

Chapter I – Introduction

The Prime Perception

‘Modernism’ is the name given to the movement which dominated the arts and culture of the first half of the twentieth century. Modernism is that earthquake in the arts which brought down much of the structure of pre - twentieth century practice in music, painting, literature, and architecture. The overall result of these shifts is to produce a literature which seems committed to experimentation and innovation. After its high point, modernism seemed to retreat considerably in the 1930s.

The literature which arose as a series of styles and ideas in the post World War II period that reacted against the viewed norms of modernist literature has been termed ‘Postmodern literature.’ It can also be described as a literature from the World War II till the present day. It is known for its style of narrative breaks from modernism in its earlier form, with the ideas evolving out of the subconscious mind, and a continuous conscience stream of narrative. It is a non-conformist style of literature. “Postmodern literature is a literature characterized by heavy reliance on techniques like fragmentation, paradox, and questionable narrators, and is often though not exclusively defined as a style or trend which evolved in the post-World War II era” (Lewis 126). Postmodern works are seen as a reaction against enlightened thinking and modernist approaches to literature. They have an ideologically inspired use of fragmented forms, like collage structures in art, and deliberately discontinuous narratives in literature to suggest the fragmentation and break up of formerly accepted systems of thought and belief. Postmodernism does what modernism does, only in a commemorative rather than penitent way. Thus, instead of lamenting the loss of the past, the fragmentation of existence, and the collapse of selfhood, postmodernism holds these characteristics as a new form of social existence. By the mid-1960s,

critics like Susan Sontag and Ihab Hassan started spotting out the features of postmodernism. They argued that “the work of postmodernists is deliberately less unified, less obviously ‘masterful,’ more playful or anarchic, more concerned with the processes of our understanding than with the pleasures of artistic finish or unity” (qtd. in Butler 05). The difference between modernism and postmodernism is therefore best seen as a difference in mood or attitude, rather than a historical difference, or a different set of artistic practices. Postmodern fiction with its mixed and merged styles is rather an ongoing process of problematisation or subversion of realist aesthetic ideology.

Postmodernism is mostly defined as a chaos theory. “It seems to be a snake like concept whose twists and coils are difficult to pin down.” From the start, postmodernism prompted uncertainty and belligerent evaluation. The French philosophers who first described this postmodern condition are Jean - Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. They mainly argued that this era marked the demise of incredulity towards meta - narratives (the grand histories) and the emergence of micro-narratives in their place. Postmodernism although presents the unrepresentable, it does not do so nostalgically, nor does it seek to offer solace in so doing. Some of the other critics of postmodern theory are Jurgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, Brian McHale and few others. Fredric Jameson says that postmodernism has to be understood as a ‘cultural dominant’ rather than a single style, as modes rather than a genre (Woods 7-10). Many deplored the new writers’ lack of high seriousness; their scorn for the unified literary work; their addiction to popular culture, and usage of micro-narratives to shape a response to social realities. Postmodern literature, like [postmodernism](#) as a whole, tends to resist definition as a ‘movement.’ Indeed, the union of postmodern literature with various modes of [critical theories](#), particularly [reader-response](#) and [deconstructionist](#) approaches have made it more

significant. “Postmodern literature is commonly defined in relation to a precursor. For example, a postmodern literary work tends not to conclude with the neatly tied-up ending as is often found in modernist literature, but often parodies it” (Barry 20).

No specific dates exist for the growth and establishment of postmodernism. 1941, the year in which the English novelist Virginia Woolf and the Irish novelist James Joyce both died, is occasionally used as a fine boundary for the commencement of postmodernism. Postmodernism illustrates social causes, but does not confine itself to one issue, all the matters being equally relative. It seems fragmentary and arbitrary but it definitely sharpens our sensibilities and makes us see deeper and more clearly makes us alive to the beauty of the world, as well as at its injustices. In postmodernism, conventional notions of reality are challenged by such devices as exaggerated structural patterning, infinite textual regression, literary parodies, temporal and spatial dislocations, and blurred boundaries of discourse. Postmodernism focuses on experimentation with new literary devices, forms, and styles. The Canadian literary critic Linda Hutcheon says in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, “As a discourse, postmodernism is a cultural phenomenon. It is concerned with history, but is not explicitly historical like Marxism. It is resolutely historical and inescapably political” (05).

Modern and postmodern literatures mutually characterize a break from Nineteenth century [realism](#). Both modern and postmodern literatures probe into [subjectivism](#), and scrutinize interior states of perception. The [prefix](#) "post," however, does not necessarily mean a new era. Rather, it could also imply a reaction to significant post-war events: the beginning of the [Cold War](#), the [civil rights movement in the United States](#), [Post colonialism](#) ([Postcolonial literature](#)), and the increase of the [personal computer](#) ([Cyberpunk fiction](#) and [Hyper textuality](#)). It can also

be proclaimed that the establishment of postmodern literature can be obviously witnessed through considerable publications or literary events. For instance, several consider the commencement of postmodernism with “the first publication of [John Hawkes' *The Cannibal*](#) in 1949, the first presentation of [En attendant Godot](#) in 1953 ([Waiting for Godot](#), 1955), the first publication of [Howl](#) in 1956 or of [Naked Lunch](#) in 1959.” For some others the beginning is discernible by changes in critical theory: “[Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play,"](#) a lecture in 1966 or as belatedly as [Ihab Hassan's](#) usage in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus* in 1971” (Currie 10). The postmodern movement in fiction has persistently diluted the ideas of logical consistency in narration, formal plot, standard time string, and expressively portrayed characters.

Postmodernism is illustrated by the use of the uneven forms, and integration of arbitrariness or uncertainty which was important to the Dadaists of 1917, who made poems from sentences picked randomly from Newspapers. While these fragments depicted a tone of bewail, cynicism, and desolation about the world representing fractured art in modernist literature; for the postmodernist, by contrast, “fragmentation is an invigorating, energizing phenomenon, indicative of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of an unchanging systems of belief” (Zurbrugg 28). One more way Dadaism inclined postmodern literature is in the improvement of collage specifically collages using rudiments from advertisement or descriptions from popular novels.

[The Beat Generation](#) was the youth of America during the materialistic 1950s, who often includes several groups of post-war American writers from the [Black Mountain poets](#), [New York School](#), the [San Francisco Renaissance](#), and so on. These writers have occasionally been referred to as the ‘Postmodern writers.’ One writer associated with the Beat Generation who appears

often on lists of postmodern writers is [William S. Burroughs](#). Burroughs published *Naked Lunch* in 1959; this is considered by some as the first truly postmodern novel because it is inconsistent, with no inner plot; it employs pastiche. Pastiche is an amalgamation of subjects and genres not formerly considered fit for literature. It takes in elements from popular genres such as detective fiction and science fiction; it is full of distortion, absurdity, and good humor. Postmodernism in literature is not an organized movement with leaders or central figures; therefore, it is not easy to say if it has ended or when it will end. Possibly postmodernism peaked in the 60s and 70s with the publication of [Catch-22](#) in 1961, [Lost in the Funhouse](#) in 1968, [and Slaughterhouse-Five](#) in 1969. Thomas Pynchon's 1973 novel [Gravity's Rainbow](#) is also considered as the postmodern novel.

Indeed, there are many suggested terms for the post - Second World War fictional developments: 'Surfiction,' 'Post - contemporary fiction'(Jerome Klinkowitz), 'Fabulation' (Raymond Federman), 'Historiographic Metafiction' (Linda Hutcheon), and Susan Strehle's concept of 'actualism,' which proposes that postmodern fiction is 'fiction in a quantum universe.' One of the founding definitions of the term 'postmodernism,' in relation to literature occurs in the essays of Barth, a seminal writer in the 1960s who wrote on the development of new modes of fiction. [John Barth](#), the postmodern novelist who talks often about the label "postmodern," wrote an influential essay in 1967 called "[The Literature of Exhaustion](#)" and in 1979 wrote "Literature of Replenishment" in order to clarify the earlier essay. "Literature of Exhaustion" is about the need for a new era in literature after modernism had exhausted itself. In "Literature of Replenishment" Barth says, "my ideal Postmodernist author neither merely repudiates nor merely imitates either his 20th-century modernist parents or his 19th-century premodernist grandparents. He has the first half of our century under his belt, but not on his

back” (196). In his *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, the novelist and theorist Umberto Eco elucidates his idea of postmodernism. He asserts, “[P]ostmodernism is not a trend to be chronologically defined, but rather an ideal category” (qtd. in *The Politics* 45).

