Introduction

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Any discussion of the literature of a marginalised group of people should necessarily begin with the dominant community's conscious attempts to de-limit and destabilize the culture and knowledge of the former. The case of the Native Canadian writer is unique, for, many of the Indian tribes have been completely wiped out of existence. The genocide has been literal as well as figurative. In this context, it would be worthwhile to examine the efforts made by native writers to construct a Counter Discourse to challenge the onslaught of the white colonizers.

Trapped by history, handicapped by the lack of knowledge of the English language and torn apart by the evils of racism and sexism, the native women writers feel frustrated when they attempt to break free from the fetters of mainstream literature. Identifying the ideological control of the canonical texts and developing the techniques for deconstructing it has not been an easy job. The policy of commodification of the Native Indian taken up by the colonizers has had serious repercussions on native life, for, they were reduced to the role of
"semiotic pawns" on the chessboard under the control of the white sign maker (Goldie 10).

The Native women writers discussed in this work -- Joan Crate, Lee Maracle and Jovette Marchessault -- have all developed modes of discourse of their own. In Maracle's overt portrayal of the native life in the reservations and Jovette Marchessault's attempts to revision history and invert androcentric myths, one can perceive the concerted efforts of a colonized people to subvert the canon.

The imperial project had attempted to contain aboriginal cultures in order to control them. Decolonization has brought in its trail attempts to revision the political, historical, linguistic and cultural realities presented by the colonizer. Hence there has been a prominent endeavour among native writers to re-work the European interpretations of events, narratives and history inorder to invest them with more local relevance and to divest them of their assumed authority. Helen Tiffin terms this project "canonical counter discourse" ("Counter Discourse" 22), a process whereby the post-colonial writer unveils and dismantles the basic assumptions of a specific colonial text by developing a counter text that preserves many of the identifying
signifiers of the original, while altering its structures of power.

This thesis, "Counter Discourse in the Novels of Lee Maracle, Joan Crate and Jovette Marchessault", attempts to study the various levels of literary resistance developed against the Western literary canon. The first three chapters seek to study the 'different' status of Native Women's Literature, while the fourth focuses on the ways Native writing adheres to western literary modes in an attempt to subvert it in its own terrain.

The first chapter, "The Genesis of a Counter Discourse" attempts to define the discourse of a community which had been trapped by the forces of colonialism for centuries. The modes adopted by the white colonizers to appropriate knowledge and the result -- the degrading opinion the natives have about themselves -- are discussed in detail. The role of discourse in controlling the power of the indigene is immeasurable and hence a counter discourse that aims to dismantle the existing power structures of the colonial discourse is integral to any resistance activity.

The very stereotype that mummifies the present of the native has been used as a starting point for counter discourse by many writers. The images of sexuality,
alcoholism and the mysterious orality created by Crate, Maracle and Marchessault undermine the powers wielded by the colonial powers. The choice of multiple sexual partners in the case of Dione and the overt lesbianism of the characters in Marchessault's novels go a long way in nurturing the sexually perverted image of the native. Maracle, on the other hand, by creating the stereotyped native alcoholic losers in her fiction attempts to place the blame squarely on the colonizers.

The next section "Subjectivity and Power", discusses the way in which the creation of subjectivity aids the indigene to usurp power. The appropriation of the 'I' position is an important strategy in counter discourse. Paul Smith's observation, "Wherever the 'I' speaks, a knowledge is spoken; wherever a knowledge speaks, an 'I' is spoken" (100) proves the importance of this strategy. An attempt to create a splintered subjectivity too has been made by writers like Joan Crate. Instead of being self-destructive, this technique aids to develop the myth of native subjectivity as being ungraspable.

The last section "Writing Resistance" discusses the paradoxes inherent in counter discourse. That counter discourses could be constructed only by references to the dominant discourse, as a resistance against the dominant
discourse proves that the relationship between the two is symbiotic. The specialist modes of resistance-writing like creation of new schemata, mimicry, revisionary historiography and revisionary ethnography are dealt with in detail in this chapter.

The second chapter, "Feminism in the Native Context", focuses on the issues of feminist thought and on the ways the native women writers conform to the present day feminism. In issues of language, the native writers under reference uphold the feminist faith that women should develop a language that is not controlled by patriarchy. Jovette Marchessault and Joan Crate have both attempted to appropriate the mode of l'ecriture feminine in their narratives. Marchessault and Maracle have taken their subversive tactics to a greater extent in that they have often refused to abide by the dictates of the novel genre.

In the second section "Resisting Phallogocentrism", the issue of the subject matter in feminist fiction is discussed. The emotional, sexual and domestic themes discussed by women writers which form the "private" sector in fiction is not to be considered irrational, for, the public-private hierarchy itself is something that ought to be deconstructed. The valorization of the domestic and sexual themes in the narratives under reference is discussed in detail. Other feminist strategies like
inversion of Romance, Myth and Quest narratives are also attempted by Crate, Maracle and Marchessault.

In the third chapter, "From the Margins of the Margin", an attempt has been made to study the authors under discussion from a postcolonial viewpoint. Though feminism and postcolonialism share much in common, the double ostracisation of the native women make their position more problematic. The polemic regarding the margins -- that the margin is the real site of power and the ensuing controversy that touches upon the very need for a margin-centre dichotomy -- is also discussed here.

As a master narrative which has assisted the imperial project of colonisation, the Bible and its institutional significations and uses, figure among the canonical texts which are attacked. The attacks levelled against the Bible and the Catholic Church by Maracle and Marchessault are extremely vehement. Following the influential work of Hayden White, attempts have been made to demonstrate the ways in which history entails an ongoing reassessment of the past that facilitates a perception of the present and the future. By reclassifying aboriginal histories as myth or legend, or disclaiming them altogether because they are not written down, colonial historians dismissed as less significant all methods of story telling but their own.
While these attempts to reorder the colonial world to suit European sensibilities may have been initiated for reasons of convenience, they were also intended to secure complete authority over the colonized populations. Frequently, the conquered were prevented from presenting their side of the story -- either by the absence of a common language and access to information or by loss of self-esteem or even by genocide.

The final section of this chapter, "The Lesbian Voice of Dissent" takes a look at the gay theory and the attempt made by Marchessault to define the lesbian sublime. In her return to the period of pre-oedipal jouissance and in her portrayal of women as the angel makers, one could perceive a concerted effort to empower women.

The final chapter, "The Deployment of Western Literary Modes", discusses the texts of Crate, Maracle and Marchessault from a narratological perspective. If the earlier three chapters highlighted the essential differences in technique made by the native writers to aid the construction of a separate identity for native writing, this chapter examines the adherence of the texts to the western narrative modes.
Various topics related to the narrative structure -- the narrator, the reader, narrative expectations, dialogue -- and their presence in native texts are all discussed in this chapter. A structural analysis of the texts under reference is also attempted. The narrative within a narrative is a feature common to both native and western narratives. The presence of a story teller is imperative to most native communities and this in turn aids the insertion of narratives into the main text.

The final section discusses the role of myths in providing order to modern narratives. Special emphasis is given to the native myths which are curiously similar to the western myths like the Proserpine myth and the Mother-Goddess myth. An attempt has been made to relate Jovette Marchessault's works to the proletarian myth of deliverance. Eventhough the presentation of the structural analysis of the native narratives in the western narrative mould seems to destroy the very purpose of counter discourse, a reading of the chapter in the light of natives appropriating the white canon could vindicate it.
Works Cited

