in the male world.

By creating her English country garden, Diana attempts to gain control over what she perceives as the unnurtured and boundless Canadian wilderness. By molding the landscape into the order of a country garden, Diana is at the same time trying to construct a female territory within her husband's prairie setting--the terrain of male activity. Redefining the environment from a female perspective "signals women's appropriation of wilderness as feminized space, the excess term which unsettles the boundaries of male power."52

> It frightens me Paul, just when I think I know you... [Paul turns away, about to leave.] Well, I need flowers. They're part of my heritage. We've always had flower gardens. Over here they don't even have fences--hedges...There's no history. I want my son to have a sense of his past. (91)

Paul, on the other hand, ridicules her desire for an English garden because he is threatened by what he perceives as her British superiority. "Only the English would put their history behind a fence." (91) Diana equates Paul's inability to understand with the lack of Canadian history. "...You don't even know what it is...that sense of...of continuity with...everything that's gone before..." (91) Paul asserts that Kiev is his

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52 Howells. p. 18.

"history." Diana begins to realize how absurd Paul's statements are, as he has never been to Kiev. She then touches on the real issue: that Paul is isolating her from her past and disbarring her from an equal position in his social domain.

> ...You know what I'm talking about...you brought me here and wiped out my past. Are you going to tell me you've stopped loving me now? (91)

Paul tries to justify his behavior, telling Diana, "well, you knew what you were in for before you married me!" (91) There is a long pause, as Paul realizes how he deceived her. Paul softens towards Diana, and for the first time apologizes to her. " I've led you a hell of a dance, haven't I?" (91)

The scene ends with Diana and Paul in each others' arms, but it is a shaky reconciliation as none of the problems have been resolved. Diana does not question the gender power structures which have led to her helpless condition and Paul's autocratic stature. She does not scrutinize her lack of power and exclusion from the public domain as a manifestation of male domination of women. Instead of focusing on the real issue--her own powerlessness, Diana retreats into the myth of romantic love, thus giving up the struggle for autonomy and access to the social arena.

Luce, also feeling stultified by the limitations of her husband, soon realizes that Canada is not the same as America. And surrounded by the "fish and fog" of the maritimes, the American dream is unobtainable. After spending seven years in

Halifax with Chuck, she discovers she cannot rely on him to become a success. "I cannot wait for you any longer Chuck. I am more than thirty years old. Time is passing --too much time."(93) To obtain the American dream Luce sees she must go to Toronto, the most 'American' city in Canada. Luce comes to the ultimate realization that only by relinquishinng the security of her life with Chuck will she unearth her true being.

> So this time I go. Maybe this time I do go off my head ...this time I go as far as I can. I find out what is inside me. (93)

Ruth and Diana, on the other hand, remain in their marriages, and continue to experience feelings of isolation and frustration. To emphasize the fragmented condition of Ruth and Diana's inner world, Hollingsworth shifts in and out of each woman's consciousness, breaking the barriers of time and space.

In 1957 on New Year's Eve, both Ruth and Diana, in solitude, try to come to terms with their precarious identity in Canada. Ruth writes a letter to her parents in Scotland and attempts to put on a brave front--that Dave loves children and that people in Canada have "lots of money." But her letter reveals her adaptation as incomplete.

> Well, it's the end of another year, and I've a few minutes before I get on with Dave's tea. I wanted to write--you'll be wondering why I haven't written--well to tell you the truth, the sixth one's on the way--Dave's real pleased, he loves children. I'm sending a picture of us all, that's me in the back. (97)

The end of Ruth's letter unveils her deep-rooted loneliness and her longing to go home as she sits drinking alone.

> [Takes a drink.] Tell Angus to hurry up and come up on the races so he can send me a ticket to come home. I miss you...no. [Drinks.] Love from Ruthie. (97)

Diana, left alone while Paul is visiting his father in Saskatchewan, elucidates the private turmoil of her adjustment to Canadian life:

> ...There are times--there were times, when I'd look at the sky and wonder if it would be the same sky that they were seeing back home, or was it some other planet? It was so flat...and so cold in winter--the first year was the worst. The way you could hear the wolves and coyotes. I never told him...I thought I was on the edge of the world--the flatness under the snow. (99)

Diana recalls the terror and alienation evoked by the wilderness, so distant from the familiarity of English society. But she finds herself even more of a foreigner in her home land. Diana is finally able to articulate her sense of insignificance in relation to the suffocating isolation of her prairie environment. However, this awareness does not lead Diana into a position of autonomy.

> ...Then when I went back nome I couldn't sleep for the traffic noises...and we didn't even live near a main road. I was--funny how ashamed I still am of those old feelings--lonely. [Shivers, catches her arms around herself.] But this is my country now...I belong here. Paul...[Looks around, suddenly scared.] Paul, don't stay away. (99)

By accepting Canada as her home, Diana assimilates into her husband's world. Diana's prairie setting is an endorsement of

Paul's world; thus she does not achieve an individual perception of her own reality. Reminiscent of Mrs Bentley in As For Me and My House, and Ruth in Ringwood's Still Stands the House, the wilderness mirrors Diana's own vulnerability, forcing her to turn to her husband, Paul, for safety and protection. By accommodating herself to Paul's social domain Diana gives up her past identity and adopts his as her own.

Ruth's position as an exile is the most tragic. As we have seen, her situation as the victim comes not from the external world of Canadian society, but from her inexorable domestic world and the cruel indifference of her husband, Dave. Dave refuses to let her go to Scotland, claiming ostensibly that they don't have the money. Even when Ruth wins prize money in a contest and makes plans to take a trip home to visit her family, Dave tells her he has already spent the money on a car. "This way we can have an extra half hour in bed in the morning. I won't have to take the bus." (87) Ruth points out that she will still have to get up as usual with the children.

Ruth becomes increasingly marginalized and her status as an outcast intensifies as she must go out alone. She comes home drunk, only to find she is locked out.

> Come on out and hit me. They were singing Scottish songs... They asked us to come back next Friday--me and Molly McLaren. We danced...on the tables. We did so! Aye. [Giggles.] They don't really like us here, me and Molly. They don't like us, 'cos we're not Canadians. And I'll tell you something. [Giggles.] We don't like them either. [Sticks out her tongue childishly.] (102)

Like Diana, she associates her sense of displacement with the Canadian experience. They have no clear insight into what Canadian society might offer, just as they have no concrete knowledge of themselves as women, except what has been defined by their husbands. Contrary to Diana and Ruth, Luce believes that she can attain her own definition of Canada, and it is this conviction that separates her most profoundly from the two other women.

Luce, on New Year's Eve, is broadcasting in Toronto after five years of living independently. Unlike that of Ruth and Diana, the inner consciousness of Luce is not revealed; instead she is shown as a public figure broadcasting on radio. It is not until several years later, in 1966, that Luce's destiny is further revealed. She runs into Chuck on St-Catherine Street in Montreal. She has just recorded an album and is currently rehearsing a cabaret show in Toronto. Chuck has married the girl who used to work in his father's restaurant and has two sons. He is in Montreal trying to perform at local hotels. Luce offers to help him get a contract at the Holiday Inn, thus proving her success has been greater than his. "Maybe I can do something for you. Here. [Gives him her card.] Why don't you give me a call when you get into town." (101)

The last scene of the play sees the fusion of the three streams of female consciousness. The structure of the play synthesizes this amalgamation, as the last scene is a

continuation of the first scene of the play which began in 1970, with Ruth, Dave, Diana and Paul gathered together in Niagara Falls. While the two couples eat their dinner, Luce sits at a table nearby, listening to Chuck play the piano. Although they are divorced, they are shown to be friends. Luce has just obtained a job for Chuck at the Holiday Inn in Toronto and he is performing his last show.

The dinner conversation provides the external setting in which the two couples discuss their lives. On this superficial level Diana urges Paul to tell them how he has been "King Pin" in his bowling league, and then proceeds to tell Ruth and Dave, "It's been an enormously ... full life." (103) Her tone suggests the inner uncertainty below the surface reality, and on a deeper level, the uncertainty of her own identity. Dave confronts Diana's ambivalence. "Full?" Diana is unable to elaborate, thus realizing the insincerity of her remark, as she motions to Paul to finish her fractured train of thought. Paul confirms what Diana is saying: "You're dead right," (103) and then confidentially reveals the truth of their relationship to Ruth. "We hardly see each other." (103)

Diana appears to have integrated into the prairie social setting. The farm is now fairly lucrative; she has become involved in various committees in an attempt to forge her own identity. Paul is shown to resent her involvement in all these activities, confiding in Ruth, "But you try living with someone

who heads up just about every goddamned committee that's going!" (104)

The dialogue swings from superficial chit chat where they try to impress one another to the fragmented revelations of inner consciousness where intimate details of the hidden frustration in their lives is exposed. Paul and Ruth dance and Dave and Diana begin to unravel their lives on a more personal level. Dave confronts Diana about her life in Canada, hoping to get her to speculate on what her life might have been like if she had stayed in England. Through his probing, Dave reveals how he perceives her coming to Canada strictly in terms of the war, saying that she would not have come otherwise. Diana describes her reasons for coming beyond the external concerns of the war and touches upon the socio-political reasons for the three women's emigration. If she had stayed in England, she would have been trapped in a lifestyle dictated by her upper-class social milieu. "I'd've been married to some stuffy stockbroker probably." (105) There is a sense of irony as Diana articulates the all-encompassing power of patriarchy. She has merely exchanged one patriarchal system for another; escaping from one imprisonment only to find herself in another.

Dave's inquiry into Diana's inner world unites the inner consciousness of Diana and Ruth as his questions might just have been asked to his wife. "You don't think you'd'a been better off?" (105) As he continues to question Diana, his resentment of

British control over Canada multiplies. "How come you Brits always have to tell us what to do?" (105) Although he articulates the Canadian sense of displacement due to British domination, he is unaware of the female sense of inadequacy induced by patriarchal control. Dave fails to see the connection between the "national dependence"53 of Canada in the colonial tradition and women's historical dependence in patriarchy.

The three immigrant women share the same female consciousness, but only on an unconscious level: consciously, they are unaware of their deep-seated feelings. Ruth asks Luce for her autograph and mentions that they all met during the war. Luce replies that she and Chuck also met during the war. Realizing that Luce is also a war bride, Ruth remarks, "Everything... changes doesn't it?" (108) Their conversation ends and Ruth goes back to her table. But on a deeper level they are connected more than they realize: as women and as foreigners who experienced homologous feelings of alienation in their struggle for integration into a foreign setting. Luce is the only one who succeeds in breaking out of the patriarchal enclosure and is thus a symbol of Ruth and Diana's unrealized female potential. Diana continues to keep up appearances and talks about Paul's political activities. "Paul headed up our local campaign committee at the last election. We got to know Eugene Whelan

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53 Boag, Veronica Strong. "Cousin Cinderella: A Guide to Historical Literature Pertaining to Canadian Women," in Women in Canada, Marylee Stephenson, ed. Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Co. Ltd. 1977, p. 246.

personally, didn't we sweetie?" (108) But through their dinner conversation scattered portions of their private worlds emerge. When Paul questions why Ruth never went back to Scotland, she replies, "I was afraid I...I just might not've come back." (108) Ruth reveals to Diana that the children want her to leave Dave. She then begins to reflect upon her Scottish roots and wonders if the pianist (Chuck) knows any old songs. Ruth's blatant honesty makes Diana uncomfortable, and she tries to keep the conversation light. "Talking of going home, the last time I was in the old country they seemed to think I was some kind of hillbilly." (108) But Diana's remark unmasks her own extraneous loss of heritage, as she herself cannot go back. She has become a foreigner in her own country and is forced to embrace Canada as her place of refuge. But this inauguration into Canadian society is incomplete, just as integration within the boundaries of patriarchy is never absolute because it is a "sex-divided reality."54

Both Ruth and Diana's assimilation into Canadian society personifies the relinquishment of their individuality within the patriarchal mold. Luce, however, has managed to conceptualize her own definition of Canada as she has succeeded in creating her own individual status.

The death of Ruth's father symbolizes her broken ties with her past. However, her daughter Rita, represents her unacknowledged

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54 Firestone. p. 169.

female self, and her link with her motherland of Scotland. As Rita has a university degree, she is equipped to determine the individuality Ruth was denied. Diana, on the other hand, feels no such bond with her son who wants to learn Ukrainian and identifies more with his father's background.

Diana and Ruth's reflections are interrupted by the aggressivity of Dave who begins to feel threatened by the women's intimacy.

> I'm sick of hearing you run it down. It's the best goddamned country in ... You should be grateful to be here. All of you ... [Shouts.] All of you. I fought for Canada. It's the greatest goddamned country in the world, so what's the matter with you all? You name one that's better. Scotland? Don't make me laugh. England? It's a joke. (109-110)

Dave's resentment towards Ruth mirrors his own Canadian sense of hostility towards British control. But just as Canada has been an "exploited colony"55 by British and American imperialism, women also have been overshadowed by male domination. Dave fails to see that just as he feels inadequate in the face of colonial influence, Ruth feels without place in the face of patriarchal power.

Playwrights like John Coulter (Riel) and George Ryga, (The Ecstacy of Rita Joe and Indian), describe imperial domination by drawing a parallel between Indian exploitation by the white man and Canadian control by British and American powers. Ryga's vision expresses the "lack of authentic language"56 of the Cree

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55 Atwood. Survival, p. 41.

56 Watson, David. "An Interview with George Ryga," cited in Canadian Drama and the Critics, Conolly, L.W. ed. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987, p. 44.

Indians and on a national scale, the lack of an authentic language to articulate the distinctness of Canadian experience. However, Ryga recognizes only the Indian search for identity, overlooking the notion of gender as exemplifying the national search for identity.

The victimization of the native Indian has become a symbol for Canada as a "collective victim."57 This term encompasses the struggle for identity in the Canadian literary imagination. The 'collective victim' includes a "victimized country, a victimized minority group or a victimized indiviual."58 The oppression of women as a literary symbol adds another dimension to the evolution of the Canadian consciousness. The female "question of being authentic,"59 mirrors the national search for an "authentic language." The domination of Canada by British and American imperialism has impelled Canadians to seek national definitions "on our own terms."60 The influence of these external interferences has made Canadians struggle against becoming "carbon copies"61 of these powerful nations. Women playwrights like Margaret Hollingsworth stretch the boundaries of the dramatic imagination by expressing the need for an authentic

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57 Atwood. Survival, p. 36.

58 Ibid.

59 Firestone. p. 157.

60 Watson. Quoting George Ryga, cited in Canadian Drama and the Critics, p. 44.

61 Ibid.

female voice as part of the national literary search for identity.

As an expression of the lack of insight into female experience, Ruth's husband Dave can only perceive his personal inadequacy in relation to colonial rule and national dependence. By undermining Ruth's heritage, he reveals the depth of his indifference towards her alienation from her past. Ruth gets up to sneak a drink from her bottle hidden in her purse, her alcoholism being symptomatic of her non-being and silent domestic misery. Dave prevents her from going off to drink alone and coaxes her to make a toast to Canada, which is an ironic way of toasting her subordination in Canadian society.

Both Ruth and Diana accept Dave's resentment without responding to his scorn for their homeland in an attempt to praise Canada. Nor do the women allow his open hostility towards colonial domination to provoke their own frustration in being controlled by the male disposition. Diana shows her conformity to patriarchal values by raising her glass and toasting, "To us, to all of us, and to Canada." (110)

Now Dave perceives Ruth in connection with Canada. In the way he sees Canada as "the best goddamned country in the world," he now praises Ruth as having been "the best wife a man could have and I won't let any of you say any different." (110)

The final action of the play shows the two couples dancing while Luce and Chuck sing a duet. There is an ambiguous sense of

unity as the couples overlook the deeper implications of Dave's outburst and the passive response of both Diana and Ruth. Ruth's inertia personifies her severe state of oppression, one that has destroyed her ability to free herself.

There is a suggestion of irony at the end of the play as the two couples dance together, suggesting that Ruth and Diana have kept their marriages going by the illusion of romantic love. Their self-deception signifies their inabilty to perceive reality through their own eyes. By escaping into a romantic fantasy they need not face the pain of bringing their dissatisfaction into the open.

Luce, on the other hand, instead of living the romantic myth, is merely singing about it. As a symbol for the unattained female potential of Ruth and Diana, Luce has transcended the psychological boundaries that continue to confine their untapped resources.

2

Islands

In Islands, as in Ever Loving, the quest for female consciousness finds its expression in the imagery of wilderness. The protagonist's anxiety, her fear of non-being, force her to confront and overcome the dangers inherent in the physical environment. But unlike Ever Loving, where wilderness is synonymous with the male world, the wilderness in Islands offers the opportunity for female self-actualization, unhampered by the constraints imposed by patriarchal urban society.

The wilderness in Islands, then, sets the stage on which Muriel projects her inner world. By confronting the uncertainty of coping alone on a secluded island in British Columbia, Muriel is able to reject the trappings of social conventions. This escape from established structures offers the route towards self-discovery and is highly prevalent in Canadian literature. Margaret Atwood's Surfacing and Ringwood's play The Lodge, for example, both deal with the theme of escape to the wilds as a means of self-revelation. The "northern utopia,"1 the unspoilt wilderness, untainted by the corruption of 'southern' civilization, becomes the means of deliverance.

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1 Mithcham, Allison. The Northern Imagination: A Study of Northern Canadian Literature, Moonbeam, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1983, p. 21.

> ...the northern wilderness is a place where men and women in flight from what they feel are the decadent and sterile values of the 'South' may seek a heightened self-awareness -- perhaps even perceptions so transcendental as to be termed 'salvation.'2

In Islands, Hollingsworth expresses the flight from civilization through Muriel's escape northward to a secluded island in British Columbia, abandoning the stifling values of her mother's conventional world.

The escape to the wilderness in order to live the pioneer life is traditionally associated with male experience, whereas the role of women alone in the wilderness has often been that of victim. "Traditionally women have survived on the frontier as either wives or prostitutes--and therefore as followers, certainly not as trail-blazers."3 By fleeing from the corruption of civilization, Muriel repudiates the demands of patriarchal society, and finds the courage to define herself in a situation outside social roles and expectations. Diana's experience of the prairie wilderness in Ever Loving is quite different. Wilderness is part of Diana's entrapment within the patriarchal tradition, as is the "fish and fog" of Luce's confinement in Halifax with her husband, Chuck. In Islands, Hollingsworth expands her dramatic vision of the wilderness myth by incorporating the idea of female escape from patriarchal tradition towards the potential for new definitions offered by the wilderness.