The Postmodern texts are characterized by their use of certain common themes and techniques. Postmodern writings make significant use of the intertextual elements in literature such as parody, intertextuality, irony, playfulness, pastiche, paranoia, fragmentation, magic realism, historiographic metafiction, temporal distortion, technoculture, hyperreality, maximalism, minimalism, poiuomena, allusion, metafictional devices, and so on. Postmodern writers foreground fiction with postmodern techniques. There is often the employment of pastiche, the combination of multiple cultural elements. It is the mixing of literary genres (science fiction, the detective story, the thriller, the myth saga, and the realistic psychological novel, etc.). Science fiction is a popular source for postmodernist pastiche. The detective genre is another companion of postmodernism. The pursuit of clues appeals to the postmodernist writer because it very closely parallels the hunt for textual meaning by the reader. Postmodernism problematizes history and politics. History and fiction are mysteriously linked. One such technique in which history is fictionally constituted is Historiographic Metafiction.

[Linda Hutcheon](#) claims in her book *The Politics of Postmodernism*, that postmodern fiction as a whole could be characterized by [irony](#), along with [black humor](#) and the general concept of "play" related to Derrida's concept or the ideas advocated by [Roland Barthes](#) in [The Pleasure of the Text](#) as the most recognizable aspects of postmodernism (30). The idea of employing these techniques in literature did not start with the postmodernists, actually the modernists were often playful and ironic; which later became the characteristic features of many

postmodern works. In fact, several novelists later to be labeled postmodern were first collectively labeled black humorists: [John Barth](#), [Joseph Heller](#), [William Gaddis](#), [Kurt Vonnegut](#), [Bruce Jay Friedman](#), etc. It is common for postmodernists to treat serious subjects in a playful and humorous way: for example, the way Heller (*Catch-22*) and Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse-Five*) address the events of World War II. [Thomas Pynchon's](#) [The Crying of Lot 49](#) in particular provides prime examples of playfulness, often including silly wordplay, within a serious context. ‘Parody’ is used as a technique to construct a fictional historical discourse grounded in historical events. Parody (also called send up, spoof, or lampoon) is a work created to comment on, make fun, or mock at an original work, its subject, author, style, or some other target, by means of humorous, satiric or ironic imitation. Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody*, remarks that “parody is paradoxical in nature. Parody as a technique shows how the present representations come from the past. It is not always to destroy the world of the text imitated, but to show how the present is different” (11). Thus by playing with the readers’ expectations, the author helps the readers believe that the narration is not reality but a construct and reminds the readers that what is being read is a novel, not life.

As postmodernism signifies an incongruous notion of the universe in which individual works are not inaccessible constructions, much of the center in the learning of postmodern literature is on [intertextuality](#): the correlation between one text (a novel for example) and another text outside or within the interwoven framework of literary history. Critics consider this as a sign of postmodernism’s need of inventiveness and dependence on clichés. “Intertextuality in postmodern literature can be an allusion or [parallel](#) to a further literary work, an unlimited discussion of a work, or the implementation of a style” (Smyth 14).

An early Twentieth century example of intertextuality which instigated the later postmodernists is "[Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote](#)" by [Jorge Luis Borges](#), a story with noteworthy allusions to [Don Quixote](#) which is also a good example of intertextuality with its suggestions to Medieval romances. "*Don Quixote* is a common reference with postmodernists, for example [Kathy Acker](#)'s novel *Don Quixote: Which Was a Dream*. Another example of intertextuality in postmodernism is John Barth's [The Sot-Weed Factor](#) which deals with [Ebenezer Cooke](#)'s poem of the same name" (Silverman 17). Intertextuality is more complex than a single reference to another text. [Robert Coover](#)'s *Pinocchio in Venice*, for instance, relates Pinocchio to [Thomas Mann](#)'s [Death in Venice](#). Furthermore, [Umberto Eco](#)'s [The Name of the Rose](#) obtains the form of a detective novel and mentions about the authors such as [Aristotle](#), [Arthur Conan Doyle](#), and Borges. "Interrelated to postmodern intertextuality is the technique 'pastiche' which means to combine, or 'paste' together several elements. In postmodernist literature, this can be reverence to or a parody of past styles. It can be seen as a revelation of the chaotic, pluralistic, or information-drenched aspects of postmodern society" (Hoesterey 11). Pastiche being a combination of multiple genres can be used to create a unique narrative or to comment on situations in [postmodernism](#): for example, [William S. Burroughs](#) uses science fiction, and detective fiction; [Margaret Atwood](#) uses science fiction, historical fiction, and fairy tales; [Umberto Eco](#) uses detective fiction, fairy tales, and science fiction; [Derek Pell](#) depends on random collection, erotica, travel guides, and manuals. Though pastiche regularly involves the incorporation of genres, many other elements are also integrated like the metafiction and temporal distortion which are widespread in the broader pastiche of the postmodern novel. In [Robert Coover](#)'s novel [The Public Burning](#) (1977), Coover blends historically erroneous accounts of Richard Nixon communicating with historical figures and fictional characters such as Uncle

Sam and Betty Crocker. Pastiche can instead engross a compositional method, for example the cut-up technique practiced by Burroughs. Another example is [B. S. Johnson](#)'s novel *The Unfortunates* (1969); it was published in a box with no binding so that readers could assemble it however they chose.

“[Metafiction](#) is fundamentally writing about writing, it is characteristic of [deconstructionist](#) approaches, making the artificiality of art or the fictionality of fiction evident to the reader. It normally disregards the necessity for the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ ” (*Metafiction* 12). Metafiction represents a basic tension in all novels between the illusion of self-sufficiency and the unveiling of that illusion. Metafiction is a central plank of any discussion of postmodern literature. Gass is generally credited with the coinage of the term, which refers to the fact that the novelist's business is no longer to render the world, but to make one from language; fiction is no longer mimetic, but constructive. Postmodern sensibility and metafiction dictate that works of [parody](#) should parody the idea of parody itself. Metafiction is frequently used to weaken the right of the author. It consists of startling narrative shifts and it moves ahead with a story in a unique way. For example, [Italo Calvino](#)'s novel *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979) is about a reader striving to read a novel of the same name. [Kurt Vonnegut](#) also generally uses this method: the first chapter of his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) is about the course of writing the novel, he invites readers' attention to his own presence throughout the novel. Nevertheless, much of the novel has to do with Vonnegut's own experiences during the firebombing of Dresden. Vonnegut incessantly focuses on the artificiality of the central narrative, which contains apparently fictional elements such as aliens and time travel. Likewise, [Tim O'Brien](#)'s novel *The Things They Carried* (1990) is about one platoon's experiences during the [Vietnam War](#), which describes a character named Tim O'Brien; though O'Brien is a Vietnam veteran, the book is a

work of fiction and O'Brien questions the fictionality of the characters and incidents throughout the book. [Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*](#) and [William H. Gass's *Willie Master's Lonesome Wife*](#) are also fine examples of metafiction. [William H. Gass](#) coined the term "metafiction" in an essay entitled "Philosophy and the Form of Fiction" (1970). Unlike the [anti-novel](#), or anti-fiction, metafiction is exclusively fiction about fiction, i.e. fiction which self-consciously reflects upon itself.

