CHAPTER TWO

CANVAS FOR CREATIONS

Art is not created in a vacuum;
it is the work not simply of a person,
but of an author fixed in time and space
answering to a community of which he is an important,
because articulate part.

Wilbur S. Scott.

Every writer is both a product of his age and the society in which he lives. According to Welleck,

The most obvious cause of a work of art is its creator, the author, and hence, an explanation in terms of the personality and life of the writer has been one of the oldest and established methods of literary study. (75)

Adopting new goals in respect of their literature was almost a historical necessity with the Americans, as right from the inception of the new nation across the Atlantic, its citizens wanted desperately to break loose from the stronghold of European influence and culture, not for the sake of merely asserting their independence, but for the purpose of establishing their own, unique identity.
In its early phase, literature for the Americans, quite inevitably, tended to embody a hybrid European character, for most of the American writers were but "products of European Culture". "Their primary problem lay in finding a way to express the uniqueness of their American experience while at the same time remaining true to the European heritage" (D. Ross 5).

Nevertheless, the problem of cultural hybridity remained for the Americans, largely an unrecognized one, with regard to most writers, for a considerably long period of time. Consequently, the American writers continued to churn out a literature, that did not make any effort to mark its obvious and unmistakable European roots, despite all its veneer of updated contemporaneity. Such a phenomenon is perhaps most conspicuous in respect of the genre of the short story.

The nineties saw the rise of Henry James (1843-1916) who published five volumes of short stories. To many general readers and critics, James has become a paragon and a legend; the supreme practitioner of the novelist's art:

Like Flaubert James was a highly conscious and scrupulous craftsman and used the resources of language to create in the reader the right
feeling for character and atmosphere, and to suggest the right moral discrimination [. . .] James has achieved an exquisitely functional use of setting and symbol, metaphor and image, and urbane and suggestive prose to aid his artistic seriousness in projecting the felt life. (Sharma 43)

Perhaps the signal contribution of Henry James to fictional technique, has been his use of the second-hand narrative. For, in such a narrative mode, the story unfolds itself in stages, much to the delight of the suspense-filled reader, as he is permitted merely vague or partial glimpses of development of the narrative, at any given moment of time. In fact, James transfers some of the striking practices of detective novels to his short stories and psychological fiction. His major stories are "Traveling Companion" (1919) and "A Landscape Painter" (1919). Henry James, thus, is "an artist of another era, who nevertheless, continues to remain the most perennially modern" (Perkins 334-35).

The third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century, saw the advent of a plethora of magazines and weeklies catering exclusively to the American middle class women. According to a critic,
Since the war, a number of causes have operated to increase the aesthetic distance between the conventional and the experimental short stories. The most powerful influence making for conservation in subject matter, point of view, technique, ethical atmosphere and moral tone, is the rise to circulation of a million or more of such magazines as the Saturday Evening Post, Collier's The Ladies' Home Journal and the Woman's Home Companion, potent media of national advertising. (Chennery 89)

Editors catering to the taste of vast camps of readers now had to tread quite warily, extremely mindful of the prejudices and predilections of the targeted audience.

Besides the impact of the European writers like Maupassant, the rising popularity of Darwin's theory of Evolution too exercised considerable influence on short story in America, resulting in a naturalistic emphasis on human sensuality and instinctual urges. In the words of Edward J. Brien:

the genre was also influenced by those aesthetic forces [. . .] namely, "the
adaptation of the traditional well-made story on the de Maupassant - Jamesian model; experimentation in the direction of naturalistic objectivity; and experimentation in the direction of a deeper and deeper naturalistic subjectivity" (qtd. in Chennery 91).

Besides, novelistic trends began to appear in the short story too, since most short story writers of distinction just happened to be novelists.

Of the early American writers, Willa Cather and F.Scott Fitzgerald can be said to belong to the traditional kind of creators of short story. Cather's stories draw the attention of the audience to the increasing dominance of women in America. The feminism of Willa Cather is quite subtle compared to that of Edith Wharton or Ellen Glasgow: "Mrs.Wharton takes a stand far above her masculine character, Miss.Glasgow never denies her rapier [. . .]" (qtd. in R.W.B. Lewis 54-55). However, there are some striking similarities between the fictional works of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather:

The two women’s work seems old fashioned because, they remind us of solidity in a time of disintegration and decay. While Wharton’s work has as its goal the discovery of the old
garden, Cather's works aim at the creation of a new. (qtd. in R.W.B. Lewis 180)

To Donald Douglas, the world revealed in Edith Wharton's novels and stories is "a small closed circle of tight security, wherein men and women behave like toys in the discipline of a heartless social mechanism" (21). As against the art of Wharton, Fitzgerald's works are characterized by unconventional rootlessness:

the rootlessness of Fitzgerald is never disguised, whose difference from the middle class values and customs of his youth is spectacularly demonstrated in book after book [. . .] (qtd. in Justus 223).