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2 Mitcham. p. 17.

3 Ibid. p. 96.

The play Islands is a continuation of the play Alli Alli Oh, in which the relationship between Muriel and Alli, a woman Muriel rescues from a mental institution, is portrayed. While Alli Alli Oh focuses on the domestic oppression which leads to Alli's fragmented state of consciousness, Islands focuses on Muriel's attempt to rid herself of social obligations, which includes the demands of Alli. In Alli Alli Oh, Alli is shown to share in Muriel's search for identity, whereas in Islands, Muriel begins to reject Alli in an attempt to achieve her own autonomy.

The island emblemizes Muriel's attainment of a separate identity and her disconnection from the demands of others. By metaphorically representing the island as a sanctuary, Hollingsworth espouses Margaret Atwood's concept of "The Island."4 This implies the "island-as-body, self-contained, a Body Politic, evolving organically, with a heirarchical structure..."5 and is, in Atwood's view, the British symbol of refuge and security. To this Hollingsworth adds the Canadian myth of wilderness, implicit in which are the notions of escape and survival.

Thus Muriel's decision to live on the island symbolizes both the Canadian "spiritual survival"6 metaphor, and the British metaphor of island as haven and stronghold. By interiorizing

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4 Atwood. Survival. p. 32.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid. p. 33.

her struggle for survival against the external elements of the wilderness, Muriel takes on the responsibilty for her own process of development and salvation.

The opening scene of the play shows Muriel absorbed at her drawing board where she designs experimental techniques for her farm. Through Muriel's efforts to be self-sufficient in organizing her new life, Hollingsworth suggests the correlation between her protagonist's building her own farm and acquiring recognition of her own powers. Like the protagonist in The Tomorrow Box, by Anne Chislett, Muriel's farm gives her life meaning. On an individual level, in both plays, the women reject human relationships in an attempt to define their own sense of self in relation to the farm they manage.

On the secluded island, Muriel seeks to create a self-contained reality. The wilderness in Islands is an expression of what Howells sees as Canadian women writers' transformation of the national myth. Wilderness becomes "an image of female imaginative space in texts which both mirror the outside world and transform it into the interior landscape of the psyche."7 Muriel, uncertain about her identity in relation to society and her family, finds the untamed island a stimulating setting in which she can project her inner self.

In her social realm on the mainland of British Columbia, Muriel had no clear definition of self. In solitude on the island, Muriel is able to explore and penetrate her inner

7 Howells. p. 12.

female psyche without intrusion. Muriel's new definition of self is expressed in the shaping of her external reality and the defining of her female sense of place.

> I looked around here ... tried to take stock of the old place. I began to see ... how ... how unfocused I'd allowed myself to get. I'd started clearing a couple of spots, got a few head of stock, couple of hens, weatherproofed part of the barn, made a half-assed attempt at rewiring. Nothing carried through. I'd let myself get sloppy. [Waits for a response.] I took too much notice of other people. (126-127)

The building of her own house symbolizes Muriel's desire to create an identity outside the limitations of her mother's conventional milieu. Produced in 1977, Islands embodies the feminist quest for alternatives to women's traditional position according to patriarchal doctrine. Muriel embodies the feminist rejection of the conventional sex role stereotype of women, one that "assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male."8 Representative of sex role stereotypes within conventional society is Rose, Muriel's mother. When Rose comes to visit Muriel for the first time in five years, she is a reminder of the conformity from which Muriel has tried to escape.

> ROSE: You can't build a house. [MURIEL continues to work.] Not on your own.
> MURIEL: I'll get help. If I need it.
> ROSE: Your grandfather built our house. It nearly killed him. Look at your hands. [Pause.] I'm not against hard work. I've worked hard all my life. [Points at the blueprint.] That's man's work. [Long pause. MURIEL works.] (122)

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8 Millett. p. 26.

In the setting of the island, outside the boundaries of society, Muriel attempts to rid herself of the traditional role of women: one that perceives women as wives and mothers. This expression of a "sex-divided reality"9 has created what Michele Barrett sees as a "sexual division of labour, and accompanying ideologies of the appropriate meaning of labour for men and women..." 10 Rose, working within the domestic realm of the traditional female role, interprets her daughter's desire to live alone and work the land as a deviation from that role.

The dialogue in the play shifts from the level of surface reality as Rose talks about her new fiancé, Chuck, to the intimate probing of Muriel, who confronts her mother's social world.

ROSE: Oh, he's used to farm people. He was in the bank for thirty-five years. He said they'd have folded up without the farmers.
MURIEL: Sure, they milked every goddamn farmer for miles around. (122)

Muriel sees her mother's relationship with Chuck as part of the corruption of society from which she has fled. As a banker, Chuck was instrumental in exploiting the farmers and destroying their connection with the land. To Muriel, Rose's reality is one that is disconnected from the natural world, thus threatening to devastate natural life.

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9 Firestone. p. 169.

10 Barrett, Michele. "Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender," Feminist Criticism and Social Change : Sex, Class, and Race in Literature and Culture, eds. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt, New York and London: Methuen, 1985, p. 74.

MURIEL: [Points to a flower.] That's a protected species.
ROSE: I only took one or two. They're so pretty. They don't grow in Alberta, do they? I've never seen them.
MURIEL: If they did they'd have been wiped out years ago. [ROSE looks for something to do.] Why don't you pour yourself a drink? (123)

The violation of the natural environment is linked to the disruption of Muriel's private world of solitude on the island. By describing her life with Chuck, and their visit with his "married daughter" in Toronto, Rose attempts to revivify Muriel's acceptence of the traditional place of women in society. Muriel counterattacks by forcing her mother to question her own stereotypical notions of the female role she accepts as inviolable.

MURIEL: Did you know about the cockfights?
ROSE: He was a fine man.
MURIEL: On Wednesday nights. When you were at the Ladies' Auxiliary...
ROSE: On Wednesdays...I...
MURIEL: Well everyone else knew. They used to come to our place in droves. It was all very fast. Very hush-hush.
ROSE: I think I will make the chowder tonight. [ROSE brings a bucket in from the porch.] (124)

Rose is portrayed as the traditional mother who sacrifices her own individuality for the sake of the family. Her unquestioning acceptance of her role creates an illusion of harmony, thus concealing the truth behind a mask of assumed moral values.

In the natural setting of the wilderness, stimulated by the wild landscape far from the boundaries of established society,

Rose begins to reflect upon her role as a mother and wife. She reveals to Muriel for the first time that she knew about the illicit activities of Muriel's father.

ROSE: I used to dread Wednesdays.
MURIEL: You knew?
ROSE: I lived with him.
MURIEL: Well why didn't you...? (124)

Both Muriel and Rose attain a new level of intimacy, by expressing feelings they previously concealed. Rose reveals the hypocrisies of her position as the peace-keeping wife and mother. She admits for the first time she knew about the cockfights and her husband's affairs. However, when she thinks of her relationship with her fiancé, Chuck, she instinctively returns to her former orthodox approach.

Rose, afraid of the powerful feelings evoked by her confessions to Muriel, tries to bring the level of discussion back to the boundaries of surface reality. "No. [Long pause. ROSE looks nervously at the door.] Don't you say a word about this to Chuck. Do you hear me?" (124) Rose seems most concerned that Chuck's expectations be upheld, again by concealing the truth, and clings tenaciously to the moral values Chuck represents. Rose's hypocrisy is apparent when she must keep an air of respectability by not sharing a bed with Chuck when he comes. "It wouldn't be suitable." (125) Neither does she find it suitable to share a bed with Muriel.

ROSE: Well...he might be... I don't want him to think there's anything funny--you and me--in your bed.
MURIEL: [Bursts out laughing.] You can't be serious!
ROSE: Well, he's bound to notice that you're...
MURIEL: [Cuts in.] I? I'm what?
ROSE: You're not married.
MURIEL: Does he judge women on their marital status? Sounds like a typical banker.
ROSE: Just a man that's all. He might not understand.
MURIEL: [Huffily.] Can't say I do either. (125)

Muriel's sense of betrayal indicates the ambivalent relationship between herself and her mother. She feels protective of her mother's helplessness, but at the same time blames her mother for being weak and complacent.

Muriel: [Looks up with sudden decision.] You know ... You know ... I used to think you needed me. I stuck around longer than I wanted to because ... I thought he used you and you needed me as a buffer against him. And now I find out that even that was a sham--that you knew all the time. You probably even knew about his shenanigans with Maggie Butler. (125-126)

In response to Muriel's anger, Rose defends her position by saying: "If you marry a wild man you take the consequences." (126) Jean Baker Miller writes about the position of motherhood in patriarchy and its effect on mother-daughter relationships.

> Mothers have been deprived and devalued and conscripted as agents of a system that diminished all women. Daughters have felt the confusing repercussions of all of these forces. Further, it is impossible to analyze the mother-daughter relationship without an analysis of the actions of the father, more accurately an analysis of the overall context which defines the family structure.11

The depiction of motherhood and patriarchy in the play also reflects Adrienne Rich's analysis of "motherhood as

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11 Miller, Jean Baker. Toward a New Psychology of Women, Boston: Beacon Press, 1976, pp. 139-140.

institution,"12 whereby motherhood is an extension of male control which has "ghettoized and degraded female potentialities."13 Rose exemplifies this institution of wife and motherhood, by her internalization of gender stereotypes, what de Beauvoir calls "bad faith"14 and Michele Barrett calls "false consciousness."15 Muriel tries to make her mother see that her father "hated women," (126) and reveals her resentment towards her father for fostering Rose's self-sacrificial approach. In achieving her own identity, Muriel finds her parents offered no guidance outside gender stereotypes. Muriel realizes she cannot identify with her mother in her search for individuality. She is also angry for not being taken seriously as a woman.

> MURIEL: I told you I'd make it alone. Well I have, haven't I? I ran a business--I got this place together and now I'm going to build the best goddamn house on the island. On my own. To my own design. (126)

Muriel's insistence on managing her own farm alone is a clear renunciation of the expectations of her parents. Muriel's father left the family farm to her brother, Ronnie, even though he was incompetent as a farmer and never wanted to work the land. Muriel, although she showed a natural talent for farming,

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12 Rich. p. 13.

13 Ibid.

14 de Beauvoir. p. 275.

15 Barrett. p. 82.

was denied inheritance because she was a woman.

Rose reaffirms her late husband's perception of farming as an 'unproper' vocation for women, and reminds Muriel of the importance of social interaction. "You can't isolate yourself. We all need other people." (126) But Muriel sees isolation as a form of protection.

> MURIEL: Look mum--I'll try to explain. [Goes over and sits beside ROSE.] I don't mean to be hard. I just have to protect myself. I have to do things my way. Without interference from outside.
> ROSE: No man is an island.
> MURIEL: I'm a woman! (126)

Rose reveals that she does not perceive the quest for individuality as part of female experience. In her search for identity, Muriel finds that even in the wilderness she can be stifled by the intrusion of others.

Prior to her mother's visit, as depicted in Alli Alli Oh, Muriel had been living with Alli in a lesbian relationship, seeing lesbianism as an escape from patriarchal domination. Jean Baker Miller expresses this concept of lesbianism as a diversion from gender power structures. "...lesbian women by their very existence challenge the fundamental structure of women's dependence on men."16

In her search for an alternative to her limited upbringing, Muriel discovers that her lesbian relationship with Alli is not a solution to the traditional female role, as Muriel finds

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16 Miller. p. 138.

that even with Alli her individuality is threatened. The fact that Muriel cannot tell Rose about her lesbian affair shows that Muriel is still controlled by the values and expectations of her mother's world. Muriel's involvement with Alli represents the exploration of a love relationship outside the conventional realm defined by her mother--an involvement she had hoped would not restrict her human growth. On this subject, the collective writings of Radicalesbian claim,

> [The lesbian] is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society cares to allow her...She may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on some level she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society--the female role.17

Muriel's venture beyond the boundaries of prevailing sexual behaviour shows an interesting parallel with her exploration of new, revolutionary farming methods, particularly "hydroponics," by which plants are grown without soil, itself symbolic of Muriel's search for self-sufficiency. For just as Muriel's experiments expand the boundaries of traditional farming, her lesbian encounter is also a deliberate departure from the traditional male-female relationship, as living with Alli excludes the role of wife and motherhood. But Muriel is

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17 Radicalesbians. "The Woman-Identified Woman," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, New York: Quadrangle Books, 1970, p. 240.

shown to reject lesbianism as a substitute for male-female relationships and instead chooses solitude.

> ...I began to see it all in perspective. Not just my life but all the rest. On this island, in Canada, in every developed country. We're all being forced into living alone--being alone--don't you see? Relationships don't make sense any more. (127)

Rather than any kind of relationship Muriel finds satisfaction in a self-chosen project, and turns her energy towards creativity in order to achieve fulfillment.

> I'm going to work up a business on my own. On a really big scale. See here--here's the outline [Points to wall chart.] I've got it all planned. I should have the foundations of the house in by June. I figure that by December I'll be clear enough to make a start on the greenhouses. If I get a good run at it... not too much rain. (127)

Experimenting with her environment by producing plants without soil in the form of hydroponics can be seen as Muriel's attempt to gain control over her environment, thus shaping it to her own design. Muriel's plan to use science and technology to make plants grow without soil is a manipulation of the natural world, one that changes the life process. To Muriel, this becomes the creative ordering of her physical environment. As Miller points out:

> For women to act and react out of their own beings is to fly in the face of their appointed definition and their prescribed way of living. To move toward authenticity, then, also involves creation, in an immediate and pressing personal way. The whole fabric of one's life begins to change, and one sees it in a new light.18

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18 Miller. pp. 113-114.

Rose, on the other hand, does not see Muriel's activities in terms of individual growth, but as unnatural. She reminds Muriel of the traditional perception of women in relation to men.

ROSE: I'll bet there's a dozen good men who'd come here on an hour's notice if you'd only give them half a chance.
MURIEL: It'll run itself. No need for men.
ROSE: What if something happened to you? You could lie in a ditch for days--
MURIEL: Nothing's gonna to happen to me-- (127)

In perceiving women as helpless, Rose attempts to undermine Muriel's efforts to gain control over her own life. Hilary Lips writes about cultural images of female weakness and the exclusion of positive images of female strength and power.

> ...the accepted imagery of power and the accepted imagery of femininity in this society are totally incompatible and mutually exclusive. "Proper" feminine images are filled with powerlessness and weakness, and those feminine images which do incorporate power are portrayed as evil and frightening...19

Muriel's need for self-determination includes the reassessing of social values and political systems. Her disillusionment with her family and the stereotyped position of women in society leads Muriel to reflect on the breakdown of all social institutions.

MURIEL: You can't have a political system that's built up on single isolated entities. Politicians depend on mass sentiment. You know, if they were really interested in our well-being they'd be educating us to live alone. But they daren't. They'd rather see us freak out. It's unacceptable isn't it? A woman on her

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19 Lips, Hilary M. "Women and Power: Psychology's Search for New Directions," Atlantis, 5, no.1, (Fall 1979) p. 7.

> own--making it without help from the system. Do they still make jokes about spinsters back home? (128)

Muriel shows that her rejection of the traditional female role includes the abandonment of all social ideologies that limit individual potential. Through her separation from society, she becomes aware that the search for selfhood in mainstream society is stunted by social indoctrination. This is a restatement of the feminist claim that patriarchy is a socio-political "institution" controlling all aspects of life, the "military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance--in short, every avenue of power within the society..."20 Rose is shown to have internalized the very conventions her daughter is attacking when she voices the traditional role of women as well as her evasion of her own autonomy. "I guess I need a man of my own." (128)

Rose's intrusion in Muriel's life signifies the difficulty Muriel has in escaping from the restrictions of her social realm. By announcing that she would like to come and live on the island with Chuck, Rose, and the patriarchal society she represents, become a threat to Muriel's private world. "Ronnie and the kids can come out here in the winter--he likes to get away in winter. We can all be together." (129) Both Muriel's inner world and her external world, the island, are threatened by the invasion of society and its expectations from which

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20 Millett. p. 25.

Muriel has come to the island to escape. Muriel tries to discourage her mother from moving to the island. "Property prices are astronomical. Water front--do you know what you're looking at?" (129)

Muriel fears being drawn into her mother's world and her definition of women's roles. As an affirmation of Muriel's fears, Rose reminds her of her deviation from her expected role according to social norms. "Your father always used to say that the blood got mixed up. You were the oldest and you should have been the boy, then it would all have worked out." (130) Stacey and Price write about the uneasiness caused by women breaking the gender mold.

> Notions of the 'proper place'and 'proper behaviour' are deeply ingrained and emotionally loaded, such that acute discomfort is felt when the norms are violated. For the actors concerned, the norms have come to appear as 'natural', as part of an externally given order without which there could only be chaos. Thus deviants must be put down and the order maintained.21

Muriel's anger mounts as she recalls how her mother upheld gender roles and acquiesced to her husband's decision to force Ronnie into farming and Muriel into studying for an arts degree. "As it was he sent me off to do an arts degree and when it came to the crunch, you went along with him." (130) Rose reverberates the perception of women's role inside the patriarchal model. "I didn't want you to ruin your life. I wanted you to grow into a ... a woman." ... "Yes. A woman. I

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21 Stacey and Price. p. 8.

wanted you to have children." (130)

By expecting Muriel to fulfill the traditional female role, Rose, as a mother, is shown to be instrumental in perpetuating the division of gender roles.

> In not thinking to deviate from the established order, women have been architects of the reproduction of their own oppression. Women in the family particularly participate in a system that upholds a division of labour that removes them from public life. In the roles they adopt in the family and their differential treatment of their own children of different sexes, they help to perpetuate gender roles that ensure a subservient role for women.22

As young women of the 1970's, like Muriel, struggle to liberate themselves from their mothers, whom they see as having "taught a compromise and self-hatred,"23 Rich points out that it is easier "to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her."24 Thus Rose's limited perception of her daughter's potential stems from her own indoctrination of patriarchal ethos.

Alli, who arrives without warning, is the antithesis of the conforming woman. Mentally ill and bisexual, she lives on the periphery of conventional society. Nevertheless, Alli tries to identify with Rose, telling Rose that she herself is a mother and was married for eighteen years. Alli discuses her children

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22 Stacey and Price. p. 10.