'[Magic Realism](#)' is a technique well-liked among Latin American writers; in this genre, supernatural elements are treated as mundane. Though the technique has its ancestry in conventional storytelling, it is a core piece of the 'Boom,' a movement attributed with postmodernism. Some of the chief figures of the 'Boom' and practitioners of Magic Realism are [Gabriel García Márquez](#), [Julio Cortázar](#), [Vladimir Nabokov](#), and few others. [Magic realism](#) is manifested by the use of still, piercingly distinct, efficiently painted images of figures and objects dealt in a surrealistic approach. The themes and subjects are habitually imaginary, rather outlandish, and extraordinary with a certain dream-like excellence. Some of the traits of this kind of fiction are the mingling and juxtaposition of the sensible and the incredible or uncanny; competent time shifts; complicated and even obscure narratives and plots; varied use of dreams, myths and fairy stories. It has been applied, for instance to the work of [Jorge Luis Borges](#), the Argentinean who in 1935 published his *Historia universal de la infamia*, which is looked upon by many as the first work of [magic realism](#). Colombian novelist [Gabriel García Marquez](#) is also viewed as a notable exponent of this kind of fiction --- especially his novel [One Hundred Years of Solitude](#). 'Poiooumenon' (plural: poiooumena; from [Ancient Greek](#), "product") is a term coined by Alastair Fowler to refer to a particular type of metafiction in which the story is about the process of creation. According to Fowler, "the poiooumenon offers opportunities to explore the

boundaries of fiction and reality; it also checks the limits of narrative truth" (qtd. in McCaffery 48). In many cases, the book will be about the process of creating the book including a central metaphor for this process. Widespread examples of poiuomenon are [Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*](#), and [Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*](#), which is about the narrator's perturbed attempt to tell his own story. A significant postmodern example is [Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*](#), in which the narrator, Kinbote states that he is scrutinizing John Shade's long poem "Pale Fire," but the narrative of the relationship between Shade and Kinbote is presented in what are apparently the footnotes to the poem. In the same way, the self-conscious narrator in [Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*](#) connects the construction of his book to the making of chutney and the formation of independent India.

[Linda Hutcheon](#) coined the term 'Historiographic Metafiction' to allude to works that fictionalize real historical events or figures; prominent examples include [The General in His Labyrinth](#) by Gabriel García Márquez (about [Simón Bolívar](#)), [Flaubert's Parrot](#) by Julian Barnes (about [Gustave Flaubert](#)), [Ragtime](#) by [E. L. Doctorow](#) (which features historical figures such as [Sigmund Freud](#), [Carl Jung](#) and a few others), and [Rabih Alameddine's *Kooloids: The Art of War*](#) which makes references to the Lebanese Civil War and a range of real life political figures. Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor* and Berger's *Little Big Man* unite the allegedly factual with the evidently fictive. [Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon*](#) also employs this conception; for example, a scene featuring [George Washington](#) smoking marijuana is mentioned. The Indo-Canadian author who is repeatedly associated with historiographic metafiction is [Michael Ondaatje](#), his well known works are [Running in the Family](#), [In the Skin of a Lion](#), [The English Patient](#), and [Coming Through Slaughter](#). [Salman Rushdie's](#) novels [Shame](#) and [Midnight's](#)

[Children](#) can also be viewed as historiographic metafiction in their re-writing of the past of Pakistan and India in the early Twentieth century. Similarly, Margaret Atwood's novels like *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Bodily Harm*, *Alias Grace*, *The Blind Assassin*, *Oryx and Crake*, *Penelopiad*, and few more have the elements of historiographic metafiction in them. An example of historiographic metafiction is Daphne Marlatt's novel *Ana Historic*. It is the process of re-writing history through a work of fiction in a manner that has not been formerly recorded. In Marlatt's novel, this is done through journal entries of a fictional character that exemplifies a form of reality for women both in the past and in the present. Similar is the case in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Alias Grace*.

All of the above mentioned works can be portrayed as good examples of this genre of postmodern historical fiction called historiographic metafiction. The postmodern relationship of interaction and mutual implication between fiction and history is a complex one. Historiographic metafiction, by merging history and fiction with politics and culture ultimately shows connection to the deeper social reality. It denies conclusiveness and shows only contradictoriness. No political or social resolutions are given, but such issues are discussed. There is no concord in the narration, but only diversity. These works are open ended with many conclusions. Hutcheon gives many examples of postmodern authors of different nationalities who write historiographic metafiction in her books. Some of the notable ones being Christa Wolf, Salman Rushdie, J. M. Coetzee, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Julian Barnes, E. L. Doctorow, Umberto Eco, Gabriel García Márquez, Italo Calvino, John Fowles, William Faulkner, Don DeLillo, Peter Ackroyd, Ishmael Reed, Graham Swift, Ronald Sukenick, Timothy Findley, D. M Thomas, E. M. Foster, Jeanette Winterson, Kurt Vonnegut, Robert Coover, Thomas Pynchon, and few others. They all interpret the textuality of the historical discourse.

Linda Hutcheon is one of the most respected and renowned Canadian theorists. Her extensive writings, both on postmodernism and feminism provide lucid and succinct analyses of the most slippery of topics like parody, irony, and aesthetics. In all her works, she adds her own valuable insights from her background in literature, her curiosity in art and architecture, and her perception of contemporary philosophy in a most admirable way. With such a diverse background it is often difficult to characterize her work with a single title. She is identified by many to be a 'cultural theorist' or 'literary critic,' by others as a 'feminist.' Some think of her as an 'art critic,' while she is frequently seen to be an expert in Canadian literature. Her writings are always appealing, vibrant, and above all productive. Linda Hutcheon is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto. Her theoretical works include *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*; *The Politics of Postmodernism*; *Narcissistic Narrative: the Metafictional Paradox*; *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*; *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*; *Splitting Images: Contemporary Canadian Ironies*; *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* with Michael Hutcheon and some more.

Linda Hutcheon's book, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction* inspects the assumption and practice of postmodernism as seen through both contemporary cultural theory and writings of Michael Ondaatje, Robert Kroetsch, Umberto Eco, Hayden White, Terry Eagleton, Jack Hodgins, Leonard Cohen, Audrey Thomas, Fredric Jameson, Timothy Findley, Margaret Atwood, Aritha Van Herk and others.

Linda Hutcheon in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism* labels that works of historiographic metafiction are "those well-known and popular novels which are both extremely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also allege to historical events and personages"(25). Historiographic

metafiction is an ideal [postmodern](#) art form, with its usage of textual play, parody, historical re-conceptualization and distortion at certain situations.

‘Temporal distortion’ is a common technique in postmodernist fiction which emphasizes on fragmentation and non-linear narratives. Temporal distortion in postmodern fiction is used in a variety of ways, often for the sake of irony. Historiographic metafiction is an example of this. Distortions in time are central features in many of [Kurt Vonnegut](#)'s incoherent novels, the most renowned of which is [Slaughterhouse-Five](#). In *Flight to Canada*, [Ishmael Reed](#) makes use of anachronisms, Abraham Lincoln using a telephone for example. Time may partly cover, replicate, or diverge into numerous possibilities. For example, in [Robert Coover](#)'s "The Babysitter" from [Pricksongs & Descants](#), the author deals with multiple probable events taking place concurrently; in one section the babysitter is murdered while in another section nothing happens. ‘Technoculture and hyperreality’ are practically related techniques. As the names imply, these techniques show how people are swamped with information and how technology has become a focal point in many lives. Many works of fiction have dealt with this aspect of postmodernity with characteristic irony and pastiche. The cyberpunk fiction is a mixture of genres which de-centers the human consciousness in its innovative exploration of cyberspace. The [cyberpunk](#) fiction of [William Gibson](#), [Neal Stephenson](#), and many others use science fiction techniques to deal with this postmodern hyperreality that is information assault. ‘Paranoia’ conceivably is demonstrated in Joseph Heller's [Catch-22](#), the sense of mistrust, the conviction that there is an ordering system behind the turmoil of the world is another chronic postmodern theme. For the postmodernist, no ordering is dreadfully dependent upon the subject, so paranoia often overlaps the line between mirage and luminosity. Pynchon's [The Crying of Lot 49](#) is a good illustration. This often corresponds with the theme of technoculture and hyperreality. For

instance, in [Breakfast of Champions](#) by [Kurt Vonnegut](#), the character Dwayne Hoover becomes brutal when he is certain that everyone else in the world is a robot and he is the only human.