To Fitzgerald, his age was one of excess, undermined by the onslaughts of neurosis, suicide, insanity and murder, militating against the accelerating pace of hedonism. Fitzgerald's fictional art, like his novel The Great Gatsby, remains fresh because it is so "specifically conscious of its time [. . .] its continuing power comes from the courage with which it grasps a moment in history as a great moral fact" (qtd. in F.Scott 4). Fitzgerald's stories are collected in All the Sad Young Men (1926) and Taps at Reveille (1935).

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, naturalism, sometimes called scientific realism, came to
be seen as a major influence in American Literature. In its scope, Naturalism was international, primarily developed by Emile Zola and his followers from Europe and America. According to Edward Wagenknecht,

The naturalists attempted to apply Claude Bernard's theories of experimental medicine to the writing of fiction. They built as the scientist builds, on a basis of observed fact, and their method was to document their observations by the use of multitudinous details. Enthralled by the scientific materialism of the age of Darwin, the naturalists saw man, as at once the sport, and the product, of his environment. (204)

To M.H.Abrams, Naturalism

[...] is a mode of fiction that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a special philosophical thesis. This thesis is a product of post Darwinian biology in the mid-nineteenth century that held that man belongs entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul or any other connection with a religious or spiritual world beyond nature, that man is therefore merely a
high order animal, whose character and fortunes are determined by two kinds of natural forces, heredity and environment. He inherits his personal traits and his compulsive instincts, especially hunger and sex, and he is subject to the social and economic forces in the family, the class, and the society into which he is born. (141-142)

The strong infusion of naturalism in modern American fiction has resulted in certain significant consequences. It encouraged experimentation with the potential effects of a strictly objective treatment of the short story. In the case of the short story, naturalism has increasingly promoted elimination of formal or complex plots, abstention from authorial comment, accumulation of objective details and, occasionally, utilization of unlovely or unpleasant material.

Experimentation in objective naturalism was done by short story writers like Ernest Hemingway, Erskine Caldwell, Theodore Dreiser, James T. Farrell and William March.

Objective naturalists employ the diction, sentence structure, and speech rhythms which are conscientiously colloquial and yet have none of the
sprawling diffuseness of oral tale-telling. Such a dialogue used in conjunction with suitable 'topoi' are absolutely necessary for the communication of a mood or rendition of an incident. The method is implicatory rather than explicatory, and implication is one of objective naturalists' major devices.

Ernest Hemingway is the high priest of objective naturalism in respect of the short story, whose "In Our Time" (1925) and "Men Without Women" (1927) initiated the vogue of hard-boiled fiction. Hemingway's early short stories such as "The Killers" (1928) or "Hills Like White Elephants" (1928) show the possibilities of using language, almost independently of the usual meaning of words, as a means of manipulating or enforcing power.

An early disciple of James, Edith Wharton (1862-1937), carefully ordered her materials toward the illumination she wanted her reader to receive. In three of her short stories, "The Pelican", "The Rembrandt" and "The Angel at the Grave", she shows herself in full command of a style.

Naturalism, with or without the Hemingway devices, has had its followers. Erskine Caldwell for instance, utilizes naturalistic stratagems such as minimizing
plot, confining himself to the colloquial in dialogue and narration, and preferring for his raw material, the grotesque and the physically unpleasant.

Abrams is of the view,

Theodore Dreiser, and James Farrell, try to present their subjects with an objective scientific attitude and with elaborate documentation, often including an almost medical frankness about activities and bodily functions usually unmentioned in earlier literature. They tend to choose characters who exhibit strong animal drives such as greed and brutal sexual desire and who are victims both of their glandular secretions within and of sociological pressures without. (142)

The end of the naturalistic novel is usually tragic as exemplified in Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy*.

Familiar effects of the objective naturalistic mode, can also be seen in the short stories of William March. March dwells mainly on the inhumanity of military life. His design of short stories conforms to an over-all objective naturalistic mode, with its ethical significance remaining plainly implicit. March also traces the more personal cause of inner, psychic
oppression, its consequential pain and demoralization in his stories like "The Bad Seed" (1954).