23 Rich. p. 235.

24 Ibid.

with Rose. "Yes. Mine are called Denny and Christine. Christine's just had her seventeenth birthday. She's an Aries." (132) Alli eventually turns the level of reality away from trivialities towards the darker world of psychological fragmentation. By telling Rose about her experience in "the nut house," (133) Alli draws Rose into an unknown world. Alli's presence is shown to confront and disrupt Rose's established values. Where Rose sees the need to conceal and pretend in order to keep the harmony, Alli is overtly direct in her emotional and psychological expression.

> ALLI: They said I should express whatever I have on my mind. They said that most sickness is caused by repressing one's natural feelings. [To Rose.] Do you agree with that?
> ROSE: I'm not an expert in that sort of-- (133)

Rose is the voice of the stereotypical woman in the patriarchal tradition who stifles the truth for the sake of appearances. By contrast, Alli is portrayed as mentally ill, thus allowing her to depart from society's customary perception of women. As she is also a lesbian, Alli defies the traditional view of female sexuality, and is seen as a threat to the moral fibre of society. Alli's husband, who is demanding legal custody of their children, judges her to be an unfit mother. Muriel, on the other hand, does not believe that Alli is mentally ill, and explains Alli's repetition of phrases as a mantra, telling Rose, "I always thought of it as meditating." (134) While Muriel tries to justify Alli's behavior to Rose,

Alli asserts that she has been "cured" and adds, "I really don't have to talk to myself." (134)

Alli is constantly exposing and verbalizing what is hidden, including Muriel's inner feelings. "You're not very pleased about the bank teller, are you?" (p.134) Alli provokes both Rose and Muriel into disclosing intense emotions, using her mental instability as a shield against the reproach of others. Alli also enjoys the power she has over Muriel, knowing she dreads her mother finding out about their affair.

ALLI: Oh? [Laughs, to MURIEL.] Have you told her?
MURIEL: There's nothing to tell.
ALLI: You used to think there was. Don't you remember...? [Sings.] 'If she could see us now...' [Looks at MURIEL's frightened face.] No? [Takes a breath, turns to ROSE.] The hospital was on the mainland. A long way away.
ROSE: And now you're better.
MURIEL: Alli, look--
ALLI: Yes. Better.
MURIEL: For heaven's sake put your bag down. [Gets glasses and a bottle.] (135)

While Muriel and Rose camouflage their real feelings under a shroud of platitudinous conversation, Alli plunges into the cavernous depths of her own guilt and inadequacy, confessing, "I can tell that you're a very good mother. [Pause. ROSE and MURIEL exchange looks.] I wasn't. I was a lousy mother. Terrible. Terrible." (135) Rose seems to remind Alli of her failure as a traditional mother and wife. The play suggests that Alli's mental disintegration is in part an escape from

social responsibilities. By being mentally ill, she has a socially defined role, one that makes her failure as a traditional wife and mother more acceptable. Although Alli perceives Rose as the ideal mother, she does not realize that Rose herself feels she has failed as a mother.

Both Rose and Alli epitomize different extremes: Rose denies her individuality in order to gain social acceptance; Alli rejects her role as mother and wife, as well as the traditional feminine characteristics. Rose embodies the complete acceptance of convention and Alli exemplifies the total rejection of it. Where Rose is passive and inscrutable, Alli is aggressive and often cruel in her honesty. Alli ridicules Rose's need for romantic love when she notices the flowers Rose picked for Chuck, whom Alli calls her "financé."

> ALLI: Oh. They're for the financé. [To ROSE.] You know you're lucky to get a second go. At your age.
> MURIEL: Alli, that's obnoxious!
> ROSE: No it's not. [Comes up to ALLI, speaks simply.] Yes, you're quite right. I do consider myself lucky. I'm a lucky woman. (136)

By calling Chuck Rose's "financé," Alli alludes to the economic and financial power of men in patriarchy, power women like Rose have traditionally depended upon.

Muriel is caught between the two extremes: surrendering to patriarchal ubiquity, as Rose does; or, like Alli, foresaking entirely the norms of society. Muriel's task is to find her own identity through the confrontation of both extremes. Although

Muriel rejects her mother's position, Muriel shares her dislike of Alli's insensitive probing and disruption of social order, her destructive openness. "You haven't changed a bit have you? You're a wrecker, Alli. A wrecker." (139) Now Muriel begins to break the boundaries of polite behavior, demonstrating her true feelings underneath. Alli replies, "You can't wreck what's already..." But Alli does not finish her sentence, and instead returns to mundane reality, watching Rose make tea. "I don't think the water was boiling." Like Muriel, Rose begins to express underlying feelings of anger towards Alli and tells her to leave. "You're upsetting my daughter." (139) Alli in turn shows her own hostility towards Muriel for being unemotional and always "in control."

> ALLI: Upsetting your daughter? Your daughter's calm. Made of steel, your daughter. She's got a smile like a steel trap. Always damn well in control. Everything under control. (139)

Alli begins to tell Rose and Muriel what happenend to her after she left the island. At this point both Rose and Muriel are drawn into Alli's inner world. Muriel is shocked when she hears that Alli lived on Hastings Street and worked as a chambermaid. Alli tries to evoke feelings of guilt in Muriel, as she describes the humiliation and cruelty she encountered in the mental hospital. "They put a rubber gag in your mouth. Your whole body...turns to water." (140) Muriel forgets her anger towards Alli and together they cling to one another. At

this point Rose is forced to acknowledge the fact of her daughter's lesbian affair. The veil of decorum is discarded, and Muriel reveals what she had been desperately trying to conceal. At first she blames her mother for interfering in her life, claiming that if Rose had not come to visit her, she would not have found out. However, Muriel finally refuses to succumb to her mother's hypocrisy, and reveals the truth.

MURIEL: Alli--[MURIEL puts her arms around ALLI, anguished. They embrace and cling to each other. To ROSE.] Don't stare. Don't stare at us. [ROSE gets up.] If you hadn't come here ... you can't go on keeping things quiet.
ROSE: Why not? Tell me why not?
MURIEL: It isn't honest, that's why.
ROSE: Honesty! (140)

But Rose, who wants to keep all experience within the confines of respectability, evades both honesty and self-knowledge. She would rather eschew authenticity than accept unpleasant truths. In contrast, Muriel realizes that honesty is crucial in achieving a definition of self, but like her mother, she has also been concealing hidden truths, as Rose points out: "All that talk about being on your own. It wasn't anything to do with it." (140)

Muriel expresses her own concealed feelings of failure for not being the kind of woman her mother expected her to be. "Tell me I'm a freak then. Unnatural..." (140) Muriel feels caught between the two women and what they represent. She runs outside, unable to go to either of them.

Alli and Rose are left to talk alone, and Rose is brought further into Alli's world of psychological flux. Alli makes Rose deal with a side of female experience she has never acknowledged before. Alli describes her inner psyche, her intimate feelings. She tells Rose how her personal life was probed by the doctors in the hospital, and how she had been labeled a paranoid schizophrenic. "'What about your husband?' Cold storage. 'Were you on good terms-- socially?' Cold storage. 'Sexually?' Cold storage." (141) Alli sees beyond the doctor's questions, for what the doctor really wanted to know is why she lost her mind. But Alli insists she is not crazy. "I didn't lose my mind--I just put it away for a while. In cold storage." (141) By putting her mind away in 'cold storage', Alli has taken on the role of mental illness as an alternative to her social position as housewife and mother.

After being released from hospital, Alli wandered aimlessly around Hastings Street and found communion with an alcoholic native woman. Alli begins to draw Rose into her imagination through her sensitive description of the Indian woman.

> She had a bottle tucked between her breasts, under her blouse, with the neck sticking out...and she kept stroking it as if it were a baby, or...or a lover. [She makes a stroking motion, turns away from the door and leans forward, as if watching.] She's very thin. [Faster.] Suddenly one of the guys leans across and pulls the bottle out--but he doesn't make it. She's awake in a second and she grabs the bottle and brings it down on his fingers. It smashes against the table. Blood and rye and no more smell of herring. And he yells, 'You know what you are? You're a man with a cunt. A man with a frigging cunt.' She doesn't say a

> word. Just listens. [Pause.] They leave. I lean across. I want her to listen to me you see. I want her to listen--but I've forgotten how to make her hear. She starts to eat the fish. Very delicately, dainty little piles, fish on one side, bones on the other. No fuss. [Pause.] I wanted to touch her, I wanted to feel what it was like to be that bottle, to come out of cold storage. She was so much herself. Like Muriel. (142)

In Canadian literature, the Indian has become a symbol of "the ultimate victim of social oppression and deprivation."25 Unlike the Indian woman in George Ryga's The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, Ringwood's Lament for Harmonica and The Stranger, the Indian woman Alli describes is shown to struggle against her male oppressors, refusing to be a victim. Alli identifies with the Indian woman because she possesses individuality and dignity in the face of despair. But at the same time Alli is baffled by the realization that the Indian woman must have stolen her wallet and eternity ring, which she finds are missing when she leaves the café. Alli goes back to look for them and finds the Indian woman has disappeared. Alli's search for the ring suggests her loss of eternal marital happiness, symbolized by the eternity ring. Alli crawls around on the floor looking for her ring, when the police come she says she is "looking for eternity." (143) In Alli's attempt to explaiin she is looking for her eternity ring, she connects her search for the ring with her individual search for integration and meaning.

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25 Atwood. Survival, p. 97.

It is at this point that Alli is thought to be insane and taken away to the hospital. The hospital officials demand an address before they agree to release her. "I told them I lived on an island. On a farm on an island, with a woman." (143) In Alli's state of instability, the island is her place of refuge from society and its corruption. As with Muriel, the island is for Alli is a way to escape the expectations of others and offers her the harmony she seeks: what Mitcham sees as "the unmaterialistic regenerative potential"26 of the wilderness.

Rose is unsure how to respond to Alli's display of inner feelings and emotional turmoil. When Alli tells her there are questions walking "all over town," (143) Rose tries to bring the statement into the context of light conversation. "I don't know the town. I only came to the coast once before." (143) Then Alli attempts to force Rose into a frank reaction, asking her how it feels, "knowing your daughter's a dyke." (143) Rose finally admits her true feelings: "You disgust me." (144) Alli replies eagerly, "Do I? Do I really?" (144) Alli has achieved the emotional reaction from Rose she had been waiting for, she has succeeded in breaking Rose's polite facade. After admitting her real feelings, Rose immediately feels sorry for what she said, realizing that Alli "can't help it." (144) By saying Alli "can't help it," Rose displays how she associates lesbianism with mental sickness and abnormality. Consequently, she is able

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26 Mitcham. p. 11.

to pity Alli and perceive her behavior as less threatening.

Although their opposing realities clash with one another, Rose and Alli are forced into each other's inner world. Both must accept the different levels of female experience the other represents. Rose is made to acknowledge Alli's rejection of conventional values, and Alli is confronted with Rose's position within patriarchal tradition. Rose begins to confide in Alli and expresses her feeling of failure as a 'good' mother.

> ROSE: [Suddenly.] Is Muriel sick?
> ALLI: Sick? You mean like me?
> ROSE: Well--what did I do? Where did I go wrong?" (144)

Rose's sense of guilt stems from her position in the patriarchal model. Within her socialliy defined female role, as a mother, Rose feels responsible for her daughter becoming "a woman," which means being married and having children. As Adrienne Rich observes, "under the institution of motherhood, the mother is the first to blame if theory proves unworkable in practice, or if anything whatsoever goes wrong."27

Rose realizes Alli is unable to help her, as Alli herself has rejected her position as wife and mother. Alli can only respond, "You're so serious. Like Muriel." (144) At this point Rose wishes that Alli would go away, so that Rose can go back to her day-to-day reality. Alli's repeated denial of Rose's

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27 Rich. p. 222.

social values has made Rose want to cling to those values even more. Rose also wants Alli out of her daughter's life and offers her money to go away, telling her to hide it from Muriel. Alli confronts Rose's need to keep things hidden. "You're always covering up after everybody. Like a cat--you give it something it doesn't like and it tries to cover it up. That's why I hate cats." (144) Alli then throws the money on the floor.

At this stage Chuck calls, rescuing Rose from this threatening and chaotic setting, bringing her back to her familiar world. Rose wants to keep Chuck separate from all this, as he symbolizes Rose's sense of security within the old patriarchal tradition, where Rose's position as a woman is clearly defined. Within the confines of her respectable social framework, Rose has found a limited kind of order and integration: an integration, however, that excludes the search for individuality outside the dictates of assigned roles. Thus Rose's inner world, the exploration of her inner female consciousness, is left untouched. Alli threatens this security when she suggests meeting Chuck.

ALLI: Shall we shake him up?
ROSE: No! You? Yes, you would, wouldn't you?
ALLI: He's not used to honesty?
ROSE: I don't know. (145)

Alli agrees to stay out of their way. Muriel enters and Rose tells her she will take Alli to the ferry. Rose has decided to

stay with Chuck in the lodge and come to visit Muriel for breakfast the following day. Both Rose and Alli leave for the mainland. As Alli prepares to leave, she picks up the money Rose gave her and puts it in her pocket.

There is a sense that Rose and Muriel have neither reconciled, nor become closer as mother and daughter. They are shown to "embrace briefly," (146) suggesting the affection they have for one another is marred by the continuing strain in their relationship. Muriel and Alli, on the other hand, are shown to "throw their arms around each other," expressing their deeper caring for one another.

Muriel finds herself alone again. She places the quilt made by Alli on the bed and sits on it, as if contemplating about her relationship with Alli. Muriel then gets up from the bed and returns to her desk, choosing to focus her attention on the development of her farm. She must continue her search for self identity in the light of her newly defined relationship with both her mother and Alli. Rose and her conventional world, and Alli and her disordered world, have both disrupted Muriel's search for self-definition. Her relationship with Alli and Rose is still tenuous, as is her relationship with the wilderness in which she must struggle to construct her own sense of place. What remains constant is Muriel's relation to the farm and the satisfaction her work brings, when she is liberated from the demands of others. The last image leaves Muriel at her

desk, planning how to make a success of the farm and finally achieve order over her environment.

In both Islands and Ever Loving, Hollingsworth's exploration of female identity concerns the female characters' relation to their physical environment. In Ever Loving, the regional settings of Hamilton, Lethbridge and Halifax become mirror images of the three women's psychological and social entrapment within patriarchal marriages. In Islands, Hollingsworth is shown to transform the protagonist's relation to her physical environment. Whereas the physical landscape in Ever Loving reflects female oppression, the natural landsape in Islands is a projection of female creative potential. Thus Muriel's place in the wilderness is connected with her search for individuality and the liberation from the patriarchal mold. Where Diana finds the prairie landsape an extension of her husband's power which subdues her, Muriel finds the secluded island an escape from the limitations of social expectations.

Both plays expound the 1970's feminist claim that the domestic position of women under patriarchy is oppressive to women. Both Luce in Ever Loving and Muriel in Islands refuse marriage and motherhood out of fear of losing their autonomy. Like Luce, Muriel is shown to break away from a restrictive social realm, but unlike Luce who seeks identity in an urban

setting, Muriel withdraws from the urban, public world to the seclusion of the wilderness.

By becoming a farmer, a traditionally male vocation, Muriel's separation from urban mainstream society offers her power over her environment rather than isolation. However, Muriel's autonomy is not without a price. By protecting herself from the demands of others, Muriel chooses the safety of solitude and in the process limits the potential for self-enrichment through human companionship.

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The Twisted Loaf

Aviva Ravel's play, The Twisted Loaf, like Hollingsworth's Ever Loving, examines the 'immigrant exile' concept in conjunction with the female search for identity and place. Ravel explores the sense of estrangement and the concomitant quest for self-affirmation experienced by Bessie, a Russian-Jewish immigrant, in the foreign setting of Montreal. Like Ruth, Diana and Luce in Ever Loving, Bessie's sense of dislocation and marginalization as an immigrant is magnified by her position as a woman. But unlike the women in Ever Loving, Bessie is further sequestered from mainstream society because she is Jewish.

A Jewish Montrealer herself, Ravel, like playwright Ted Allen and novelist Mordecai Richler, probes the bewildering experience of attempting to preserve exogenous cultural traditions, whilst concurrently grappling with the fluctuating uncertainties of a new and unfamiliar country. Elaine Newton perceives Canadian Jewish writing as a "sub-genre of literature,"1 one that epitomizes the immigrant pursuit of identity in association with the Canadian yearning for national

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1 Newton, Elaine. "Forward" to Mirror of a People: Canadian Jewish Experience in Poetry and Prose, eds. Sheldon Oberman and Elaine Newton, Winnipeg: Jewish Educational Publishers of Canada Inc. 1985, p. xiv.

definition. Canadian Jewish writing represents the "symbolic importance of the dualistic Jewish experience in a nation which is itself adolescent and identity-seeking."2

The Twisted Loaf, published in 1970, exemplifies both the immigrant search for identity and the female search for definition in the burgeoning women's movement. Bessie, by striving to achieve an integral feeling of belonging, attempts to adjust to modern North American values and customs which are completely at variance with those of her native Russian village. Unlike Luce and Diana in Ever Loving, she is not favoured by her social background, nor does she have the advantage of coming from an English-speaking country as do Ruth and Diana. Bessie, as a Jewish immigrant, has the additional barrier of adapting to an environment with a foreign language, religion, and culture. Seeking refuge in the Jewish ghetto, she acquires a sense of place, but in the process she becomes marginalized from the mainstream of Canadian society.

Dying in a hospital bed, Bessie, now 65, reflects upon her life as a young woman trying to forge a new life in a foreign country. The play opens with Bessie's recollections of her life in Russian society before she was sent to Canada. Even in her own country she was without place, for, as Jews, her family was disbarred from Russian society by anti-semitism. Unable to pay their rent, Bessie's family is forced into ruin and must sell

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2 Newton. p. xiv.

all they possess, sending their young daughter, Bessie, alone to live with her uncle in Montreal.

The family's sense of loss is echoed by the auctioneer who sells their treasured candlesticks for profit. In the family's moment of despair, it is Bessie's mother who has the strength to find a way out of the misery and plan for a better future.