A 'maximalist' novel is jumbled, barren and crammed with language play for its own sake, devoid of expressiveness and therefore drained of values as a novel. Yet there are counter-examples, such as Pynchon's [Mason & Dixon](#) and [David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest](#) in which postmodern description co - exists with touching commitment. Literary '[minimalism](#)' can be typified as focused on surface description where readers are estimated to take a vigorous role in the formation of a story. The characters in minimalist stories and novels tend to be inconspicuous. [Minimalism](#), the opposite of [Maximalism](#), is a depiction of only the most essential and required pieces, specific by economy of words. Minimalist authors seldom use adjectives, adverbs, or insignificant details. Instead of giving every minute detail, the author provides a common [context](#) and then permits the reader's thoughts to shape the story. Among those listed as postmodernist writers, literary minimalism is most commonly associated with [Samuel Beckett](#). 'Fragmentation' is another chief aspect of postmodern literature. The works using this technique have a variety of elements relating to plot, characters, themes, images, and realistic references disjointed and dispersed throughout the entire work. In general, "there is an interrupted sequence of events, character development, and action which can at first glance look modern, it purports, however, to depict a metaphysically unfounded, chaotic universe" (Currie 32). Fragmentation can take place in language, sentence structure or grammar. To cite, [Z213: Exit](#) is a fictional diary by Greek writer [Dimitris Lyacos](#) which implements an almost telegraphic style, devoid of articles and conjunctions. The text is intermingled with [gaps](#) and everyday language which combines poetry and biblical references leading to distortion of grammar.

The modernist pursuit for meaning in a disorganized world is eschewed by the postmodern author, but such a quest is often parodied in the postmodern novels. “Thus postmodern writers celebrate chance over craft and employ metafiction to undermine the author’s ‘univocation,’ that is the existence of narrative primacy within a text, the presence of a single all powerful story telling authority” (Reiss 15). Most of the postmodern authors born during the inter-war period deal with the ravages of post World War II and they lay heavy emphasis on parody and narrative experimentation. Beckett, Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, John Barth, Kathy Acker, Donald Barthelme, Thomas Pynchon, William Gaddis are some of the prominent writers to mention.

One among them is the living Canadian author, Margaret Atwood. Profoundly accomplished Atwood is born on Nov 18, 1939. She is a prolific writer, literary critic, essayist, and environmental activist. She has to her credit several works of poetry collections, collections of short stories, short prose works, and novels. She is one of the most distinguished authors of fiction in recent history. She is the recipient of more than 55 awards including the Governor General’s award twice, Giller prize and the Booker prize in 2000 for her novel, *The Blind Assassin*. The other notable works of Atwood are *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Robber Bride*, *Bodily Harm*, *Life Before Man*, *Alias Grace*, *Oryx and Crake*, *Penelopiad*, and so on. In 2008, Atwood was awarded the Prince of Asturias Prize for Literature in Spain.

The word “Canada,” originates from two Spanish words “aca” and “nada” meaning “nothing here” (Salat xii). It is an absolute irony of fate, as the author illustrates, all through its socio-cultural history, this idea of ‘absence’ innate in the name has been a haunting ‘presence’ in Canada. Not surprisingly, therefore, the search for an acknowledgeable and meaningful Canadian ‘here’ has been a prime preoccupation in Canada. “The concept of ‘identity’ is

endemic to the political, historical, and cultural ethos [of Canada]” (Ashcroft 19). The quest for identity is in fact, certainly not a unique Canadian problem. It is a fate Canada shares with all post-colonial or new nations. Yet, the deep scar of colonial rule has its permanent mark on the Canadian psyche. Every colonized country has indeed its share of suffering and bitterness, but what distinguishes the Canadian predicament from that of the other countries is the continuation of the identity-crisis over an inordinately long time span. Despite the fact, that Canada attained its sovereign status as a confederate country by the British North America Act of 1867, the quest for a distinctive national identity continued to remain ‘a deferred dream’ in Canada. Canada, toiled to attain the yearned - for, but ever evading distinction as a reputable, recognizable, and recognized nation. Colonization had a rather destructive effect on the native Canadian society and culture; it brought into the land a number of new ethnical and cultural patterns. “Canada witnessed cultural interaction, absorption, assimilation, and synthesis of various cultures, leading often to cultural conflicts” (Moss, John 03).

Canada’s prolonged struggle for a distinct identity is due to the fact, that unlike most colonial nations, which have known subordination under one ‘mother country,’ Canada has been a colony paying allegiance to several mother countries. It was originally a colony of France and England and then became an economic colony of the United States of America. Cultural pluralism and disparity are yet other factors which added to the continuation of the Canadian enigma of identity. Quite often, the overwhelming and at the same time frustrating multiplicity and heterogeneity of Canadian cultures give rise to ex-centric attempts to look for regional identities as an alternative to the goal of seeking a homogeneous or homogenizing national identity. These tendencies, while they reflect and reveal the Canadian preoccupation to discover alternative modes to resolve the Canadian problem, they at the same time intensify the problem

by further compounding and subverting the already complex problem of acquiring ‘a centered Canadian identity.’

In such circumstances, it may seem almost quixotic to speak of a Canadian literary tradition, indeed a number of critics and commentators have offered cogent reasons regarding the delayed establishment of Canadian literature. According to them, “the psychological effects of a colonial past; a narrow and emotionally crippling Puritanism; excessive openness to foreign influences or sometimes, an obstinate and parochial rejection of them; the general dullness of Canada and the Canadian people; and the lack of an authentic history are obviously the causes which detained the growth of Canadian literature” (qtd. in Daymond 02). Hence Canadian literature like other colonial literatures was slow in its development. These are obviously the causes which delayed the growth of Canadian literary tradition. Therefore, Canadian literature developed gradually.

Canadian literature, especially fiction started assuming significance only in the early twentieth century. There were then hardly any novelists of unquestioned importance. The two early important novelists were Morley Callaghan and Hugh MacLennan. They may rightly be considered as the founding fathers of serious Canadian fiction. Morley Callaghan’s significant novels are: *The Strange Fugitive* (1928), *Such is My Beloved* (1934), and *The Loved and the Lost* (1951). Callaghan is a novelist, who for the first time wrote fiction of the city and gave expression to urban problems and urban mores. Hugh MacLennan is another novelist, who became aware of the real problems facing Canadians. He has been regarded as a representative novelist of the contemporary world. He strongly exhorted his countrymen to abandon their collective inferiority complex and to face their problem of a divided culture realistically and prudently. He wrote great novels including *Barometer Rising* (1941), *Two Solitudes* (1945), *The*

Watch that Ends the Night (1959), and *Voices in Time* (1983). The forties and the fifties laid a sound footing to the modern Canadian fiction, and it was a time, when several eminent novelists came into being, such as Sinclair Ross, Rudy Wiebe, Robert Kroetsch, Frank Davey, and several others. All these writers felt that Canadian literature had no tradition, but it was quite possible to establish one and so, they toiled to the core for the evolution of a whole and meaningful Canadian literary tradition, which in turn gave way to the evolution of ‘distinctive Canadian identity.’

It was in the post - 1960s, however, that women in Canada began to assert more consciously and confidently the authenticity of the feminine sensibility. Then evolved a feminine discourse, which was different and divergent to the patriarchal discourse. The postmodernism and the women’s movement in the 1960s acted as catalysts to generate a greater awareness of the need for self-definition and self-assertion among Canadian women as it did elsewhere in the world. Also, the wide spread preoccupation with the quest for a distinctive cultural identity in Canada in the post - 1960s, contributed to strengthening the desire to assert a distinctive feminine identity comparable to and compatible with the male, in culture as well as in literature. This marked the beginning of women writers in Canadian literature. As proclaimed by Atwood, “Women cannot be ignored in Canadian literature. You can’t ignore them” (qtd. in Struthers 220).

Several Canadian women writers have achieved international recognition, such as Ethel Wilson, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Mavis Gallant, and Alice Munro are to name a few. While the first three have mastered the art of novel, Gallant and Munro are at their best in the domain of short story or novella. Many of Gallant’s stories give expression to the menace of war and its repercussions on human beings. Munro’s *Lives of Girls and Women* has been treated

as a series of short stories despite the fact that it was published as a novel. *In Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*, Munro depicts man-woman relationship from the woman's point of view. It explores the psyche of a woman, who has been married twice; it gives a review of her two husbands. Margaret Lawrence's extensive travels to Africa and her experiences there form the fabric of her fiction. Her early works, *This Side Jordan* (1961), *The Tomorrow Tamer and other Stories* (1963) are set in the Gold coast just before its transformation into Ghana. In the fictional quests for self-discovery and self-actualization of her women protagonists, Lawrence metaphorically problematizes Canada's similar quest. While in their shared preoccupation with the woman's and the nation's identity, all these writers reflect the increased concern for the status of women in society and the concurrent increase in the desire to evolve and assert a distinctive Canadian identity. The most distinguished and versatile Atwood, a champion of Canadian literature, deconstructs the exploitative and inferiorizing structures of power in gender relationships and thereby typifies the strong feminist voice that is heard from the post -1960s in Canada.

“Atwood problematizes the feminine search for a distinctive identity within a predominantly feminist frame work and postulates a contextual discourse on feminine identity that explores and exposes the male will to power and iterates the need to recognize and resist hegemonic and homogenizing patriarchal power - structures” (McCombs 20). Moreover, since she perceives a resemblance between the woman's powerlessness and passivity towards man's aggression and domination and Canada's similar posture towards the more powerful and expansionist U.S. culture, Atwood implicitly problematizes Canada's quest for identity in the women protagonists' similar quest in her novels and thus inscribes her nationalist concerns within her feminist and postmodernist ideology. Part of her fame and popularity perhaps she

owes to the way in which she has fought for the establishment of a distinct Canadian identity for Canadian literature. She observes, “Canada as a separate, but dominated country has done about as well under the US / as women, worldwide, have done under men” (George 27). Hence, the narratives of her women characters metaphorically become the narratives of her nation. Since woman is viewed as a colony in patriarchal discourse, her examination of woman as colony in her novels becomes, by extension, an examination of Canada as colony in the context of the actual or possible Americanization of Canada. “In a victim-victor equation, Atwood always makes Canada ‘the victim’ and ‘the victor’ often America, gets the image of a male aggressor” (Keith 05).

Patriarchy and colonialism are both power structures which operate on similar principles. These are the diabolic power structures tormenting and ruining Canada for more than a century. Colonialism may well be seen as a paradigm of patriarchy in feminist literary criticism. This is because, gender relations provide the blue print for all other power relationships and are the model for power relations between generations, socio- economic classes, racial, historical, cultural, and ethnic groups as well as between imperial powers and their colonies. “Both patriarchy and colonialism involve relationships of domination and suppression; assumed superiority and imposed inferiority; but the dominated is forced to take up the oppressed, exploited victim position” (Spivak 51). Just as colonialism maintains, underlines, and emphasizes the difference between the native and the colonizer, patriarchy promotes and stresses the difference between women and men.

Canada is a land of vast empty spaces, prairies, lakes, freezing and frozen rivers, and the snow-covered Arctic. The climate, geography, history and economics of Canada have thus caused the Canadian imagination to be obsessed with the limitations rather than the possibilities

of human experience and have made 'survival' the great fact of Canadian life. A preoccupation with survival is necessarily also a preoccupation with the obstacles to that survival. Seeing Canadians willfully cast themselves in the role of victims in fact and in fiction, Atwood remarked: "stick a pin in Canadian literature at random and nine times out of ten you'll hit a victim" (*Survival* 33). The survival mentality prevented Canadians from respecting themselves for it is a colonial mentality, the nation couldn't act because it saw itself as acted upon, it accepted a passive role, and with perverse narcissism, perpetuated it. Thus, Atwood began to strive and struggle in order to transcend the victim state of Canadians through her works.

Victimization and survival are twin themes explored by Atwood in her criticism, fiction, and poetry. As a Canadian woman writer, Atwood deals with issues of victimization and survival as conditions of both the Canadian experience and female experience. Atwood claims, "Canada as a whole is a victim or an 'oppressed minority' or 'exploited,' a colony for someone else's profit" (*Survival* 35). Just as colonial power structures seem to be built into the Canadian national consciousness, patriarchal power structures too have left their impact on the female psyche, but a sensitive and consciously self-aware writer like Atwood makes it her mission to explore and expose these power structures and their effects on both those who exercise power and those who are subjected to it. While colonial domination is a recurrent theme with the Canadian male writers, women writers see colonialism as a metaphor for the gender power struggle.

Most of Atwood's novels grapple with the 'politics of gender.' "By 'political' I mean having to do with power: Who's got it, who wants it, how it operates; who's allowed to do what to whom, who gets what from whom, who gets away with it and how" (153), explains Atwood in her non-fictional text *Second Words*. Atwood explicitly expresses this 'power politics of gender

relations,' in her select novels through the successful handling of the postmodern genre of historical fiction, also called historiographic metafiction, which explores the relationship between history, fiction, and culture.

Patricia Waugh in her book, *Metafiction : The Theory and Practice of Self -Conscious Fiction*, remarks that metafiction employs intertextual references and citations to fictional systems. It crafts biographies of imaginary writers. It often violates the traditional narrative techniques by involving the writer with the fictional characters. Metafiction addresses the readers through the first person narrator (33-40). Works of metafiction which have a historical reconstruction of the past with details that appear to be original and that has the main story line inter-connected with the stated historic scenario has been termed as "Historiographic Metafiction." This postmodern historical genre of fiction has been coined by the literary critic Linda Hutcheon. "Literature has always been studied with reference to its origins (historical genesis), than for its own sake," (03) says Hutcheon in her *The Politics of Postmodernism*. The novels which employ this postmodern technique lay claim to historical incidents paradoxically. Certain traits of historiographic metafiction are: (i) historiographic metafiction exposes a complex relationship between fiction and history. The world of fiction and the world of history seem to be mutually contributing and confronting. (ii) It keeps the reader engrossed in the labyrinthine narrative in the process of identifying the main plot which remains hidden in several other captivating parallel and serious narratives. (iii) It works consciously to situate itself within historical discourse (historical context) without surrendering its autonomy as fiction. It is a kind of seriously ironic parody. (iv) Historiographic Metafiction confers on the intertexts of history and fiction, a parallel status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of the world and the literature. Most of these characteristics are explicit in the novels of Margaret Atwood. Hutcheon

The elements of historiographic metafiction are pastiche, parody, and intertextuality. Historiographic metafiction has its relations both with the historical past and with the historically imbibed expectations of its readers. Hence in Barthes' view, the text is an amalgamation of references drawn from the innumerable cores of culture. He states that books always verbalize other books, and every tale tells a story that has already been narrated. He asserts that the source of the text is not a cohesive authorial perception but a plurality of influences, of others' utterances and other transcripts. Barthes genuinely proclaims that if anyone is able to look into the author's mind, then one might not discern original thoughts or ideas, but what the author has previously read. In accordance to critical theory, the postmodern historiographic metafiction is strongly interconnected to Barthes' "The Death of the Author." "The Death of the Author" is a 1967 essay by the [French literary critic](#) and [theorist Roland Barthes](#). It was published in an anthology of Barthes' essays, *Image-Music-Text* (1977). In his essay, he states:

A text is not a line of words discharging a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message of the Author-God'), but a multidimensional space in which a range of writings, none of them unique, merge and collide [...] A text is made up of compound writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into common relations of conversation, discourse, satire, contestation, but there is one place where this assortment is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as was until now said, the author. A text's unity lies not in its origin, but in its destination [...] the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.