Daughter: Where will we go tonight?
Mother: To the auntie, and then, maybe a ticket to America.
Father: Who will send us a ticket, who?
Mother: My uncle. He's a good man.
Father: May I rot in my grave before I take charity!
Mother: We have no choice, papa. First we'll send Bessie and then, God willing, we'll go...
Father: (Going off) The pogrom will get us first! (7)

Bessie returns to the present with the nightmare of the past fresh in her imagination, and the realization that she has created a better world for her own children. "Thank God I protected my children from that...ah my poor father." (7) Bessie's husband, Alex, comes to visit her in the hospital and their dialogue reveals fragments of their social world. Both Bessie and Alex are disappointed about the marriages of their two daughters, Judy and Annie, and by the life of their single daughter, Sheila. When Alex leaves the room, the focus shifts from surface reality to Bessie's inner reflections on the futility of her life-long struggle to achieve success for her daughters, when death only comes in the end. "Amount to something. In the end it all amounts to the same thing." (8-9)

Through her solitary contemplations about the hardships of her life, Bessie attempts to come to terms with herself, and to reach self-definition. The stylistic device of creating two characters that represent Bessie's young and old self allows for the interaction between Bessie's inner consciousness and her external self, between the past and the present. The young energetic Bessie tells the old tired Bessie that she must return to her sewing, to support the family, to which Old Bessie replies, "I can't work no more." (9) Young Bessie says she can go on without her, and that she must continue buying food and clothes for the three children. "I have to get the work out. Annie and Sheila need shoes, and there's the grocery bill. Gottenu give me strength." (9) Now Bessie takes on the persona of her younger consciousness who is at home with her children, sewing to earn a living for the family when her husband is laid off from the clothing factory.

It is Bessie who must provide the economic security and emotional strength to keep the family from poverty. But as a traditional woman, she is confined to working within the domestic realm of the home, borrowing money from her uncle to start a home sewing-business, employing six girls.

Although Bessie becomes the generating force behind the income which supports the whole family, Alex is her link with the exterior world. "I'll manage everything. You'll just go to

the manufacturers and get the work." (9) Using her uncle's position in the business world and her husband's access to the public world, she engineers a way to bring the labour market into her own home. Adrienne Rich discusses the enormous responsibilites undertaken by the early Jewish woman immigrant.

> Jewish women of the shtetl and ghetto and of the early immigrant period supported their Talmud-studying men, raised children, ran the family business, trafficked with the hostile gentile world, and in every practical and active way made possible the economic and cultural survival of the Jews.3

Bessie's will to overcome all obstacles pivots around the well-being of her three daughters, as well as a desire to offer hope and emotional support to her husband. "It's going to be good again. I want to live to see them well off. That's all I care." (9)

The focus of the play shifts forward to the present when her daughters, Annie, Sheila and Judy, meet to visit their mother in the hospital. Sheila reveals her hostility to her family and remembers her upbringing with bitterness.

> Sheila: You know what I learned at home? To hate. Everything and everybody. Especially little Judy princess. (Smiles) Remember I tied her to a post and forced her to eat worms? And I cut off her curly locks... served mama right for calling her "Shirley Temple." And once I set a match to her crib and she almost burned...gee I was a rotten kid. Mama was so good to her and you know how she paid her back--by marrying a 'goy'. Mama never got over it. (11)

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3 Rich. pp. 235-236.

By focusing on Judy's marriage outside the Jewish faith, Judy's failure appears greater than her own, for Judy's "defection" threatens the continuation of Jewish tradition. But as Sheila is unmarried, she, too, spurns Jewish convention in which marriage and family has an essential role.

The importance of the Jewish figure's cultural past is pivotal to the Canadian Jewish imagination. Richler's novel, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, and Ted Allan's play, Lies My Father Told Me, show that success achieved at the expense of cultural and historical identity is illusory.

> The Jew in Canadian fiction is similarly a perennial exile for whom assimilation is tantamount to annihilation, and who thus remains an immigrant in an alien land, struggling through generations of change to maintain some semblance of the past in his present life.4

Although influenced by their background, Bessie's three daughters have acquired Canadian values through their attempt to integrate into society. By marrying a wealthy business man, Judy fulfills her mother's dream, but in the process repudiates her Jewish tradition as her children become Catholic like their father. Annie must support her family while her husband finishes his law degree; Sheila renounces her parents' expectations by living the unconventional life of a struggling writer and seeking solace in psychoanalysis.

Like Alli in Islands, Sheila, by scrutinizing unpleasant

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4 Moss. p. 83.

truths, forces others to remove the shroud from their buried feelings.

Sheila: Whatsamatter? The princess can't take it? Let's soften the blow then. Let's tell it to her slowly. Ma-- ma...is...pass--ing...away.
Annie: Look Judy, it's like this. She won't get better, and the doctor wants to perform another operation.
Judy: (Pale) Then she has got..oh, my God...
Sheila: (Enjoys Judy's pain) Whose God do you think she's talking to, ours or Arthur's?
Annie: For godsake, Sheila, shut up!
Judy: You're disgusting!
Annie: That was a rotten thing to say!
Sheila: (Pauses and smiles) That's how it is. Everyone's always picking on me. (12)

But dissension and bitterness turn to concern as the sisters remember the traditional expectations of their mother. Their sense of failure is paramount when Annie tells Sheila to pretend she is successful. "Tell her...(Pause)...that your novel will be published. That you're going to be rich and famous!..." (12) As they prepare themselves to meet their mother, the focus of the play shifts to the younger consciousness of Bessie on the night she accepts Alex's proposal. In a foreign country, separate from her family, Bessie sees marriage as a way of finding security and social acceptance.

Young Bessie: My uncle says I shouldn't marry you.
Young Alex: Maybe he's right. I can't promise you 'goldene glicken', just that I'll always love you.
Young Bessie: If I was in the old country my mother would choose me a husband. Here it's different.
Young Alex: You're beautiful, Bessie.
Young Bessie: A girl has to have a family, a home... (13)

Severed from a tradition in which her mother would choose her husband, Bessie must now make her own choices in a setting with opposing values and customs. However, what Bessie clings to is the belief that women need a husband for economic security. Like the women immigrants in Ever Loving, Bessie's acceptance of her role within the traditions of patriarchy is unquestioned. Even in the New World, Bessie can identify with the patriarchal definition of women as wives and mothers.

Bessie forges a new self-definition and adjusts painfully to an alien way of life, entirely for the sake of her daughters. As part of the 'immigrant exile' motif, Bessie projects her hopes onto her children who represent both a link with the old country and a future in the new country.

> Dispossessed though they were, needing to cling to and preserve memories of the old world, they yet hungrily claimed personal shares of experience, of opportunity, of Canada. Above all, amid mutilations of communal and religious life, they worked to provide a home and an education for their children who would be the 'real Canadians.'5

It is only in the hospital, in solitude, that Bessie begins to think of herself separately from her family. Bessie's inner reflections give her the required distance to reclaim her autonomy detached from others. But when her daughters visit her, Bessie is brought back to the social responsibilities of her position as mother. In this vein, Annie describes her own children's achievements, how her son Steve is captain of the

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5 Newton and Oberman. p. 2.

baseball team and how her son Allan is first in his class. Bessie is disappointed that Judy's children go to Catholic school and will grow up thinking that "Chanuka is a Japanese toy." (15) Although Bessie regrets that her grandchildren will lose their Jewish heritage, she appreciates the financial security Judy's marriage brings, and the private nurse Judy's husband has hired for her. Bessie and her daughters endeavour to retain social appearances, and protect one another from the pain of failed expectations. Bessie wants her daughters to believe she is getting better and they try to convince their mother they are succeeding in life. When Sheila tells her mother that her book will be published, Bessie in turn feigns satisfaction.

> Old Bessie: They're going to print it! And sell it in all the stores! You see, Alex, she's going to be all right. For that I give you a kiss, Sheila. (Bessie kisses her) That's all I want. My children should be settled and have 'naches' from life. (15)

It is only when Bessie is alone again and retreats into her younger consciousness that she deliberates on how she undermined her daughters' ambitions. She recalls how Judy comes home one day and announces that she wants to go to New York to become an actress. Bessie refuses to let her go.

> Young Bessie: ...I'm not going to let you ruin your life... Judy, pity me! You're my treasure. For this I work like a slave? For you to walk the streets in a strange city?
> Judy: Mama, I want to be somebody!

> Young Bessie: When you have bread on the table, you can afford to be somebody. You'll get married first, to a nice boy, with a good job, if he wants you to be an actress, you'll be an actress. In the meantime, you'll stay home. (16)

The stereotypical Jewish mother, both self-sacrificing and controlling, Bessie lives vicariously through her daughters, treating them as possessions. Her panic mounts as the persona of Young Bessie invades her conscious mind. Gone at the stroke of the auctioneer's hammer, she sees the candlesticks disappear: a symbol of a vanished world and her lost family, provoking her to cry: "That'll never happen to my children! Never!" (16) Adrienne Rich writes about the "double vision"6 in regard to the Jewish mother: she is viewed with contempt and resentment on the one hand, and admired and revered on the other.

> But there is also a smoldering energy and resilience in the domesticated Jewish woman which--from a woman's point of view--commands respect, however it has been abused or derogated by this particular subculture. She is a survivor—woman, a fighter with tooth and claw and her own nervous system, who, like her black sisters, has borne the weight of a people on her back.7

In her struggle to survive, however, Old Bessie has denied her own self-development for the sake of her children. By viewing marriage as the only promise for a successful future, she endorses the old-world traditions of patriarchy, seeing her daughters as an extension of her own self-denial.

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6 Rich. p. 203.

7 Ibid.

Margaret Atwood defines women in Canadian literature as falling into two main categories: "The Diana or Maiden figure, the young girl," or "the Hecate figure" personified as "the goddess of the underworld, who presides over death and has oracular powers."8 The mothers in both Sheila Watson's The Double Hook, Hollingsworth's Mother Country, and Hester in Ringwood's Still Stands the House are such examples of Canada's life-denying female literary figures.

> If you trusted Canadian fiction you would have to believe that most of the women in the country with any real presence at all are over fifty, and a tough, sterile, suppressed and granite-jawed lot they are. They live their lives with intensity, but through gritted teeth, and they are often seen as malevolent, sinister or life-denying, either by themselves or by other characters in their books.9

Although Bessie possesses the controlling characteristcs of the 'Hecate' figure, her approaching death is not destructive: it is life-affirming. Her stifled individuality becomes illuminated by her vibrant self beneath the socially defined role as mother, wife, and old woman. She remembers herself as a young woman at a dance with an old boyfriend. "Sh. Laibel, the old woman is very sick. Look what's become of her, poor thing." (18) Laibel replies, "You'll never be old for me, Bessie. I'll always remember you like this." But the hiatus betwen the young persona and the old woman she has become, leads Bessie to repudiate her own deterioration towards death. Like Hagar

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8 Atwood. Survival, p. 199.

9 Ibid.

Shipley in The Stone Angel, Bessie is trapped in a role over which she has no control.

> These heroines have internalized the values of their cultures to such an extent that they have become their own prisons. The real struggle in The Fire Dwellers and in The Honeyman Festival is the struggle of the Diana, capable of freedom, and of the "good" Venus, capable of love both maternal and sexual, to find a way out of the rigid Hecate stereotype in which she finds herself shut like a moth in a chrysalis.10

Bessie, like the heroines in these novels, seeks the self-realization which will transcend the social restrictions of her position as a dying old woman. Her identification with her younger self expresses her search for her female potential and autonomy beyond physical boundaries. Young Bessie, as the 'Venus' figure, is a sensual being, an erotic figure who breaks out of her social role as wife and mother by having an affair. Young Bessie is transposed by Laibel's fantasy of taking her away to California to live in luxury, in "the real land of milk and honey." (18)

Bessie returns to the present, confusing it with the past. She remembers with horror Alex discovering the affair and running out of the house in anger. Old Bessie calls for Alex, believing he has left her, but he is sitting beside her, comforting her through her illness. Alex is characterized as a kind, gentle, but unambitious man. He is not the powerful male persona of the patriarchal tradition; rather, it is Bessie who shows intense concern for the future of the family. She is

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10 Atwood. Survival, pp. 209-210.

the strong one, the one who makes the decisions, although she is motivated by the desire to see her daughters successfully married. As Janeway observes, "the less control which a woman exercises over other areas of her life, the greater will be the satisfaction she derives from managing the lives of her children."11 Because Bessie's world is that of wife and mother, her sense of power is contained within the domestic realm where she directs the lives of her offspring.

Through her fragmented state of consciousness, Bessie begins to attain insight into the human condition. She tells the nurse about the importance of living a good life, as one must relive everything through memory.

> Old Bessie: So I want to tell you something. Everything you live now, you'll live again when you're old. It'll only be in your head, but just as real as the first time. So do nice things, Angela, so your last days will be nice. (20)

In a private meeting with her daughter, Annie, Bessie is concerned that Annie is overworked, but she worries most that her husband, Harry, will leave her because she has no time to take care of her appearance.

> Old Bessie: Ah, Annie, we live everyday worrying about the future. But what happens to today, to now? The years go in the garbage and there's nothing left but a bundle of garbage...If you don't watch out, Harry's going to find a young girl with red cheeks and lots of 'koyach'. (21)

Bessie gives Annie money to spend on improving her appearance: 'You stop working today, you hear? Go to the beauty parlour;

11 Janeway. p. 54.

buy a few dresses. It's a shame the way you go round in that coat." (21) She paints a picture of women as defined by stereotypes: that working outside the home will lead to the breakdown of the family. But Annie's state of exhaustion is a result of fulfilling two roles: that of economic provider and housewife.

Although Bessie wants to secure her daughters' happiness, she cannot perceive their existence outside the traditional role of women. She shows her self-sacrificing nature, giving up her own needs for the benefit of her daughters' marital security.

> Old Bessie: All my life I worked, not for myself. When you grew up, to buy the grandchildren presents, to dress nice you shouldn't be ashamed of me. Now, it's all finished... (21)

In Bessie's old age, illness and solitude, she questions her self-identity for the first time, free from the intrusion of social responsibility. On the subject of women's servitude to others, Jean Baker Miller observes,

> Women are taught that their main goal in life is to serve others--first men, and later, children. This prescription leads to enormous problems, for it is supposed to be carried out as if women did not have needs of their own, as if one could serve others without simultaneously attending to one's own interests and desires.12

As Old Bessie slips into her inner psyche, she begins to comprehend that self-sacrificing is a form of control. By

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12 Miller. p. 62.

serving others and denying her own existence, she is unable to understand the needs of others.

Old Bessie: The children need you like a hole in the head.
Young Bessie: They'll always need me.
Old Bessie: They never did what they wanted.
Young Bessie: This country gave us a home, a place to live in peace, as Jews. What more could they want?
Old Bessie: You know what I mean.
Young Bessie: Annie has a good husband, she's all right.
Old Bessie: All right is not good enough. (22)

Old Bessie begins to realize that acquiring identity is more complex than simply accepting the traditional role of wife and mother. She becomes aware of the potential for individuality beyond the limitations of social expectations; a perception she refused to acknowledge when her children were growing up. Young Bessie is unaware of the opportunities for individual development offered by the New World, as a setting where her daughters could realize their individual potential. Instead, Young Bessie limits her daughters' future to the conventional role of wife and mother. To Young Bessie, Canada is a secure place to raise her children, not a land of opportunity for educating her daughters. She refuses adamantly to allow Annie to attend university.

Young Bessie: You'll go to business college, then work in an office...
Annie: I'd rather die.
Young Bessie: I wish I had the education to work in an office. You don't break your back, nice men come in maybe the boss's son. .
Annie: I want to study!

Young Bessie: You want, I also want lots of things. Maybe if you were a boy, it would be different. Now we'll save up money, get a nice place for you and Judy to bring your boyfriends...
Annie: (Runs out crying) Mama, you make me sick! (24)

Annie's individual development is cloistered by Bessie's definition of her as a woman. Annie is forced to perceive her self-identity through the limitations of the patriarchal system, which excludes women going to university and becoming scientists. Janeway writes about the shift away from patriarchal values and the turmoil created when the old customs are challenged.

> Here is one source of a gap between generations, for the old naturally cling to the moral values they once learned to call good, while the young, who can't see how they fit into the scheme of things at all, are contemptuous. It is time which has made the change, but because the structure of myth declares itself to be eternal and always present, the old call the young immoral, and the young reject the old as hypocrites.13

Bessie's need to cling to her traditional moral values is concomitant with her bond to her Jewish heritage. Her lack of vision concerning her daughters' positions as women is tied to her perception of her own self growing up in Russia where marriage was seen as a form of survival. To Bessie, Annie's scholarship is meaningless, as her daughter's only role is to work to help support the family until she gets married.

Back in the present, thinking of Annie's unfulfilled ambitions triggers the memory of Bessie's own failed potential.

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13 Janeway. p. 140.

Old Bessie: In my town girls were lucky if they learned to read and write...If I had the chance, wonder what I could have been... a teacher, a bookkeeper... (25)

Adrienne Rich analyzes how a mother's self-denial affects her relationship with her daughter:

> Thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted.14

By contrast, Sheila is shown to reject the conventional values of her mother. Bessie sinks back into the past and imagines the table set for Passover, a symbol of her Jewish heritage. Sheila disrupts this tradition by interrupting her father's prayer over wine by demanding a piece of 'matsah'. When Annie gets the prized matsah instead of herself, Sheila blurts out "Shit!" (27) Alex, horrified by his daughter's lack of respect for Jewish tradition, commands her to leave.

Young Alex: (To Sheila) Get away from the table.
Sheila: (Protesting) Papa!
Young Alex: Out I said! (27)

It is at this moment that Sheila runs into the alley and gets raped by a gang of boys. The act of rape represents the corruption of the outside world which threatens the moral and religious fibre of Bessie's family, and also suggests Sheila's condemnation by her father. The religious connotation suggested here is that of Alex as the "Sacred" patriarch banishing his sinful daughter, Eve, from the garden of Eden.

14 Rich. p.235.

When Sheila comes to visit Bessie in the hospital, she reveals her feelings of failure. Her longing for something meaningful makes her dream of going to Europe. For the first time, Bessie tells Sheila about the importance of self-fulfillment and the discovery of her individuality. "If going away will make you happy, I'm happy." (29)

Through her introspection on the threshold of death Bessie begins to transmit her reflections to her daughters. Aviva Ravel explores the process of dying as a transforming experience, "only at the moment of death do you separate reality from fantasy and come closest to the true essence of your person."15 Thus Bessie, for the first time, is able to disengage her individual identity from social expectations.

When Bessie is alone again, she realizes that Sheila will not find what she is looking for by changing environments, for she must attain inner meaning first.

> Old Bessie: (Holds up her hand) You see this hand? No matter which finger you cut off, they all hurt the same...the trouble is, child, you won't find what you want, not in Europe, not in Africa, and that's why I cry, not for myself, Gottenu, not for myself... (29)

This realization leads Bessie back into her younger consciousness, as she recollects the day Sheila came home after being raped in the alley. The older, wiser Bessie tries to make the younger Bessie acknowledge her negligence. Young Bessie, on

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15 Morley, Patricia. "Talking with Aviva Ravel, on Priorities, Fairness, and Being Human," Canadian Drama, (Fall 1979) p. 186.

the other hand, declares she had too many responsibilities to cope with.

Old Bessie: She had no business being out on the street at night.
Young Bessie: She had a fight with Alex. She tore his book. He yelled and she ran out. I was too busy to go after her. How was I to know that...
Old Bessie: You also loved the others more.
Young Bessie: No! I had to keep peace in the house. The two of them always shouting at each other. I had to keep peace! (30)

Ravel suggests women's inabilty to be solely responsible for the care of others when they alone must keep the family together. Jean Baker Miller articulates this claim when she writes:

> In a system which so totally constricted women, mothers could not possibly give their daughters what the daughters needed, as they did not receive what they needed as mothers.16

The more Old Bessie connects with her younger self, the greater understanding she obtains of her own life and of the human condition. Bessie meditates upon the final peace that death will bring and the acceptance of destiny: life will go on after she is gone. "Day and night, summer--winter. People are born, they get married..." (30)

Bessie tries to reconcile herself with Judy's marriage and the recognition that her daughter's roots are in the New World. She remembers Judy's wedding when she tried to make Alex accept that "Times are different." (30) Although Judy has married a gentile and lost much of her heritage, she has married a man

16 Miller. p. 139.

who is affluent enough to support the entire family, and has obtained the material security Bessie has always craved for her daughters. Although Bessie displays a realistic acceptance of life, it is shown to be tinged with irony.

> Old Bessie: By me, whenever something good happens, it has to have a little bad too. Nu, maybe it'll be all right. And if not, she can always come back to Mama. (31)

Bessie's contemplation sets the stage for the discussion on the telephone with Judy. Judy tells Bessie that her daughter, Cathy, ran away, to get away from the "phoniness" of life. Cathy's search for meaning inspires Judy to question her own identity. Judy reveals that she, too, would like to get away from the artificiality of her life. Bessie, now aware of the importance of self-fulfillment and spontaneity, tells Judy to go off by herself if that is what she wishes. "So get yourself a knapsack and start hitch-hiking." (31)

Through her old age and accompanying illness, Bessie perceives human existence in a new light. About old age as a period of enlightenment, June Singer writes,

> In old age, when people have already proved their identity and established their position in the world, there is no longer so much necessity to live by collective standards. It is a time when those who have fulfilled the objective purposes for which they have striven are ready to turn inward and let themselves be more what they truly are and less what the world expects.17

17 Singer, June. Androgyny: Toward a New Theory of Sexuality, Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Press, 1976. p. 321.

Through her reflections, Bessie discovers the ambiguity of marriage--that people spend their lives together because they are afraid to die alone. The paradox is that death must be faced alone, by everyone. "I can't...stop...it's so funny...live a whole life together so you don't die alone!" (32) Bessie's revelation of life's absurdity makes her laugh until she is filled with pain and the nurse is summoned by Alex to give her an injection.

Bessie is put in a deep sleep and begins to dream about her three daughters again. Her worst fears are brought to life as the auctioneer, a symbol of her lost heritage, introduces Judy at a nightclub where she sings "Paper Doll."

> Judy: (Sings) "I want a paper doll that I can call my own. A doll that other fellahs bannot steal. And then the flirty flirty guys with the flirty flirty eyes will have to flirt with dollies that are real..." (32)

The lyrics of the song express Bessie's fear that Judy would become a victim of male exploitation in the corrupt world of urban night life. Bessie's struggle for survival in Russia in the face of annihilation is interwoven with her struggle to keep her daughters safe from the hostile forces of Canadian metropolitan society. The Jewish tradition that had been threatened by anti-semitism in Russia is replaced by a different kind of danger: that of material values and the alienation they produce. Annie is seen typing a business letter, and Sheila, in a mental institution, recites a poem about despair.

> "The walls are covered with thick slime. I touched them accidentally and my fingers are caught in the mess. I pull with all my might but the stuff drips from my hand, like from a leaky faucet. There is no place to run, for my legs sink in the sewage..." (32)

Bessie's consciousness becomes fragmented as she desperately clings to her traditional beliefs in the face of the modern world's chaos.

> Annie: No choices...
> Judy: Be somebody...
> Old Alex: Leave me, Bessie, leave me... (Young Bessie dances in with Young Alex.)
> Young Bessie: If only life were one long dance. (33)

The different streams of consciousness overlap as Bessie tries to make sense out of her own identity. "I did everything for you! Where would you have been without me?...but I forgot to live myself." (33) Young Bessie reveals another paradox--that life must end when one begins to understand the world, and perceives that Old Bessie needs more time to make up for her past mistakes. "Let her live a little longer. She has things to fix up. So much to do!" (33)

Alex enters Bessie's dream state and voices his traumatic experiences as a young boy, witnessing soldiers murdering his family.

> Young Alex: I wanted you to have an easy life, Bessie. But I was afraid of rich men, politicians, goyim. When I was a little boy, the soldiers came into our village. They burned the houses. Then they came to our house. They stabbed my mother six times, she fell on the floor and died. My older brother ran out in

> the street to fight them with his bare hands. They shot him. I hid in the cupboard. At night I ran away. A man took me across the border in a wagon of straw... Since then I've been afraid. (33)

The cruelty and sense of loss is magnified through the laughter of their three daughters and the auctioneer. Their daughters, identifying with Canadian experience, are perceived as indifferent to their parents' past suffering and loss of tradition. Although Alex and Bessie have managed to escape the destruction of their past existence, what they find in their new setting is a society that threatens their heritage through assimilation. As part of the dislocation felt by the immigrant, the Jew, as the 'perennial exile' epitomizes the struggle for identity.

> Burdened by old-world attitudes and influences, yet struggling to be accepted by and to accept the not always understood or even desired new culture, the Jew walked a tightrope, balancing the remembered claims of his forefathers and the ambiguous demands of the alien environment. He was the proverbial stranger in a strange and harsh land.18

Although Canada may offer peace and security to immigrants, it can also separate them from their cultural, historical, and moral traditions. Bessie, preparing to go into surgery, articulates this realization.

> Old Bessie: Listen to me nurse. I was a young girl in a strange country. I didn't know the language. My little town had only three streets. I knew everybody. I never understood America. Too many people, too much work. I did my best. I made

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18 Newton. p. xv.

> Shabbos for the family. 'Yom-Tov' was 'Yom-Tov' I was a good Jewish daughter. I did my best!(33)

As Bessie reminisces about her individual sense of loss, she voices her exclusion and disorientation as a Jew, immigrant, and woman struggling to achieve integration. She realizes that "it doesn't matter in the end. You're alone anyway. The pain, the fear, everything is lived alone." (35)

There is a sense of sadness at the end of the play, but it is combined with an acceptance and understanding of loss. Through her approaching death, Bessie obtains the ultimate connection with her own identity, free from the constraints of the external world. The tragic dimensions of the play suggest that although Bessie's illness culminates in death, it has brought about a deeper awareness of her own individuality.

Juxtaposing Bessie's insight at the moment of death, however, is her sudden vision of the Russian auctioneer selling the family candlesticks for one million rubles. Paradoxically, spiritual victory has been gained, but not without the realization that Bessie's traditional inheritance has been lost to the materialism of the modern world.

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A Place on Earth

In A Place on Earth, as in The Twisted Loaf, the search for female identity is explored within the boundaries of an urban landscape. Densely populated Toronto becomes a metaphorical wilderness where the sense of dislocation and isolation is manifested by an urban wasteland.

Canadian women playwrights frequently use an urban setting as symbolic of both female inner landscape and exclusion from the male world. Beverly Simons' play, Crabdance, Lezley Havard's Despair, Margaret Penman's Wheelchair and Elinore Siminovitch's Tomorrow and Tomorrow all explore women's disembodiment from urban, male society through their isolation, loneliness and lack of power.

In A Place on Earth, produced in 1982, Betty Jane Wylie, through her protagonist, Peggy, suggests that effacement of female identity becomes more all-encompassing in the urban wilderness of pre-cast concrete than it does in the untamed, primeval world of nature. The unchartered forest may intimidate, even annihilate, but it can also restore primordial roots, tap hidden resources within, as shown in Islands, where, unlike the city, nature enhances individual growth. Peggy, a seventy-two year old widow, fights for survival and dignity in the inimical world of the inner city. Her isolation,

symbolized by her shabby one-room apartment, is her only refuge against the savage cruelty of the ghettoized chaos outside her door.

The "unconscious horror of nature,"1 prevalent in dramatic works like Ringwood's Still Stands the House and Hollingsworth's Ever Loving, is transformed in A Place on Earth to a terror evoked by the concrete urban jungle. Where the wilderness in the former plays accentuates female powerlessness in facing both nature and the repressions of patriarchal society, in the latter play, female alienation in the inner city has been artificially created by man. What is threatening to Peggy is not the savagery of winter or wild animals found in the wilderness, but the fear of male violence lurking in the dark streets. To emphasize this outside threat, the play describes the male activities in the hall which disturb Peggy's tranquillity.

> We hear men's voices grunting, greeting each other. We hear a good, productive cough, retrieval, and a toilet flushing. The body in the bed becomes restless, resisting all this noise, turning away from it, pulling the covers more tightly around her head. (1)

As a woman alone, the world of fear is personified as the male world in which Peggy is victimized through rape. She is further demoralized by the indifference of the police and by the drunken men lurking outside her apartment door. The hostile urban environment, unlike the wilderness that frightens Ruth

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1 Frye. p. 141.

and Diana in Ever Loving, is shown to be man-made. Alienation and fear in A Place on Earth are derived from male violence and aggression manifested in the urban setting through the actions of men who govern it.

D. G. Jones sees the technological, urban reality as an expression of male power, in which man attempts to conquer and subject the forces of nature,

> In extremes he has declared total war on the wilderness, woman, or the world of spontaneous impulse and irrational desire. At the least he has sought to subjugate these unruly elements within himself by force of will. More largely, he has sought to bind them in the body politic by force of law. And more ambitious still, with the increased confidence in his power, he has sought to control them in the world around him and even to eradicate them from the earth.2

Peggy, as part of the natural elements man wishes to subjugate, fights for survival in the engulfing body politic. As a way of defining her existence, Peggy maintains her inner, emotional world through her puppet, Buddy. This dramatic device connects Peggy with her inner consciousness and allows for the articulation of her individuality in opposition to the mechanical, indifferent outside world. The puppet is also a personification of the aesthetic, imaginative world in which Peggy finds refuge. Through nursery rhymes, the puppet connects Peggy with her meaningful past when she was an elementary school teacher and made puppets for her students. In her state of solitude, the puppet is instrumental in making everyday life

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2 Jones. p. 57.

an aesthetic experience and gives trivial daily activities a level of fantasy, as together they sing nursery rhymes.

PEGGY: (sings) Make the bed,
Shake the bed,
Turn the bed right over.
Make the bed, shake the bed,
Turn the bed right over. (3)

This nursery rhyme suggests Peggy's search for identity outside the traditional role of wife and mother. Peggy confronts the limited position of women in the home by appropriating her domestic setting and transforming it into her private space. By wanting to "shake the bed," and "turn the bed right over," Wylie portrays a symbolic revolution whereby Peggy overthrows the patriarchal throne. The act of 'making' the bed becomes a reshaping of traditional forms, culminating in the ultimate transfiguration of the patriarchal system, again by turning the bed "right over."

As Peggy makes her morning tea, the puppet sings "Polly put the kettle on" and "Jack be nimble." Nursery rhymes also serve to give imaginative meaning to the mundane, as, in her solitude, Peggy performs her domestic chores as a ritual, no longer as a duty. The puppet also helps Peggy keep her individuality and sense of dignity which she strives to restore after the degradation of rape.

VOICE: I always said you were a lady.
PEGGY: (suddenly angry) And where did that get me? Exposed, and ripped, and invaded. Oh! Oh!
(She shudders and shakes and stops and stares into space)
VOICE: This won't do, Peggy.
PEGGY: I know, I know. (6)

While Peggy prepares her breakfast, a woman phones her about a survey. As an expression of the hostility of the outside world, the woman bang downs the phone when she discovers Peggy is retired and over sixty, creating the feeling that she is unimportant in society. "I don't count!" (7) However, contrary to this perception, Peggy defines her own position:

> PEGGY: I have not retired. Soon, maybe, but not yet. I still work. I work very hard. I work very hard at staying alive. I work very hard at finding the truth of each day... I may retire. I'll have to think about that. (8)

The phone call leads Peggy to think about her relation to others, as the telephone has become her only source of human contact with her friends and family. This heightens her sense of insecurity in the technological urban reality where communication has become mechanical, severed from emotional involvement. "Phone calls like that make you wonder why you have a phone. Why do I have a phone? Because Marion pays for it, that's why." (8)

Buddy reminds Peggy how the telephone allows her to keep in touch with her friends, like Lily and Madge. But Peggy finds she is alienated from her friends for other reasons: Lily's asthma which prevents her from talking, and the possessiveness of Madge's husband. "I can't ever talk to her too long because Harry gets jealous." (8)

In reflecting about her married friend, Madge, Peggy recalls

her own domestic duties as a traditional wife, and acts out a marriage scenario to Buddy.

> Would you like some more tea, dear? How about a nice Arrowroot bickie, love? Want me to cut your meat? (pause) Oh, no. No...he could cut his own meat. But more clothes to wash. Oh, my. It's all I can do to look after myself. I don't know how Madge does it. (9)

Peggy reveals how her position as wife included being mother and handmaiden to her husband, and finds her friendship with Madge a meaningful reminder of her marriage. "She gives me glimpses of the world I left behind." (9)

Through her friend Alma, Peggy can identify with her strong, independent self. As a college student, Alma evokes happy memories of Peggy's own student days when she fell in love with Herb, the principal, whom she married. She contemplates her own perception of herself and how much she has changed. Like Bessie in The Twisted Loaf, Peggy's external image in the mirror contrasts with her inner vision of herself. "Who is that old hag? (pause) Not me. That's not whom I remember. I don't know you. I don't know you at all." (10) Like Bessie, Peggy finds affinity with her young, vibrant self, and fears her older self as destructive and repellent. Peggy has internalized negative stereotyped images of old women. As de Beauvoir observes, "it takes only the passage of time to alter her charms--infirm, homely, old, woman is horrifying."3

While Peggy prepares herself to go to the police station to

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3 de Beauvoir. p. 180.

press charges, she judges her appearance in the context of the fairy tales she learned as a young girl. As she brushes her hair, she imagines herself as a young, beautiful Rapunzel. "And who did you used to be? (pause) Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair!" (11) But Peggy reinterprets the romantic illusion to suit her own life, where the "handsome prince" dies and leaves Rapunzel a poor widow. "And after that? (pause) He died, he died. (pause) And she lived...forever after. There!" (11)

In Peggy's search for self-definition, the mirror reflects Peggy's self-doubts about her appearance, and simultaneously it becomes a symbol for male images of female beauty, ones Peggy no longer lives up to. "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, Who's the oldest of them all?" (12) Susan Griffin writes about mirrors as a metonym for the male perception of female beauty. In the "room of the dressing where the walls are covered with mirrors. Where mirrors are like eyes of men, and the women reflect the judgments of mirrors."4 Thus Peggy is confronted with socially created images of women in the mirror, unable to see her real self.

As Peggy wonders how she is perceived extrinsically through her reflection in the mirror, she decides to phone the police station to alert them of her visit. She is then haunted by her traumatic rape experience, riveted to her memory.

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4 Griffin, Susan. Woman and Nature, New York: Harper and Row, 1978, p. 155.

> ...I really thought he was going to kill me. This is it, I thought. It's not so bad. This is it. Rough. Strong. Pressure. Dragging me down, arm over my face. And then his knees in my ribs. Ripping, tearing. Clothes. Flesh. Dry. Tearing. (pause) Don't think about it, don't think about it...(pause) Yes, I remember him. (13)

Although Peggy tries to go on with her life, the rape experience has destroyed her self-image. Susan Griffin, in her analysis of rape, equates it with the annihilation of selfhood into non-being.

> In the moment of rape a woman becomes anonymous. Like all victims of terrorism, there is something awesomely accidental about her fate. She is like the duck flying in formation which the hunter chose to shoot down--she appeared in his gunsight. Absorbed by his violence, her soul and the history of her soul are lost, are irrelevant.5

Rosemary Radford Ruether perceives the act of rape as an expression of man's desire to dominate the earth, subduing all "inferior" existence into products of consumption.

> The labour of dominated bodies, dominated peoples--women, peasants, workers--mediate for those who rule the fruits of the earth... Through the raped bodies the earth is raped. Those who enjoy the goods distance themselves from the destruction.6

Peggy repudiates her feelings of insignificance by concentrating on her daily activities which are performed like rituals, celebrating her individual survival. As she does her exercises, she uses her cane to perform a tap dance and

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5 Griffin, Susan. Rape: The Power of Consciousness, New York: Harper and Row, 1979, p. 53.

6 Ruether, Rosemary Radford. Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology, Boston: Beacon Press, 1983, p. 263.

imagines how she could have defended herself against her attacker. "Hit him with your cane, Peg! Just hit him with your cane next time. Belt him!" (15)

Another activity that gives Peggy pleasure is opening her mail. She finds a letter from her cousin, Laura, who tells her that her aunt is very ill. Peggy remembers her childhood when her young and beautiful aunt used to put nail polish on Peggy's toe nails. Now her aunt is old and close to death. "And now she's...dear God--she's ninety!" (18) This realization fills Peggy with horror, as she ponders her own state of decline through old age and loneliness. "Oh, Buddy! Stay with me! Stay with me!" (18) Peggy then reads a letter from her granddaughter, Debby, which only intensifies her state of loneliness.