Language in a sense constitutes reality, rather than merely reflecting it, the readers are expected to analyze the inner meaning of text. The readers hence become the actual and actualizing links between the author and the text; the history and the fiction; as well as between the past and the present. 'History' refers to the 'past,' whereas 'historiography' refers to the writings of historians. The past is the object of the historians and historiography is the way historians attend to it. When past is looked from a historian's point of view, it becomes historical record. Historiography is created of inter-textual construct. It alludes to the study of the style of historians and the progress of history as a discipline, and also to a body of historical work on a specific subject.

According to Dominick LaCapra, a contemporary theorist of historiography, "The meaning of the past is not coherent, continuous, or unified--- until we make it so" (236). Keith Jenkins is of the view that facts never articulate for themselves; history is not one of discovery, but of construction. The past for Jenkins is a building site, not a foreign land to be explored. There is no centre to history, as there is no knowable past. There is only what we might call the past-as-history. This is what the French critic Roland Barthes calls the 'reality effect.' We can only represent the past through the form we give to its reality. Jenkins says that for a mainstream academic historian, "the attempt to re-think/ re-figure/ deconstruct/ post-modernize an old discourse may appear destructive" (22). Arthur Marwick, in his book *The Nature of History* condemns postmodernism as "a menace to serious historical study," because he believes that the postmodern approaches to history stress the value of meta narrative over archival approach (qtd. in Hoefflerle 11). Similar views are shared by John Tosh in his book *The Pursuit of History*.

History plays an increasingly central role in Fredric Jameson's books, *The Political Unconscious* and *The Critique of Postmodernism*; both the books emphasize history as the 'ultimate horizon' of literary and cultural analysis. He claims that postmodernism is characterized by pastiche and a crisis in historicity, whereas the postmodern critic Linda Hutcheon and writers like Umberto Eco, E. L. Doctorow, Salman Rushdie have claimed that postmodern artists demonstrate finer historical erudition, by examining the discursive means through which historical narratives are constructed. Even Keith Jenkins acknowledges that history in this postmodern world gives way to various historical genres and theories. Like the most notable historical genre, 'Historiographic Metafiction.' He seems to endorse Hutcheon's view that history and fiction go hand in hand and says, "Historians do not see themselves as writers of fiction, although inadvertently they may be." In their history making process, the historians shuffle between other historians' published and unpublished works, books, and articles and then transform the past into history (15-25). The postmodern historiographic metafictionists, who deal with events already constituted in history, are perhaps in an even more complex position than the historians. They are constrained by the demands of narrative fiction as much as by those of historical events. They must deal with literature's intertexts as well as historical details. Historical evidences do not represent anything on their own, but to a certain extent their meanings depend on the way they are depicted and correlated together to form a historical narrative. As every representation of the past has explicit ideological objective, the historiographic metafictionists consider that history is very much subject to ideological configurations; and individual experiences of the writer who aims to process the facts. This is no doubt evident in the works of Margaret Atwood.

Atwood being a historiographic metafictionist explicates the amalgamation of history and fiction through her select novels like *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Alias Grace*, and *The Blind Assassin*. She effectively employs the postmodern elements such as pastiche, parody, and intertextuality to her historiographic metafiction and illustrates the presence of the past in the present. At the thematic level, Atwood's novels examine themes related to the politics of gender, such as the enforced alienation of women under patriarchy; the delimiting definition of woman as a function; the patriarchal attempt to annihilate the selfhood of women; the 'wounded selves' of women due to this annihilation; the gradual carving out of female space by woman through various strategies; and woman's quest for identity, self-definition, and autonomy. Structurally Atwood is an innovator who experiments with various narrative forms in her attempt to adequately express the postmodernist and the feminist themes handled by her. Linda Hutcheon in her *Canadian Postmodern* remarks, "In all her writings, Atwood shows herself to be the tireless explorer and exposé of cultural clichés and stereotypes, in particular of those that affect women" (80).

The novels of Atwood do have, without doubt, a specific socio-cultural background in as much as they have well defined temporal settings. It cannot be denied that her works reflect the Canadian social scene in all its variety, colour, and complexity. "I began," Atwood has written in the Introduction to her *Second Words* (1982), "as a profoundly apolitical writer, but then I began to do what all novelists and some poets do. I began to describe the world around me" (15). This unequivocal admission, quite obviously fixes her writing within an overtly socio-political framework. Atwood acknowledges and strongly believes that the writer is necessarily a socio-political being and she also proclaims, that the writer cannot consider himself/ herself a totally isolated individual, for he/she is inescapably connected with the society. She emphasizes that the

intensity between the society and the writer will definitely increase if the society becomes the subject of his/her writing. About herself as a writer, she feels that she is not a propagandist, and that she only presents to her readers the reality of life around her. Atwood says, "I live in the society; [and] I put that society inside my books so that you get a box within a box effect" (qtd. in Meyer 24).

Atwood is indeed a writer with a deep understanding of human behaviour, she possesses an unusual combination of wit and satiric edge, a fine critical intelligence and an ability to go deep into the irrational earth of the psyche. She has continued to explore a basic core of subjects, such as the function and nature of myth, humanity's relationship to nature, the nature of power, the possibilities for change and metamorphosis in human relationships and in the natural world. Atwood is thoughtfully feminist, ecologically sensitive, and a clear eyed observer of social trends from urban alienation to rural isolation, she is one of those writers who seem to function as barometers of their times. "Her works have the energy and clarity of a swift river, they are limpid without being limp, clever without being silly, controlled without being stilted, and precise without being pedantic" (McCombs 10).

The early formative years of Atwood were shaped by her father's profession and by her reading. The daughter of a forest entomologist, Atwood "grew up in and out of the bush, in and out of Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie and Toronto and did not attend a full year of school until [...] grade eight." The fall and spring transitions between the bush and the city were made dramatic by the way her family changed appearances, especially her mother, who put on nylons and dresses and hats and gloves and make-up when they stayed in the south. They had one identity for the city and one for the bush. This rhythm of going back and forth made Atwood 'double natured.' Her close knit family always stressed on intellectual development. From a child till she

turned into a young woman, she went with her entomologist father on research trips into the Canadian wilderness. These trips provided Atwood with an early and extensive knowledge of life in the woods, evident in imagery that runs throughout her works. At sixteen she began writing, “suddenly the only thing [she] wanted to do.” Her parents, “great readers,” expected her to utilize her “intelligence and abilities and [...] did not pressure her into marriage” (Cooke 13). At Victoria College, University of Toronto, her teachers were Jay Macpherson, Northrop Frye, Kathleen Coburn, and Millar MacLure. This exciting discovery that Canadians were writing and publishing made her feel that she could too. She read the poetry of P.K. Page, Margaret Avison, James Reaney, D.G. Jones, and Douglas LePan. In 1961, with a B.A. from Victoria College, she won the E.J. Pratt Medal for her book of poems, *Double Persephone*, and a Woodrow Wilson fellowship. Her Harvard experience from 1961 to 1963 and from 1965 to 1967 had far reaching effects on her self-image as a ‘Canadian.’ Cambridge was where she started thinking seriously about Canada as having a shape and a culture of its own. Canadians had never been taught much about their own history or culture, but if Americans could study puritan literature, not notable for its purely literary value, then why couldn’t Canadians also study their own? Americans at Harvard found Canadians “boring.” “The beginning of Canadian cultural nationalism was not ‘am I really that oppressed?’ but ‘am I really that boring?’” (qtd. in Djwa 20) She felt invisible, almost nonexistent, alienated. These feelings of depression are aptly depicted in her collection of poems, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*:

The moving water will not show me
my reflection
The rocks ignore
I am a word

in a foreign language.