Unlike Muriel in Islands, Peggy does not choose to be alone. Where Muriel believes it is the political system that forces people to live together, Peggy finds it is the structure of society that isolates people from loved ones. "There must be something wrong with a system that separates grandmothers from their grandchildren." (18) Although Peggy cannot visit Debby, who has sent her fangs for Halloween, Peggy and Debby interact on the level of imagination, through nursery rhymes and ritual. Peggy puts on the fangs and plays the part of a witch.

> Wicked Old Witch,
> Are you hungry today?

> If you are--
> Then we will run away. (18)

Another source of inspiration is Peggy's drawer filled with souvenirs from the past, like her old birthday cards. Peggy's memory is stirred by vivid recollections of love and sensuality. But these sensations are smothered by the brutality of rape.

> ...I remember how wonderful it was to be touched, to be held. Everyone needs to be touched...But not like that, not like that! (She starts to rock back and forth) That ...was an act of violence, against my body. Against my spirit. Violation. I was inviolate and I was taken in violence. Ripped and torn. Torn apart! (20)

Peggy rips up one of her birthday cards, representing the annihilation of her being induced by her violent attack.

She retrieves her late husband's cap from World War I, her teacher's certificate, and her marriage license. These are all meaningful symbols in her life, uniting her with the past as well as being rich sources of inspiration in defining her present existence.

Through her husband's photograph, Peggy awakens the memory of her intimate and poetic relationship with her husband.

> Herbert Woodgreen, you could charm the birds out of the trees. It never mattered that we didn't have much money. We used to pop corn and do jigsaw puzzles and read poetry and make love, and laugh. Oh, and laugh! (21)

By becoming a widow, Peggy has no control over her state of solitude which is inflicted upon her, as June Singer suggests

when writing about widowhood and female-identity:

> The woman who has defined herself and her personality in terms of her relationship to a man suffers most when she is faced with widowhood. Unlike the divorcee, she has not deliberately chosen the path of self-determination--she has not prepared herself for being without the man who has been her partner, through a period of questioning the validity of the relationship, through dissatisfaction with her status as wife, and through the conscious growth toward that independence that is necessary to decide to terminate a crucial relationship and to stand alone.7

Thus Peggy's status as an autonomous woman is ruptured by her deeply embedded loneliness due to the death of loved ones. The birth certificates of her two children, John and Marion, remind her of her role as a mother, and a newspaper clipping brings back her son's death in a car accident. Another clipping describes her husband's death, leaving her to struggle alone. Herb's obituary reads, "survived by his wife." (22) This makes Peggy consider her individual struggle for identity in the midst of loneliness and loss. "I always knew I was a survivor." However, she feels it is not enough "merely to have survived!"

For, unlike Muriel in Islands, Peggy craves to have her family back again. Peggy sees her state of solitude as her banishment from all that is meaningful, and it is only through fading memories that she is able to anchor her past to the present. "I keep burying parts of myself--people I loved, memories. It's getting so I know more people in the cemetery than on the street." (23) In her loneliness, Peggy imagines

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7 Singer. pp. 313-314.

what it would be like if some of her dead loved ones could come back, just for one day, to be with her.

In contrast with her rich and meaningful past relationships, Peggy now has only fragmentary and sporadic connections with others. A volunteer comes by to give Peggy a "meals on wheels" lunch, leaving it outside her door; she plays a Halloween game from her window with the children in the street by putting on her fangs and playing the part of a witch. Peggy's daily activities are an attempt to re-create her identity in the face of desperate loneliness. As June Singer observes of the widow:

> A widow finds herself in a position in which she is nearly forced to develop her own creative powers in order to fill the missing part of her own existence with something to make her feel whole again. If she succeeds in this, she reaches a new level of conscious development.8

In an attempt to fill the void in her life, Peggy always observes the "niceties." She sets the dinner table with care, and always puts on clean clothes. Maintaining a level of dignity is related to Peggy's self-affirmation. But beneath the surface, Peggy's feelings of mortification emerge as she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror.

> I hate you! You sit there so cold, watching, watching, aging, aging, but never a crack in the facade. Cold and icy, and every day one day older. Stop it! (25)

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8 Singer. pp. 316-317.

Like Bessie in The Twisted Loaf, Peggy keeps seeing her outward self as a frightening stranger. Peggy, too, seeks her young and vibrant self behind the deteriorating mask of old age. As part of the "Nature-Woman" motif described by Atwood, Peggy perceives herself as both destructive and life-affirming, fluctuating between the two polarities. Like Hagar Shipley in The Stone Angel, Peggy's young and creative self is trapped inside a malignant image of decay.

> Perhaps this pattern gives us a clue to the full shape of the Nature-Woman metaphor in Canadian literature: not just an Ice-Virgin-Hecate figure, but a Hecate with Venus and Diana trapped inside. And perhaps the "plots"--the stories that can be told--about the Ice-Virgin-Hecate Nature-Monster are not limited to how one is destroyed by or manage to escape or conquer this figure; the story can also be about the attempts of the buried Venuses and Dianas to get out, to free themselves.9

A Place on Earth reflects Peggy's struggle to free herself from the negative perceptions of old age by identifying with her inner world of imagination. The play delves into Peggy's fragmented consciousness, one that swings from a sense of integration to a level of disintegration and self- alienation. As Peggy eats her lunch she throws custard at the decaying mirror image of her old self, wishing the intruder would go away. "I'm not loking at you. You're not my friend..." (26) Then Peggy is brought back to reality as Buddy scolds her like a young child, pointing out the mess she has to clean up. Peggy's sense of humour is restored, and she remarks, "That's

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9 Atwood. Survival, p. 210.

the worst of being a woman. You always have to clean up after yourself." (26) Peggy believes in the importance of individual responsibilty which she used to teach her children. "That's what I used to tell my kids. Be responsible." (27)

As Peggy cleans up, she recalls her role as a traditional wife and Herb's unwillingness to help in the house, which Peggy now sees as irresponsibilty. "Now, Herb, there, he never picked up after himself at all. That man--may he rest in peace--was a SLOB!" (27) As Peggy finishes her cleaning, she is shown to be in good humour. However, when she catches her reflection in the mirror, she digresses to a negative perception of herself.

> So many lines to learn. Where did they all come from? If only the me that was was still in there. Where are you Peggy? Where did you go-- I saw you just a little while ago, looking bright and fresh and full of wonder...Well, you're still full of wonder. (27)

Peggy tries to find her creative, eternal self which she knows is buried deep within her, a timeless self, governed only by imagination and wonder. Susan Griffin writes about the potential of seeing beyond stereotyped images to the primeval sources which unite all women.

> And now, beneath these images we can see the gleam of older images. And these peel back to reveal the older still. The past, the dead, once breathing, the forgotten, the secret, the buried, the once blood and bone, the vanished, shimmering now like an answer from these walls...10

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10 Griffin. Woman and Nature, pp. 159-160.

However, Peggy's consciousness shifts back to conventional images of women as she paints her face to go outside. Buddy echoes social customs and their definition of femininity. "A girl's face is her fortune." (28) Peggy identifies with her younger self as an erotic being, "the loving, potentially beautiful woman trapped inside a negative shell."11 As she dresses up, she ignites the embers of her romantic vision as a young woman in love. "My love, you are like a cameo. Oh, Herbert, how loving you are! Oh, my love, oh, my love." In this state of mind, Peggy abruptly leaves the seclusion of her apartment, ready to confront the outside world.

In Act II, Peggy's experience at the police department is revealed through a telephone conversation with her daughter, Marion. The cruel malice of the police towards Peggy's rape experience accentuates her position as victim in the world of male violence, a position Peggy challenges.

> ...Then they asked what I was doing out that time of night. Eight o'clock on a Saturday night, what was I doing out? I was going to the drugstore, to buy some popcorn. I like popcorn. Why not ask that man what was he doing out? They should have a curfew for men. Then women would be safe on the streets... (32)

Peggy confronts the authority of the police who, by their apathy, condone the exploitation of women. This reiterates Susan Griffin's claim that rape is a form of "mass terrorism"12 which subjects women to male control.

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11 Atwood. Survival, p. 210.

12 Griffin. Rape, p. 21.

> [T]he victims of rape are chosen indiscriminately, but the propagandists for male supremacy broadcast that it is women who cause rape by being unchaste or in the wrong place at the wrong time--in essence, by behaving as though they were free.13

Peggy describes how the police conceive her sexual assault as an acceptable part of male behaviour.

> ...I heard one of the men say to another one--I guess he thought I couldn't hear--he said he'd been wondering how long it was since an old prune like me had had some fresh meat... (32)

The policemen's perception of women demonstrates how they see women as "the Other"14, thus divided from male experience. As de Beauvoir observes, because women are outside the realm of male activity, they are perceived in conjunction with nature. Just as man asserts his will on nature, he projects his consciousness on women.

> Now ally, now enemy, she appears as the dark chaos from whence life wells up, as this life itself, and as the over-yonder toward which life tends. Woman sums up nature as Mother, Wife, and Idea; these forms now mingle and now conflict, and each of them wears a double visage.15

As part of this double visage of women, the rape victim is woman as enemy, associated with destruction and chaos. By going to the police station to press charges against her attacker, Peggy wishes to eradicate the perception of women as "the Other", integrating female experience into the political power

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13 Griffin. Rape, p. 21.

14 de Beauvoir. p. 162.

15 Ibid. pp. 162-163.

structures. However, she finds as a woman and rape victim, she is denied recognition as an equal.

> I was going to fight for justice and stand up for all women, my last act of bravery, and they bruised my spirit as badly as that creature bruised my body... (32)

To emphasize the hostility of her surroundings, a man tries to get through Peggy's door which she has left open. He calls her "sweetheart" and asks her if she wants a drink. Instead, Peggy decides to pour her own drink and celebrate her pursuit of justice. As she makes popcorn, Peggy ruminates on her marginalized position as widow and scapegoat.

> Men...develop...nasty habits! (pause) So they leave. Leave us holding the bag. Ex...it. Here's to all the little old ladies left holding the bag...And there shall rise...a mighty popping ...of corn! (34)

Peggy envisions a mock revolution whereby old women rebel against their exclusion from society and assert their individual power.

> Witches, unite! You have nothing to lose but your brooms! (sips again) Bring back brooms and cats for little old ladies! (sips again) Grandmothers of the world--hit 'em with your wet tea bags. ZOT! (giggles, and sips again) And there shall rise a mighty clacking of dentures, and a tapping of canes... (35)

Peggy's mood of defiant optimism shifts back to her feeling of humiliation and anger, as she thinks about society's conception of her. She has been called an "old prune," (35) an "old girl," and a "senior citizen." (36) Peggy rejects all these labels which debase her individuality. "I am not an

object."..."I am me. I am not Josh Murdoch's girl. I am not Herb Woodgreen's wife. I am not Marion Logan's mother. I am me." (36) Peggy refuses to dissolve her identity into the social contents of the patriarchal formula. Buddy echoes religious tradition which advocates the importance of conformity. "It is not good for man to be alone." Peggy herself reads from the bible about togetherness:

> "Two are better than one; because they have good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him, that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." (37)

Peggy is prompted to feel her existence is deficient because she is alone, and reverberates the biblical claim, "how can one be warm alone?" (37) She remembers the reassurances from others that Herb is still with her in spirit. Buddy echoes this sentiment, "Herb is still with you." Trying to escape from loneliness, Peggy knows she can bring Herb back by evoking "fond memories and warm smiles." However, what she misses most is Herb's physical presence.

Through introspection, Peggy is able to slip into her younger consciousness. She recites Herb's declarations of love, "'til death us do part." (38) The light in the ceiling blows out and Peggy appears as a shadowy figure of her younger self.

> Oh, my love, oh, my love. In the darkness I am always young, and still waiting for you. Why did you leave me so soon? I miss you. I still miss you. Sometimes at night you come to me. I can still remember the little half-smile on your mouth just before you came into me,

> and then I would shut my eyes and hold you, rising and arching to the glory of you in me, and me all around you. (39)

Like Old Bessie, Peggy reclaims her erotic, vibrant young self. As a Venus figure, she seeks deliverance from the decrepitude of old age by calling forth her dynamic sexual being: active and all-encompassing. However, her old self stoically reminds her of mundane reality. "No dreams and no illusions. And they don't make light bulbs the way they used to." (39) Peggy changes the light bulb and begins to speculate on the inevitablity of approaching death. "That is the last time I will change a light bulb. Little by little we leave the world." (39) Her pleasure at having fixed the light is diminished by society's overwhelming impression of old age as synonymous with irrelevance. Peggy echoes the social worker's attitude: "My dear, you can see she's incompetent, can't do for herself at all, you know." (39) Peggy has a comic-tragic vision of nursing homes where the elderly are suffocated with "care". There is the "Bide-a-Wee Home," (40) where they play with marbles and toss bean bags all day; there is "Belly Acres," (41) a peaceful place right next to the cemetery, "controlled by nurses trained in Belsen and doctors skilled in the art of heavy sedation." There is also "Tranquillity Towers," where a "tranc in time saves nine." (41)

Peggy's cynical vision affirms her fight against old age as non-being. However, Peggy's consciousness fluctuates between

her past memories of hope for the future and her present state of despair. "I used to wonder what the future held for me, lying there all bright and glossy ahead of me. And now--this is the future. There isn't any more where this came from." (42) She tries to cling to the belief that life is still worth living, in spite of Buddy's claim that "there is no tomorrow." (42)

Confused by the effects of the sherry, Peggy's identity becomes blurred as she toasts herself: "And to me. Whoever I am." (43) Buddy reminds her of her role as the creator of life, "You are the Mother." (43) Peggy stuffs a pillow up her sweater and proudly displays her pregnancy. "I am the Mother." She mimics the perception of motherhood as "institution,"16 as her patronizing doctor strips her of power. "Now, Mrs. Woodgreen, how are we feeling today? Putting on a little weight, aren't we? We wouldn't want that, would we now?" (43) Peggy re-enacts her birth experience, encouraging herself: "The only way is through." (43)

As Peggy relives the struggle of her pregnancy, the humiliation of the police interrogation overshadows her imagination. The policeman had asked her, "And do you think you'll get pregnant?" (44) As she recalls the cruelty of the police, Peggy's despair becomes acute. "I can't stand it any longer. They've spoiled it all, what little I had left, they've spoiled it." (44) In Peggy's state of distress, her instinct

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16 Rich. p. 13.

for survival is mingled with self-immolation. She comforts herself and caresses her pregnant belly, but when she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror, she is overcome by her deep loathing of her aged image. "You stupid, old fool. You're seventy-two years old, and you're still playing games. When are you going to quit? Right..now!" (44)

Overcome with self-hatred, Peggy tries to force Buddy to kill her with a kitchen knife. However, as much as Peggy wants to die, her instinct to live is stronger and she cannot kill herself. Yet Peggy still longs for liberation from the futility of her life.

> You have to have a reason to get out of bed each morning. And what was my reason today? I was going to vindicate myself today, do my bit for women everywhere, make a stand for justice. It was something to look forward to. I was going to make a little victory of it, a celebration. But they spoilt it. I'm tired of living life to the hilt. I want to die...to the hilt. (46)

The indifference of the outside world has taken away Peggy's faith in human existence. Severed from any form of justice from the legal system, her life seems void of meaning.

Buddy, however, articulates her inner consciousness, one that still believes in the power of her existence. Buddy supports her strong conviction that suicide is a sin, and quotes the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." (47) Peggy grapples with her inner consciousness, wishing to free herself from her utter disillusionment with mankind and the suffering the world inflicts upon her. In her desperate frenzy, she

grabs the knife and begins to stab the puppet, cutting herself in the wrist by accident. This self-mutilation brings her back to her senses, as her life-affirming nature takes over.

> You're going to live, and you're going to keep on living until you are permitted to die. (pause) I have just lost another option of my life. (thinks) I guess it never was an option. (pause) I won't go brainstorming the gates of eternity again. I'll wait 'til I'm invited. (48)

Peggy comes to the realization that she must find meaning in her daily existence, no matter how inadequate it may sometimes appear. She begins to see the trivial details of everyday life as significant. "Tomorrow I will buy some All-Bran...and maybe a banana." (48) Peggy's new hope and determination is juxtaposed with the taped singing of a nursery rhyme about an old woman leading a life of insignificance, without control or impact on society.

> ...She'd nothing to lose,
> She'd nothing to fear,
> She'd nothing to ask,
> And nothing to give,
> And when she did die,
> She'd nothing to leave. (48)

Betty Jane Wylie's vision of an old woman's oppression in a hostile urban society is a clear deviation from Hollinsgworth's portrayal of female oppression in patriarchy. Hollingsworth's characters in Ever Loving are trapped in their stifling positions as wives and mothers which prevent them from achieving autonomy. Peggy, however, is oppressed through her isolation from others. Her solitude, then, becomes a form of

imprisonment in which she is controlled by poverty, fear and loneliness. Where Muriel in Islands chooses solitude as a way to liberate herself from human relationships, and Luce in Ever Loving leaves her conventional husband in order to fulfill her potential, Peggy's solitude only makes her dream of the past, when she was connected to those she loved.

In The Twisted Loaf, Bessie struggles in an urban setting to preserve her family tradition, despite the foreign values of urban materialism. Like Peggy, Bessie experiences the corruption of the outside world and the threat of male violence through rape--in Bessie's case, the rape of her daughter.

Like Bessie, Peggy searches for her eternal self in the face of physical deterioration and approaching death. Yet Peggy's greatest battle is that she must continue to live in a world which has abandoned her by denying her justice. As an old woman, she perceives a mechanical world ruled by male violence, against which she must struggle alone.

Man's urban reality grew out of the transformation of nature into a technological and mechanical structure. The play portrays the distortion of human behavior in which violence towards women in the form of rape is symptomatic of man's will to subdue the natural world.

Peggy withdraws from the corruption of the urban wilderness, by delving into her female inner landscape. Through the medium

of her puppet, she escapes into the richness of her imaginary world, keeping at bay the terrors of a living death. She thus creates a tenuous order over the negative forces of the wasteland outside, by drawing sustenance from the natural, human impulses deep within herself.

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A Woman from the Sea

In Cindy Cowan's play, A Woman from the Sea, produced in 1986, the creative potential offered by the wilderness takes on new significance. Where the wilderness in Ever Loving symbolizes patriarchal society, and becomes a place of refuge in Islands, the wilderness in A Woman from the Sea is used as a metonym for the female life process. The "Nature as Woman" motif in Canadian literature reaches new heights as both nature and woman are portrayed as the affirmation of life in the face of technological destruction. Whilst the wilderness in Canadian literature has often been perceived as hostile to man, demonstrating a "mindless barbarity,"1 in A Woman from the Sea, it is the hostility of man that threatens to annihilate the natural world. Northrop Frye sees this shift of consciousness occurring in "the second phase of Canadian social development,"2 when man's technological atrocities have managed to subdue the forces of nature and the individual begins to ally himself with the natural world.

> In this version nature, though still full of awfulness and mystery, is the visible representative of an order

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1 Frye. p. 142.

2 Ibid. p. 245.

> that man has violated, a spiritual unity that the intellect murders to dissect.3

Searching for the lost connection with nature is a recurring theme in Canadian literature. D. G. Jones sees the quest for a lost paradise as the central "archetypal pattern"4 of Canadian literature. As in the Old Testament, the Canadian Adam is "separated from his Creator and cast out of Eden to wander in the wilderness."5 Thus the national sense of exile and isolation motivates the literary Adam figure to regain the lost Utopia, as in Gabrielle Roy's The Magic Mountain and Henry Kreisel's The Betrayal.

Canadian women writers have reinterpreted this search from a female perspective. As in Atwood's Surfacing, and Marian Engel's Bear, in A Woman from the Sea, Cindy Cowan transforms this archetypal pattern by associating the lost paradise with the matriarchal "Golden Age." The female loss of identity becomes the struggle to regain the power of female creation in pre-patriarchal society, "when Goddess-worshp prevailed, and when myths depicted strong and revered female figures."6 Man's search for integration with the natural world is thus reshaped into a female mythology whereby the primeval religion of the Mother Goddess symbolizes all existence. The image of the

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3 Frye. p. 245.

4 Jones. p. 15.

5 Ibid.

6 Rich. p. 93.

Goddess has become a symbol for the restoration of female authenticity in the feminist imagination, as Carol P. Christ demonstrates:

> The image of the Goddess that is reemerging in the psyches of modern women is symbolic of women's sense that the power we are claiming for ourselves through the women's movement is rooted in the ground of being itself.7

In Cowan's play, the connection with the natural process is attained through female fertility. The protagonist, Almira, gains a deeper awareness of nature through becoming pregnant, and discovering the psychic energy of her being. Motherhood for the playwright symbolizes both the life cycle and the creative process, as Cindy Cowan was inspired to write the play after giving birth to her child.

> As I lifted my eyes to the sea that forever surrounds me in Nova Scotia I started to hear a story. One of destruction and birth and the endurance and power of women's love. A love which must be far greater than the megatons of destruction released by a single nuclear explosion.8

Giving birth exemplifies the female correspondence with nature, life, and creative energy. Cindy Cowan explores her metaphysical connection with the natural world inspired by her

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7 Christ, Carol P. Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess, San Fransisco: Harper and Row, 1987, p. 154.

8 Cowan, Cindy. "Introduction and Playwright's Notes," to A Woman from the Sea, in Canadian Theatre Review (Fall 1986) p. 63.

own experience of motherhood and creativity. "Lying on the table, between my shaking legs, was a living human being. This was power. Real power! Like the wind and water and fire."9

Retrieving the lost connection acquires further impetus through the medium of drama. Feminist playwrights and critics like Karen Malpede search in drama for the inchoation of female creativity.

> ...the origins of female consciousness, to learn if something sacred, which was lost, still lives, and if the work of women in theatre has been impelled and shaped by remembrance of a time when women were sanctioned to create.10

Women's central role at seasonal rituals like that of Eleusis and Thesmophoria of ancient Greece gave birth to the art of drama through female worship of fertility, thus achieving archetypal status in the modern quest for female artistic identity.

> In each and every one of these life-desiring, life-affirming rituals which are the origins of drama, women played major roles as characters, performers, and creators, as the ones who imagined the content and who wrought the form.11

Playwright Cindy Cowan explores the dramatic link between female mythology and the primeval forces of nature in the setting of the Nova Scotia seashore. Described as a "fourth character"12 in the play, the natural environment of the

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9 Ibid.

10 Malpede. p. 2.

11 Ibid. p. 5.

12 Cowan. p. 63.

seashore becomes a dynamic Supreme Being. The sound of the sea and the music in the play give expression to the forces of nature and add emphasis to the emotional process of the three characters, Sedna, Almira, and George.

The protagonist, Almira, like Muriel in Islands, leaves the corruption of society in pursuit of individual meaning. However, it is Almira's husband, George, who brings her to the deserted Nova Scotian coast to enjoy the splendour of the unspoilt landscape. Almira herself has become cynical and disillusioned, seeing the cabin he brings her to as a "fish shack," one that is ridden with "feathers and mouse droppings." (65) George tries to awaken Almira to the beauty of the scenery, but Almira remains unstirred. Involved in the fight against the seal hunt, they have come to observe the behavior of seals. But Almira feels her efforts to prevent the seal hunt have been in vain and begins to withdraw from the natural world. Almira's despair signifies her disconnection from her environment. Because of her inner turmoil, she is unable to retrieve a connection with her exterior world.

The mythical sea creature, Sedna--half seal and half human, serves to link mankind with the natural world and to the inner process of the character of Almira. The 'boom' sounds in the play represent the powerful presence of Sedna, as well as "the disintegration of Almira's grasp on reality."13

13 Cowan. p. 63.

Sedna is able to change from woman to seal at will. She is also a symbol of the female link with the primeval past, reflecting the mythological imagination; one that correlates with the natural world through ritual and mythology. As an image of the "Lady of the Animals,"14 depicted in the cave drawings and figurines of Paleolithic and Neolithic times, Sedna is a personification of humanity's earliest imaginative consciousness, expressing the "image of the awesome creative power of woman and nature."15

The desire to retrieve the lost alliance between mankind and nature is a prominent theme in the Canadian imagination, typified by works like Atwood's Surfacing and Ringwood's plays The Deep Has Many Voices and The Lodge. Frye perceives the search for the lost connection with nature in the form of the pastoral myth as "the most explicitly mythopoeic aspect of Canadian literature."16 As part of the pastoral myth and the "vision of vanished grandeur,"17 Cindy Cowan's interpretation of the myth explores the atrophied state of the relationship between female creation and nature.

As a representation of the natural process, Sedna tries to reconnect Almira with the primeval life force. She chooses Almira, a lost and confused woman, as her medium for the

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14 Christ. p. 167.

15 Ibid. p. 166.

16 Frye. p. 242.

17 Ibid. p. 239.

communication of natural powers. As if her subconscious is being awakened by a forgotten dream, Almira responds when Sedna calls her name, reminding her of her inner self and the natural world from which she has severed herself.

George is the first to meet Sedna on the beach, hoping to sight a Hood seal. Sedna appears as a wise old woman who tells George her father was a fisherman and once saw a strange sea creature that waved at him. George goes back to the cabin full of the excitement and magic of the sea only to be met with Almira's scepticism. "Something out of a bottle of Hermits." (67) Almira takes the binoculars and stares out to sea in a trance-like state, singing the words to an old seal hunting song, "Death to our best friends," (67) having never heard it before. George notices a change is taking place within Almira's perception, but he is unsure of what it means. Almira unconsciously is beginning to incorporate Sedna into her being, but her thoughts are fragmented and her focus is scattered. As a result of her separation from nature, Almira lunches on processed food like pink popcorn and chips, unconcerned about the effects on her body. "What's the point in being healthy?" (69)

George, on the other hand, believes eating well and exercising is an important form of discipline. "Combat discipline. To fight the enemy." (69) He deals with reality in practical terms and sees Almira as over-emotional and

"melodramatic." (70) He is intent on preventing the hunting of seals by climbing onto the ice floes to save their lives, unlike Almira who once saw the importance of pressuring the government towards protection. In her disillusionment over the failure of protecting seals, Almira declares she is "retreating from society." (70) George is alarmed by Almira's ability to give up caring, but she insists that "Not caring feels very, very good." (70) At this point, the sound of the boom is heard, signaling Sedna's arrival. It is followed by a terrible smell, "Like something dead," (71) observes Almira. The fact that only Almira smells the odour signifies her awakening consciousness, infused by the presence of Sedna. George is uneasy by what he perceives as Almira's mental disintegration and decides to let her rest.

Sedna appears to George on the beach as a rotting seal corpse which he struggles to push back to sea. In contrast, the life process, emanating through the baying of seals, increases in power.

Sedna then enters Almira's dream state, intensifying Almira's nightmare as she rolls up the beach crying in pain. She beckons Almira to look at her and describes the "Thick, crimson blood." (71) Almira tries to avoid facing animal suffering by looking away, but Sedna forces her to experience the horrors of killing. Almira is suddenly woken by George in the middle of her nightmare. "I was drowning. Down...down...

down." (71) He tries to reassure her that he got rid of the corpse and the smell of death. But Almira knows that the smell will not go away as the rotting corpse is really herself. "It's me. It's me. It's me..." (72)

By identifying with the destruction of the animal world through her bond with Sedna, Almira begins to associate herself with the exploitation of nature. Northrop Frye discusses the "prevalence in Canada of animal stories, in which animals are closely assimilated to human behaviour and emotions."18 The identification with the animal world by writers like Grey Owl, Farley Mowat, and Margaret Atwood illustrates the search for man's primeval instincts which have been defiled by the corruption of civilization. The destruction of the natural world mirrors man's own self-annihilation. "By devastating nature, man loses his own humanity."19 Allison Mitcham reflects this perception when she writes:

> The destruction of our wild animals...ultimately signals our own destruction, for without the wild life our northland indeed becomes the barren wilderness that so many urban dwellers have long, and hitherto falsely, considered it to be.20

By identifying with the extermination of the seals, like the hanged heron the protagonist identifies with in Surfacing, Almira recognizes her own sense of helpless non-being. George

18 Frye. p. 240.

19 Atwood. Survival, p. 60.

20 Mitcham. p. 12.

tries in vain to reanimate her enthusiasm for the seal campaign, and reads one of the postcards they composed describing the slaughter of the seals. But Almira is disillusioned, saying, "They don't care." (72) She refers to the British government who boycotts Canadian fish to end the seal hunt, but at the same time, "they support the slaughter of sea turtles for a bloody bowl of soup!" (72)

The destruction of the natural world by international governments derives from what D. G. Jones sees as western culture's need to bind nature "in the body politic by force of law."21 By molding nature into a product for consumption, western man is able to assert his rational superiority over the "irrational" physical elements.

> Rather than accept the world as it is, western man has sought to transform it, to refashion the world in the image of his ideal. Certainly he has enlarged his understanding of nature to an astonishing degree, but more often than not he has used this understanding to consolidate his power over nature rather than to extend his communion with her. He has persisted in opposing to nature the world of ideas, the world of his ideal, and in his idealism he has tended to become exclusive rather than inclusive, arrogant rather than humble...22

As an expression of this "inclusive" thinking, George, although he works to save nature, proceeds from the idealism of his intellect when he plans to fight the seal hunt. "It is very important, at this time, that the federal government be aware of the desire." (73) Almira, on the other hand, indicates her

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21 Jones. p. 57.

22 Ibid.

need for an emotional connection with nature. "Desire?" She has "forgotten desire." George is not concerned with a spontaneous, emotional association with nature, and rather, imposes his rational consciousness on nature, confidently believing that this year could be the end of the seal hunt. The boom is heard, and Almira reveals her fear of annihilation. "I see the end." (73)

The play echoes Atwood's claim that the Canadian identification with the destruction of the animal world is manifested in the national fear of extinction, as well as the individual fear of lost identity.

> ...Canadians themselves feel threatened and nearly extinct as a nation, and suffer also from life-denying experience as individuals--the culture threatens the "animal" within them--and that their identification with animals is the expression of a deep-seated cultural fear.23

Thus Almira's loss of individuality interconnects with the violation of the animal world. Her identification with animal suffering embodies her own helpless position in the technological nuclear age which threatens human existence, a recurring theme in the Canadian consciousness, as Atwood discerns.

> ...the English Canadian projects himself through his animal images as a threatened victim, confronted by a superior alien technology against which he feels powerless, unable to take any positive defensive action, and, survive each crisis as he may, ultimately doomed.24

23 Atwood. Survival, p. 79.

24 Ibid. p. 80.

By becoming defeated by man's rejection of nature, Almira has allowed man's exploitation to destroy her alliance with the Earth Mother. The 'boom' signifies the presence of Sedna who reminds Almira of her responsiblity to the natural world. "You have forgotten our bond." (73) When George talks about leaving the animals in peace, Almira crosses herself "In nomini patri, et filii, et spiritu sanctu." (73) Sedna interprets this from the female perspective, urging Almira to exchange her male-oriented perception for a female-oriented vision. "In the name of the mother, the daughter, and the Holy Ghost." (73)

George instigates his plans in an orderly fashion, but Almira can no longer distance herself, becoming overwhelmed with animal suffering. She identifies with the helpless pregnant turtles who "lumber up onto the beach to lay their eggs..." (74) They become victims of the male hunters who "hack off their belly plates," (74) and leave them mutilated to die on the beach. George thinks her behavior is caused by over-work. "You got too close that's all. You need a break." (74) In her anguish, Almira perceives the decimation of the animal world as the exploitation of the female species. She realizes that it is the nesting female that is the easiest victim. "Listen to me! The seals slaughtered on the ice floes? Nesting females! The annihilation of the penguins, gannets, spearbills, swiftwings...How was it accomplished?" (74)

Cindy Cowan implies that the destruction of animals was accomplished through the separation of human consciousness from nature, restating Rosemary Radford Ruether's claim that man, by perceiving nature as a product for consumption, uses his "rational knowledge"25 to manipulate nature. Through the "hierarchical chain of being and chain of command,"26 man's superior status gives him the power to exploit all other life forms.

> The domination of nature is seen as a system of infinite expansion. The eschatological flight from the finite to the infinite has been turned on its side and converted into a doctrine of infinite progress, as both rational knowledge of and control over nature. Nature is to be impelled forward in infinite expansion of material productivity, and its limits are to be gradually conquered.27

Almira, aware of nature's equivocal existence in the nuclear age, sees nature as "fragile." (76) George, on the other hand, perceives nature as "subtle." In his defense he proclaims the life process as continuous since people are still having babies. Almira thinks it is unnatural to have children, as life hinges on the edge of oblivion. Sedna echoes Almira's words and her perception: "Life doesn't seem natural." (77) And in her state of despair Almira believes she would be a "terrible mother." (77)

25 Ruether. p. 83.

26 Ibid. p. 85.

27 Ibid. pp. 83-84.

Almira ruminates upon the distortion of life and hears the boom of nuclear devastation looming in the distance. She begins to perceive the absurdity of modern life in the technological age. "After the successful explosion of the first atomic bomb, the National Baby Association named Robert Oppenheimer its 'Father of the Year.'" (77) Sedna questions the corruption of the natural process. "If he was the father and the bomb was his baby...who was the mother?" (77) Almira remembers the first mother: Eve. Both Almira and Sedna propound the power of female fertility, envisioning Eve as a dynamic producer of life. George, as the voice of patriarchal tradition, denies the image of Eve as a figure of fertility and power.

> Almira: Eve was pregnant.
> George: Almira! She was not.
> Almira: Eve ate from the tree of knowledge and put two and two together. She produced life!
> Sedna: Eve rejoiced more for the coming of her child than all the trappings of Paradise!
> George: She didn't. (78)

By perceiving Eve as a fertility figure, Cindy Cowan connects Eve with the Mother Goddess, as does Millett when she describes Eve as a "fertility goddess overthrown."28

The 'boom' sound in the play crescendos into a slow explosion, reminding Almira of the inevitable destruction of the apocalyptic myth. "The knowledge of life required the knowledge of death." (78) But in the nuclear age natural life

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28 Millett. p. 52.

and death have become contorted by a mechanical, artificial process.

> There'll be no more babies. Woman won't be able to have them. We'll keep getting bigger and rounder only there's nothing inside. Nothing! Only some grey mushrooming gas that bloats us. But there can be no baby... (78)

Almira articulates the deformation of the life process through the threat of nuclear destruction; the sole production of man. Man is the inimical threat to the survival of the natural environment. "Every human being including myself is my enemy." (78)

George echoes the traditional idea of motherhood and the family, repeating his mother's words. "A baby brings love into the world." (78) But to Almira this perception seems out of place in the nuclear age. The whole concept of traditional male/female sexual bonding in order to produce a child seems futile to her in the face of an atomic wasteland. George fails to see how the nuclear age has changed the natural order of life. He continues to perceive the creation of life and the demonstration of love as unchanged. Almira, on the other hand, sees everything as fragmented, like her own psyche. "I just want to keep dissolving." (79) George tries to awaken her sensuality and female desires. "You're in a body that's healthy, and round, and soft." (79) He lowers her to the ground and she passively resigns herself to her own oblivion. "Leaden lovers living love lower me to my grave." (79) Again George

reiterates the traditional role of his mother. "A baby brings love into the world..." (79) Sedna prevents the love-making from occurring by placing a "musket ball" near Almira. She is overcome by the horror of the recurring odour, but again, George is unable to smell it. Sedna takes the musket ball away and returns to the beach, confirming: "It stinks of fear." (80)

Almira goes down to the beach to dig for clams where she meets Sedna for the first time. At this stage Almira is still resisting unification with the life process. Almira believes she is hallucinating and that she is talking to herself when Sedna reveals she lives "In the mother of us all. She who embraces us, bathes us, and to whom we will return when our time is come...The sea!" (82) The sea is described as a mother image of fertility and nurture, and reverberates with the feminist belief that women must reclaim their connection with the archetypal primeval past, as Susan Griffin writes,

> Like the sunlight trapped in the leaf which becomes part of the ground, of the sea, the body of the fish, body of animal, soil, seed. What is growing inside and will pierce the surface, if she awakens with this memory: what she was before.29

As a member of the dynamic process, Sedna is a "Selkie," which is "half seal and half...human." (83) She wants Almira to understand who Selkies were, and how they had been slaughtered as seals.