(“Disembarking At Quebec” 01-05)

This is a fine example of Margaret Atwood’s alienated mood. She expects the moving water to allow her reflection on it and the rocks to accept. At last, she finds that she is nothing but ‘a word in an alien language.’ This poem is a monologue, written in the persona of Susanna Moodie. These feelings of non- existence made Atwood’s writings eventually develop into a search for a visible identity on several levels. After receiving her M.A. degree from Harvard University, she returned to Toronto in 1963. Then in 1964, Atwood started teaching English at the University of British Columbia for a year and finished her first novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969). Later she published five volumes of poetry: *The Circle Game* (1966), *The Animals in That Country* (1968), *Procedures for Underground* (1970), *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), and *Power Politics* (1971). *The Circle Game* won the Governor General’s Award for poetry in 1966. *The Animals in That Country* won first prize in the Centennial Commission Poetry competition in 1967. Five poems from *Procedures for Underground* were awarded the Union Poetry Prize by Poetry [Chicago] in 1969.

In 1972, Atwood published her second novel, *Surfacing* and a non-fiction *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. *Survival* had a great impact on the development of Canadian cultural nationalism, an impact deriving its power from Atwood’s analysis of victimization and survival as “the structural features of Canadian life” (Hogan 184). Atwood also furthered the cause of Canadian literature by working to organize the writers’ union of Canada, which she chaired in 1981. With the consolidation of her reputation, many books and honours followed. She published five more volumes of poetry: *You are Happy* (1974), *Selected Poems* (1976), *Two-Headed Poems*(1978), *True Stories* (1981), and *Interlunar* (1984); four more

novels, *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life Before Man* (1979), *Bodily Harm* (1981), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985); three collections of short stories, *Dancing Girls* (1977), *Murder in the Dark* (1983), and *Bluebeard's Egg* (1983). She also published *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose* (1982), which collected book reviews, essays, and many of her lectures. Her poetry collection, *You are Happy* received the Best Hopkins prize (1974) from poetry [Chicago]. Her novel, *Lady Oracle*, received both the city of Toronto Book Award (1976) and the Canadian Booksellers Association Award (1977). In 1977, Atwood received the St. Lawrence Award for fiction for *Dancing Girls* and the award of the Periodical Distributors of Canada for short fiction. In 1980, she received a Graduate Society Medal from Radcliffe College. Her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* won the Governor General's prize. Her next four novels were *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Alias Grace* (1996), *The Blind Assassin* (2000), which won The Booker prize and *Oryx and Crake* (2003) which was published on the Internet. Her latest works include *Penelopiad* (2005), *The Year of Flood* (2009), and [MaddAddam](#) (2013). Atwood is now a major public figure, not only delivering literary lectures at Universities in Canada and abroad, but also addressing 'the Empire Club of Canada,' 'the Modern Language Association of America,' 'the Harvard Consortium in Inter-American Relations,' and 'the World Meeting of Amnesty International.'

Classified as a product of genres and criticized as didactic, Atwood's works can best be understood in terms of the critical methods outlined in her book, *Survival*. The double justification for this approach comes from her own approach that is first, she is a poet-novelist who writes criticism from the writer's point of view; secondly, she is a poet who writes novels. In *Survival*, she defines literature as "a map, geography of the mind" (18). Studying the geography of her mind as it is mapped in her fiction; we see that her most distinctive methods are always those of the poet, with images to convey the act of consciousness, multilevel puns, and

structured metaphors. And thus, her every novel is tightly organized through an obsessive metaphorical network to dramatize her protagonists' developing consciousness. Although they see themselves menaced by external enemies, they repeatedly discover the same enemy within.

Atwood is not one of those writers, whose writing in prose seems separate except in formal terms from their verse. On the contrary, "the capillary links between her poetry, her fiction, her criticism, are many and evident" (qtd. in Bhatnagar 176). A phrase in her poem becomes a theme in her novel; characters sketched out in the barely differentiated personae of the poetry become full human beings in the developing process of her fiction. Atwood's first major book of poetry, *The Circle Game* shows her maturity, the authority and control; now recognized as integral to the Atwood's voice. It reflects her intense preoccupation with the double aspect of life. The opening poem of the collection, "This is a photograph of me" refers to the 'I - thou' correlation, that is of alteration of insights. It explores an intimate relationship between the 'I' of the external world and the 'you' of the internal world. The 'you' is the 'other' of the 'I.' The photograph has been taken some time ago, and so has lost its lustre and figures. The poet herself scans for the readers and takes them through the blurred contours of photograph identifying the landmarks, until she arrives at a lake bordered with low hills; and then, there is a sudden reversal in the poem. The poet, who has conducted the tour in the photograph, suddenly turns eerie and says: "The photograph was taken the day after I drowned / I am in the lake, in the centre of the picture, just under the surface [...]" (Line 15). The reader is pushed into reality, as he or she is compelled like the poet, to identify the Jungian 'shadow,' by staring into the lake of unconscious. The poem depicts the misunderstanding of the roles one believes and also the games one plays with his/ her 'own self.' Here, the poet explores the fallibility of human perception and the concomitant changes of the egocentric self. "Man distorts and delimits life

and makes it as an endless circle game. This poem, which makes the readers stare into the lake of unconscious with its images of circle and games, conveys the idea of the indispensable Jungian shadow” (qtd. in Bhatnagar 177).

According to Dr. Carl G. Jung, the conscious and the unconscious parts of the psyche function independently, as a result of which one leads arid and amputated life. The process of individualization is an antidote to alienation. A dive into oneself makes one aware of his/her fragmented state, caused by false myths. By responding to the archetypal figures which emerge from one’s own inner self like the shadow (the dark, awkward side of the psyche), and the anima or animus (the contra sexual side of the psyche), one becomes aware not only of the personal unconsciousness, but also of the collective unconsciousness; which is the psychic heritage common to all human beings, and which constitutes the foundation of human psyches. With this increased self - knowledge, the split between the conscious and unconscious parts is healed (Jung 12- 15).

This ‘double vision’ of Jungian psychology is made more apparent in Atwood’s novels. Atwood’s protagonists desiring to appear ‘normal’ and ‘well - adjusted’ remain unaware of their true potentialities and they identify themselves only with a very small section of the conscious part of their psyches called ‘the ego.’ Hence, these protagonists live in their egos and ignore the archetypal figures within themselves, and they remain unaware of both their personal unconsciousness and of the transpersonal dimensions of themselves.

In Atwood’s second volume of poetry, *The Animals in That Country*, she writes about anthropomorphic characters that seem to represent the human types. Metaphor suffuses these poems. Her next poetry collection, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* enlarges upon the national

theme. In this collection, Atwood devotes her attention to what she calls the ‘schizoid’ or ‘double nature’ of Canada. This poetry collection reflects the life of the 19th-century Canadian pioneer woman with whom Atwood felt an obvious affinity. These poems examine why Canadians came to develop ambivalent feelings towards their country. Atwood has written in the “Afterword” to *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*: “If the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia” (164). Atwood’s achievement in this collection is to present a protagonist believable in her conflicts. Through Moodie / Atwood, we experience hope, anguish, fear, joy, resignation, and anger. Like Atwood, Moodie wrote enthusiastically about life in Canada. The character of Susanna Moodie becomes a perfect mask for the journey to self exploration that Atwood attempts in her later works, especially in her novel, *Alias Grace*.

There has always been a sort of compatibility between Atwood’s poetry and fiction. Moreover, she brings to fiction the verbal subtleties of a poet. The basic imageries of water, mirrors, photographs, etc., recur throughout her verses and fictions along with her characteristic sharpness and tangy prose style. Her novels depict her sparseness of language, emotional restraint, and her willingness to examine the harsh realities of both society and the natural world. Atwood’s first novel, *The Edible Woman*, institutes a concern that becomes an essential theme in all her succeeding fiction: “power politics, in particular sexual politics and gender history” (Begum iv). This novel traces the ambivalent responses of Marian MacAlpin (who, ironically works for a market research firm), to her upcoming marriage to a young, rising lawyer, Peter. Here, Atwood links the economy of a consumer society with women’s place in the economy of the marriage market. Marian’s commitment to Peter symbolizes her conversion from consumer to a thing consumed as she gets ensnared by his conventional outlook of feminine ideals. She

feels an increasing sense of her 'self' as an 'object.' Marian's unconscious rejection of this process is played out quite literally in terms of consumption; her body begins to refuse food. As the wedding day approaches, her rebellion escalates in a figurative categorization with any edible entity. Eventually, she escapes from her own engagement party, before she is entangled forever in the pictorial frame of Peter's desires. Her redemption to 'subject' status is obvious by the baking of an edible woman. Offering this cake proxy to her fiancée, she discards both his wedding proposal and his objectification of her. Eating the cake herself, she progresses from a frenzied victim to an independent consumer.

Atwood's second novel, *Surfacing* is a novel of self - exploration. The nameless narrator tries to trace her own identity as a human being through her journey into the self by exploring her personal past. The novel is written entirely as a first - person narrative, spoken by the anonymous protagonist, who is 'I' to herself and 'you' to everyone else. This nameless narrator may be considered as the representative of women all over the world who have no individuality and who have been exploited in one way or the other. The novel reflects the historical oppression of women. Atwood's third novel, *Lady Oracle* parodies the conventions of romance and of the gothic in an exploration of the damaging effects of mass produced fantasies for women. It is her comic masterpiece in its parodies of literary forms and subversion of literary expectations. *Lady Oracle* comes as something of a light relief, as Atwood's concerns with metamorphosis and identity are given a comic spin. *Life Before Man* is Atwood's bleakest exploration of relations between the sexes, and her most typical novel to date. Although popular with readers, it has been less well received by critics, partly because of its uncharacteristic pessimism. Yet, ultimately it is Atwood's most compassionate and human book. Like all the other novels, however it ends on an essentially ambiguous note in which there is 'room for hope, but also for disaster.' Although her

next novel, *Bodily Harm* is a riveting and dreadful storyline (complete with CIA and spy reinforcement), it is a suspense-filled adventure tale set in the Caribbean for an additional feel of foreign atmosphere. It is the narrative of Rennie Wilson, a transient journalist who takes an apparently safe vacation in St. Antoine to flee from the heaviness and abnormalities of her life. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a speculative fiction that hit many as a sweeping departure, but it is just a flexible deviation in her constant investigation of the inter-sections of history, gender, and authority. Envisioning Orwell's *1984* in feminist terms, Atwood constructs the 'Republic of Gilead,' a dystopian projection extracted from existing trends. *The Handmaid's Tale* with its postmodernist approach to reality and art breaks the boundaries between history and fiction. Being a historiographic metafiction, it never projects present values and principles onto the past and affirms the specificity and distinctiveness of the past event. With Atwood's subsequent novels, such as *The Cat's Eye*, *The Robber Bride*, and *Alias Grace* --- Atwood proceeds to the Toronto background of her former works to survey public and private histories.

Alias Grace is again a historiographic metafiction. This novel is based on the murder of Thomas Kinnear and his mistress Nancy Montgomery in 1843. Kinnear's male servant was sentenced to death for the crime, but the capital punishment of his supposed partner in crime, Grace Marks was commuted to life due to her extreme youth. The whole incident led to extensive attention, even though some agreed that integrity and justice was maintained throughout the case. There were people who accused Grace as a crafty fiend as well as those who considered her a frightened sufferer of circumstances and beseeched for her forgiveness. The Booker prize winning novel *The Blind Assassin* is an unsettling cautionary tale that like Atwood's other novels, focuses attention on the power politics. Here Atwood explores the relationship between sexual roles and power structures of gender relations. It deals with the

historic difficulties of women and the destructive games, projections, and illusions of men. *Oryx and Crake* is another dystopian novel of Atwood, which is an influential and inspiring tale, extraordinary and less impending than *The Handmaid's Tale*. Here, Atwood deals with the inclinations of present society, technological advancement, business competitiveness, snobbery, urban obscurity, ethical decay and transmits them to an extreme. Her *Penelopiad*, a variant of the Homeric legend taken from his *Odyssey* is set in the mould of a postmodern narrative. A postmodern narrative is uncertain of all ethical and political judgments because it challenges the reliability of any one single truth. Homer's story was recited by an omniscient storyteller, while Atwood features two centers of perception: Penelope's and her handmaids'. Atwood's narrative explicitly subverts the conservative patriarchal opinion widespread in the period of Homer. *The Year of the Flood* is a continuation and a companion piece to her prior novel *Oryx and Crake*. This is debatably a work of science fiction, which poses fascinating questions about literature and genre. Her most recent novel, *MaddAddam* puts an end to the trilogy she began with *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. The subsequent chapters in this thesis will examine the elements of historiographic metafiction in Atwood's select novels namely *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Alias Grace*, and *The Blind Assassin*.

Margaret Atwood through these novels investigates and exposes the brutal power relations that confine and hinder the lives of her female protagonists. In almost all her novels, Atwood broadens the range and the intricacy of this assessment in a judicious analysis of North American social and cultural politics with a steady detection of human capability to both impose and endure pain.

The historian E.H. Carr is of the opinion that the facts are truly not at all like "fish on the fishmonger's slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible

ocean; and what the historian catches will depend, partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use.” These two aspects are no doubt resolved by the kind of fish the historian wishes to catch. Therefore, the historian gets only the kind of facts he wants. Hence Carr concludes saying, “History means interpretation” (23). So writing history is to arrange, to give shape to incongruent details; in other words, to fictionalize. History remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian’s perspective as a ‘narrator.’ Unlike direct memory, history relies on someone else’s eyes and voice. The readers learn about history only through an interpreter who stands between past events and the readings of them. “The historian’s viewpoint and predilections shape the choice of historical materials” (Jenkins 14). Consequently, Historiographic metafiction is equally a manuscript and a construction; a record and an invention. This eschews the readers from thinking that writing and the written text are not fixed or dead products. Instead they are made to realize that reading and interpreting are never ending processes; in which the readers are instigated to participate as equally as the writers to be the makers of culture. In postmodern historical novels, also referred to as historiographic metafictions, evaluation becomes an act of rational perplexity and also one of co-creation. As is reflected in the words of Atwood, “[...] the process of reading is part of the process of writing; the necessary completion, without which writing can hardly be said to exist” (*Second Words*17).

The ensuing chapters will not only elucidate the ‘wounded selves’ of the protagonists of *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Alias Grace*, and *The Blind Assassin*, but also their triumph over their selves. These chapters will also serve well as a commemoration of the wounds endured and resented by these protagonists. Atwood’s women are not solitary weepers, but they make decisions, perform actions, and are ready to face the consequences whatever they be. Atwood’s

novels reinforce and historicize the vital principle of her ethical vision, that though human inclination instigates humans to be both a victim and victimizer, it is everyone's responsibility to be neither.

The thesis has been divided into six consequent chapters. The first and the last being the Introduction and Conclusion, the rest of the chapters deal with the select novels of Atwood each. The scope of this study is to assess the select novels of Atwood as historiographic metafiction. The postmodern characteristics viz., intertextuality, parody, and pastiche considered as the chief elements of historiographic metafiction are discussed in the process of the thesis. The thesis strives to substantiate that historiographic metafiction is in a way akin to historical works. Like the historical works, the historiographic metafiction also records the social, cultural, and political histories blended with fictional narrative wherever essential. The thesis explicates this through the citations of certain historians and historiographic metafictionists. Atwood's postmodern historical novels selected for analysis bring to light the silenced histories of the politically marginalized, the colonized, and the women in the course of rewriting historical data within the diverse frameworks of the novels. These novels put in historical substance and unite fact and fiction within their self-reflexive narratives and focus on the social problems, the domestic violence, and gender issues pertaining to women. The methodology followed throughout the thesis is based on MLA Handbook, 7th edition.