Almira realizes Sedna's words are part of her dream. She is

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29 Griffin, Susan. Woman and Nature, p. 168.

frightened by Sedna's intrusion into her inner consciousness and wants to go back to her state of inertia. But Sedna is determined that Almira acknowledge the destruction of the natural environment. Sedna will leave her alone when "you decide to leave the Earth alone." (84)

Both Sedna and Almira share the same consciousness as Almira describes her dream of living in the sea, which dissolves into Sedna's nightmarish vision of animal destruction. Both Sedna and Almira embrace the beauty of the natural world against the opposing threat of man the hunter, the "black silhouettes shimmering in the glare of the ice." (84) The sounds of the crying seals are heard in the distance, as Almira imagines the horror of the attack. "Red! Blood! In my eyes. All around me... thuck...thuck...thuck..." (85) Sedna articlulates her betrayal by the patriarchal Father who instituted the subjection of female power by sacrificing her to the sea.

The play expounds the concept that man imposes his will on both woman and nature in order to exorcise his fear of the irrational and instinctive.

> Man seeks in woman the Other as Nature and as his fellow being. But we know what ambivalent feelings Nature inspires in man. He exploits her, but she crushes him, he is born of her and dies in her; she is the source of his being and the realm that he subjugates to his will; Nature is a vein of gross material in which the soul is imprisoned, and she is the supreme reality: she is contingence and Idea, the finite and the whole: she is what opposes the Spirit, and the Spirit itself.30

30 de Beauvoir, p. 162.

Sedna defies the patriarchal Father who initiated her slaying. "I was your daughter, father." ... "Why did you throw me away? I loved you..." (85) The biblical connotations of Sedna's banishment portray her as an Eve figure, cast out of the garden of Eden by her angry Divine Patriarch and condemned to aimless wandering in the wilderness. D. G. Jones sees the ostracism of Eve as a denial of the Divine Mother by patriarchy. "It is that world conventionally symbolized by Eve, the world of the instinctive life, of passion, feeling, and intuition."31 It is "traditional [patriarchal] culture that leads to the rejection of Eve, the land or mother nature herself."32 Sedna's exile is interwoven with Almira's sense of betrayal by the bureaucratic male government because she is unable to propel them into action against the seal hunt. "I can do nothing...I've tried." (85) Sedna understands Almira's state of despair, conscious of her own tenuous existence, constantly being threatened.

By dominating both women's fertility and the natural world, man tries to gain control over the life and death process that engulfs him. By the "dicatorship of mind"33 over "all non-rational life,"34 man tries to extricate himself from nature's

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31 Jones. p. 51.

32 Ibid. p. 55.

33 Ibid. p. 58.

34 Ibid.

terrifying omnipotence. Technological control and nuclear destruction is an outcome of man's "total war on the wilderness, woman, or the world of spontaneous impulse and irrational desire."35 Man, by subduing nature and woman to his will, takes possession of female fertility, as Adrienne Rich observes,

> Through control of the mother, the man assures himself of possession of his children; through control of his children he insures the disposition of his patrimony and the safe passage of his soul after death.36

Sedna attempts to galvanize Almira's power to create life free from patriarchal domination. "Almira the mystery of your womb makes you more powerful than that!" (86) But Almira rejects herself as a potential mother, claiming she is "too tired to have a baby." (86)

Sedna envisions herself as the primeval link with the life process and describes the fertility of the lush sea landscape.

> When I was born, the sea held many marvellous creatures and nowhere was there a place more mysterious or a greater haven of life! And dotted throughout the seas were pools of shimmering sand, milky white crescents, where the creature came for rest, and to feed upon sweet dewy grasses, and mate; listening to the heavy grey roll of the sea. So many worlds there were! For three million years I have travelled and I have slept in a hundred islands. Islands appearing and disappearing...Now there is but one left. After that is gone there will be none.(86)

The disappearance of the landscape's magnificence parallels the evanescence of the matriarchal universe. Both appear barren

35 Jones. p. 57.

36 Rich. p. 64.

and infertile. Almira still resists her obligation towards Sedna of accepting the fertility cycle. She begins to club Sedna, thinking she is a hallucination, and manages to pull off Sedna's headdress, discovering she is a woman inside. However, Almira hears George calling and decides to go to him, and, just as man turns his back on nature, Sedna is left abandoned on the beach. Sedna appeals to Almira's instinctive nature, "Life is precious to me... it once was to you." (87)

As symbolic of Almira's refusal to adopt Sedna's vision, she retreats to the cabin because it is "getting dark." (87) George intensifies this shrouded consciousness by declaring that soon she "won't be able to see." (87) Sedna equates their blindness with the inability to reach enlightenment, and the closing of Almira's mind, with the sun sinking into the darkness of night. "A darkness from which no light will be emitted ever!" (87) As Jones avows, through man's attempt to liberate himself from the natural forces which ultimately overpower him, he has diminished his own existence.

> As long as his defiance is radical, man shall remain an isolated voyager, a moving point on the map, surrounded by the threatening waves. Only when he is prepared to accept his final, if not immediate engulfment, shall he find comfort, love, communion.37

Sedna speaks out against the human corruption emanating from a cloistered vision. "You think you have power because you are human?" (88) Instead Sedna sees that man has only increased

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37 Jones. p. 127.

"the power of death!" Sedna appears on a rock, with her headpiece in one hand and an axe in the other, symbolic images of life and death. As she descends from the rock she dons the headpiece and asserts her belief in the life process. She rejects the distorted male stereotype of herself: "I am not a bare-breasted manifestation of a sex-starved fisherman. Mermaids indeed!" (88)

Almira finds Sedna's power disturbing, for Sedna is a frightening reminder of the deep truths she wishes to forget. Sedna provokes Almira's latency by scaring her with a raised axe, conveying the violence of mankind. "Here comes your darkness to cower and hide in. Run to George. Run from the sickness of men." (88) But Sedna, as a personification of nature's energy, innately trusts her omnipresence in the universe as being much superior to man's expression of power. "I know when they will live and when they will die!" (88)

In Act II, Almira begins to awaken to the sublime genesis of nature. She feels her environment near the sea is suddenly "familiar," (89) and feels a deep connection, "as if I had lived here before." In contrast, George feels no such bond, unable to see any sign of life on the beach. "This place is empty!" ... "Not even a clam to be found." (89) Almira herself describes the fertility of the sea and her incredible experience with Sedna. But George remains sceptical, representing man's inabilty to accept the magic of the natural

world. George wants only to leave, threatened by the irrationality which opposes intellectual order. Entranced by Sedna's vision, Almira tells George she now has the power to carry on the campaign against the slaughter of the animal world built around the protection of the selkies. "By donating your time and money, we can ensure that selkies continue to live on this planet. No postage required for federal politicians." (91)

George, however, cannot accept Almira's vision of a mythical animal world. Now George has become disillusioned, claiming that the bureaucratic world will reject this mythical perception of animal life. "You're trying to save a hallucination." (90) George himself cannot accept this image of nature and perceives Almira's imaginative description as insanity. He is overcome with a sense of terror evoked by Almira's magical vision. "There is something out there! And it stinks. It's a putrid, rotting..." (91)

Sedna perceives George as a "poor pathetic creature." (92) He has become an image of the helpless figure of man, made more pitiful by his need to destroy and conquer nature in an attempt to alleviate his fear. Sedna appears to him as a rotting seal corpse, personifying his negative image of the natural world, one he must subdue. "I'll fix it Almira. There'll be no more seals." (92)

Sedna proclaims the absurdity of man's destructive impulse towards the natural domain, ironically calling him the "mighty

protector of his family." (92) George kicks the corpse and Sedna cries out to him as her "Father." He is both the figure of her own father and the patriarchal God who transforms himself into her executioner. George massacres the corpse, merging the sensations of love and hate, illustrating man's ambivalent relationship with nature. "Love you...(Silence.) Oh sweet mother of God...what have I done?" (93)

The portrayal of George's perception of the "double visage"38 of woman and nature, "now ally, now enemy,"39 is a central theme in Canadian literature. The "two polarities of the state of mind"40 in regard to nature is imbued by man's insignificance in the face of the life-affirming and destructive characteristics of nature, as Northrop Frye contends.

> At one pole of experience there is a fusion of human life and the life in nature; at the opposite pole is the identity of the sinister and terrible elements in nature with the death-wish in man.41

Atwood takes this analysis a step further by relating this dichotomy to man's perception of women. As part of the "Woman-

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38 de Beauvoir. p. 163.

39 Ibid. p. 162.

40 Kreisel. p. 256.

41 Frye. p. 246.

Nature"42 metaphor, woman is both the life-producing "Birth-and-Love Goddess"43 in the form of the Venus figure, as well as the "destructive barren ice-goddess"44 in the shape of the Hecate figure. Sedna reveals her alliance with the patriarchal male figure, prior to her banishment. "I loved you, Father. Long ago..." (93) She reveals her anguish to George over her victimized position as a seal, at the same time despising her human status which destroys. "Half human, half seal. Each part of me hating the other." (93)

Sedna then appears to George as the old woman he met on the beach at the beginning of the play. She tells George he owes her a child for all the suffering man has caused. George, revealing his irresponsibility to nature, cries out in fear, "Noooooooo!!!"

In contrast, Sedna depicts the mystical and poetic inspiration of the natural world which inflames the imagination.

> The soul shall burst her fetters.
> At last and shall be free.
> As the sun, as the wind, as the night.
> As the stars, as the sea. (93)

Almira is transposed by this creative perception of nature. "Close your eyes. Open your ears. Listen. Just wave after wave, swelling, shattering, returning to the sea once again." (94)

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42 Atwood. Survival, p. 200.

43 Ibid. p. 204.

44 Ibid. p. 202.

Engulfed by the sea, Almira unites with Sedna's vision. Sedna takes her to her home, a floating island in the sea and initiates Almira back into nature through ritual, placing a symbolic garland of seaflowers on her head. Together they dance, celebrating the unity of the human soul with the sensual world.

> The soul shall be crowned and calm
> Eyes fearless and she
> Shall be queen of the wind and the night
> Stars, sun, and sea. (95)

Sedna's vision evokes a female perception of nature, recalling the image of the Mother Goddess and an ancient fertility ritual. Feminist theologians like Mary Daly, Carol P. Christ and Rosemary Radford Ruether see Goddess worship as an important departure from patriarchal Judaic-Christian tradition, where female power is denied.

> The God/ess who is primal Matrix, the ground of being--new being, is neither stifling immanence nor rootless transcendence. Spirit and matter are not dichotomized but are inside and outside of the same thing.45

On an individual level, the symbol of the Goddess personifies the female "quest for authenticity and power."46 The primeval connection with "God/ess" inspirits women's "authentic selves resurrected from underneath the alienated self."47

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45 Ruether. p. 85.

46 Christ. p. 154.

47 Ruether. p. 71.

Through gazing in a mirror, Almira begins to recognize her own individuality and her female power of creation. However, she is afraid of self-knowledge as she must face the uncertainty of her existence. "I'm afraid of dreaming. I'm afraid of tomorrow and tomorrow. I'm losing my mind...I don't want to be alone." (95)

In contrast to the life-affirming ritual, Sedna recalls the destruction of the whales in the second world war, "their songs were mistaken for the sound of submarine sonar." (96) But the whales still sing, and like Sedna, they still have the instinct to create life. "New life is a wonder. And should be celebrated. A baby brings love into the world." (96) Unlike the institution of motherhood described in Ever Loving and Islands where women's oppression is related to "the tyranny"[48] of human biology, Sedna's Divine Motherhood resonates Adrienne Rich's rediscovery of motherhood "as experience," free from patriarchal control. Sedna interprets the fertility ritual of motherhood as a time of rejoicing, celebrating the wonder of female fertility: "For the great mystery that is ours." (98) About pre-patriarchal motherhood, the "Golden Age" Sedna mourns, Rich writes:

> Out of her body the woman created man, created woman, created continuing existence. Spiritualized into a divine being, she was the source of vegetation, fruition, fertility of every kind.[49]

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48 Firestone. p. 193.

49 Rich. p. 100.

Sedna makes a plea for the remembrance of the primeval "humble beginnings," (98) and offers Almira foods from the earth linked to female fertility, such as asparagus. This connection with the natural world through sensation reminds Almira of her erotic desires. She recalls George's smell, relating it to a "foreign market filled with unknown and forbidden scents." (98)

Sedna reaffirms her belief in the life process, saying "the real pleasure in the world for men and women is still provided by children." (98) Almira points out, also, "the burden." Sedna calls for the transformation of patriarchal motherhood: "The work's in raising the husband not the children." (98)

Sedna unveils her relationship with her former husband to Almira. Prior to marriage she was an independent woman, "I refused every male that appeared at my doorstep." (99) However, she finally did succumb. "He told me he would cherish and honour me with a home and warmth and food. He also promised me a room of my own. So I married him." (99) She reveals how her husband entrapped her, as the home turned out to be a domestic prison. In an attempt to liberate herself, Sedna murdered her husband.

Sedna's betrayal is portrayed in mythological terms as Sedna flees to her father's boat for protection, only to be sacrificed to the sea to pacify the anger of the gods. When she clings to the gunnels her father hacks off her fingers, which

form into dolphins, seals, and the walrus. "Then from all around me, from my flesh and blood, were born the whales. They swam beneath my father's small dory till the sea boiled." (100)

By this reference to mythology, Sedna's resurrection into sea creatures signifes both her eternal connection with nature and her resistance of the patriarchal impulse to subjugate her.

> I rid myself of a husband who would have all my power drained in preparing his nest, his food, his clothes, and a father who bartered with my life. They prepared the scene for their own finish. (100)

The loss of Sedna's identity is personified by the extinction of the selkie species. Sedna does not feel Almira fully understands the sense of loss as Almira herself wishes her own species would disappear, one she calls "a deformed and demented race." (101) As she cannot fully comprehend the implications of the loss, Sedna transports her back to the beginning, before women's bond with nature was severed, when humanity and all living matter was integrated into "the Earth's spirit."

> Long ago,
> The Earth's Spirit was everything.
> That walked, swam, crawled
> On her surface.
> That bond is broken. (101)

Sedna re-enacts the broken bond between mankind and the animal world whereby Sedna becomes the seal and George personifies the hunter. George creeps around eyeing the seals, seeing them as objects to exploit. "Look at those mothers." (101) George ties Sedna with rope and calculates her value through her weight, becoming a savage and greedy hunter. "Throw the stone. Now. At the head. The head!" (102) George raises his axe to slay the seal. At this stage, Almira intervenes to prevent him, but Sedna wants Almira to see that her dream "is the nightmare you humans have spewed on this earth." (102)

A blackout occurs in the play and the sound of the sea is heard mingled with the protest cries of Almira, dissolving into the sound of soft waves lapping on the shore, followed by complete silence.

Sedna forces Almira to live through the nightmare in order to restore her sensitivity and willingness to fight the devastation of the animal kingdom. Almira is now conscious of the child growing inside her; the life force she embraces within. She asks Sedna for her guidance and wisdom in raising the child, and Sedna reassures her, "the sea will give you strength to bear the child." (105)

Sedna wants the child to be raised as a selkie so that the "cycle would begin again!" (105) She becomes the child's Godmother, agreeing to share the child with Almira and George.

Almira returns to the shack, and in the distance she hears

the cry of the loons and ruminates about their deep loyalty, as loons bond forever. Sedna explains to Almira that their cries are so lonely because they recognize the bond that we have lost. "Union is a gift," (106) as most of life is spent divided from others. Sedna departs for the sea, leaving Almira with the reassurance that her vision will one day flame into being. "In waking and sleeping dreams, in joy, in love, a seed is planted. Dream us a new dream Almira." (107)

In the final scene of the play, George finds Almira still wearing the kimono Sedna gave her. In her disarray, she declares she almost stayed on the floating island with Sedna. George demonstrates his final acceptance of her vision by signing the letter for the protection of the selkies. "There are societies for the preservation of everything on this planet except for selkies and...ourselves." (108)

There is a sense of integration and enlightenment as Almira and George dance a waltz together. But again Almira smells the terrible odour. The rotting corpse, a symbol of man's annihilation of the animal world, will not let them forget. This image of destruction is juxtaposed with an image of rebirth and renewal. Almira feels the baby move inside her and imagines the power of the life force within her. "It's still there. The wind, and the waves, and the sounds of the sea." (110) Through this newly formed alliance with the natural world, Almira and George reinforce their own eternal bond, and

like the loons, their expression of love merges with the sound of the waves.

Cindy Cowan gives new meaning to the Canadian literary search for identity in the wilderness by correlating the female quest for identity with the lost paradise of the matriarchal "Golden Age." The Nova Scotia seashore, as the primeval lost utopia, is ultimately regained through Almira's recognition of the omnipotent life process within her. As in Islands, the protagonists pursue self-harmony in the healing powers of nature's eternal resources.

However, Cindy Cowan transposes the search for individual discovery into a new dimension by envisioning nature as a metonym for the female life process. By depicting matriarchal power as the lost female identity, the female literary archetype is thus brought into the medium of drama, transforming the myth of lost paradise into a female dramatic mythology.

CONCLUSION

In their search for self-definition within the Canadian literary quest for identity, it has been shown that the four selected women playwrights give a new dimension to Canadian literature by applying cultural myths to the notion of gender and female definition.

By interweaving the concepts of wilderness, immigration and imperialism into the female imagination these women playwrights transform the search for national identity into a dramatic female vision.

Wilderness, so dominant a myth in Canadian literature, acquires specific meaning to women, giving impetus to the imaginative interiorization of landscape as a metaphor for female consciousness, one which reflects both internal and external reality.

The struggle for survival, the portrayal of woman as immigrant, and women's quest to survive alone in a male-defined environment, exemplifies women's marginality and search for social integration.

Patriarchalism is interpreted in the plays as being consistent with imperial domination, through which women are excluded, and which leads to self-deprecating acceptance of

masculine definitions against which women struggle for their individuality.

The women whose work we have studied strive to enlarge female consciousness by articulating challenges to the conditions and traditions which have often alienated women from the mainstream of Canadian life. The uniqueness of their work springs from their faith in the value of women, and the conviction that they must question and clarify the assumptions about their position within the conventional frameworks of society.

Canadian women playwrights epitomize the female literary search for an "authentic language." The female struggle for self-definition is no more apparent than in the medium of drama, for, unlike the private world of fiction, drama, due to its public nature, has traditionally been a male domain. Women playwrights, through the process of writing plays from a female perspective, further strengthen the artistic position of women in Canadian society.

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