Experimentation in subjective naturalism has been more bold and varied. Subjective naturalists show a sensitivity to the inner lives of their characters that was to prove stimulating to writers, dissatisfied with the effects of superficial realism or the conscientious objectivity of naturalism.

Some of the outstanding short story writers who cast their art in the mould of subjective Naturalism have been Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, Conrad Aiken, Tess Slesinger, Kay Boyle, William Faulkner and Katherine Anne Porter (Chennery 94). As for the stories of Gertrude Stein,

Her abiding concern was to express the essential qualities of people rather than the merely contingent. The preoccupation with what she called 'bottom nature' is the opposite of the realist's interest in the unique and particular, and accounts for the drive towards abstraction in her prose. A person's 'reality' is discovered by stripping away the superficial trivia of lies and laying bare the fundamental rhythm of existence. (Lee 191)
Sherwood Anderson's works too are based on a naturalistic interpretation of American life, as he believed that the primal forces of human life are instinctive and not to be denied by the standardization of the machine age.

On the other hand, Conrad Aiken's works are concerned with "the problem of personal identity, what it is that constitutes one's own self consciousness, how to achieve self-knowledge, and how to transcend the self so as to understand the world at large" (qtd. in Hart 13-14). Aiken's stories appeared in Bring! Bring! (1925), Costumes by Eros (1928) and Among the Lost People (1984).

Kay Boyle is one of the leading American experimental novelists, profoundly influenced by Gertrude Stein:

She has a penchant for 'advanced' themes, while more conservative readers often accuse her of waywardness and lack of discipline; of indulging in 'orgies of sensibility', and of concentrating attention upon technique rather than theme. She has been much concerned with the theme of love facing disease and death. (Wagenknecht 467)
William Faulkner's works have been associated with the evil inherent in man's nature and in the social structure of American South.

Faulkner, divides his characters into several categories: naturalistic characters who permit the forces to do with their lives as they will; characters who succumb to the forces with a sense of their own moral failure; characters who wage a desperate, losing battle against the forces, characters who triumph morally, who endure. (D. Ross 36)

In the words of Featherstone:

Katherine Anne Porter is a contemporary of Faulkner, and although she has always stood completely alone as a literary figure, her art suggests some reflections on the First World War generation of American writers, whose restless search for values and experiments with form, introduced Americans to the modern age. She too questioned all that she inherited [...] (392)

Like many other writers in the twenties, in the aftermath of catastrophic destruction of World War I, the idealism of the Western world lay in a shambles.
"Porter apotheosized the literary craft, coming to see writing as perhaps the only way to give human life a meaningful frame" (qtd. in Brink 7).

In an article entitled "St. Augustine and the Bull fight", Katherine Anne Porter writes how she feels happy in creating a kind of order in her art, out of the existential chaos she sees all around.

Writing fiction is for me a wholesome exercise to my natural, incurable tendency; to try to wangle the sprawling mire of our existence in this bloody world into some kind of shape: almost any shape will do [. . .] . (CE 93)

In a televised interview to Eric F. Goldman she talks of her art in the following terms.

"I think it gives all the meaning that I need, and it probably does give meaning to my life because I can't imagine life without it". Art, she has frequently affirmed, is a vocation, not simply a job but a calling, or a means of living. [. . .] not as necessary as air and water perhaps, but as food and water. (qtd. in Belfkin 773)

Porter also finds a pragmatic use for her fiction. To her, creating a work of art is also a means of
resolving inner conflicts, and it is only the resolution of such conflicts that lend to the core of the work concerned, its peculiar profundity:

All great literature, I think it is fair to say, arrives from tensions and conflicts within the artist's mind, dilemmas that the artist consciously or unconsciously attempts to work out in art. Without these tensions, literature usually remains flat [...] (Brink 16)

The tension Porter feels between a desire to immerse herself in life and its adventures and a desire to withdraw from life's chaos in the world into the stability of solitude and artistic creation is, at times, so severe that it does tell on the quality of her art. Perhaps it is the intensity of this inner dilemma that constitutes one of the reasons for Porter's relatively small canon, particularly small for a writer whose career spans close to six decades.

According to John W. Aldrige, Porter occupies today a "most peculiar" position (393). She is widely recognised as a creative artist of almost awesome fastidiousness, whose very paucity of production has come to be regarded as the mark of talent so fine that it can scarcely bring itself to function.
Born in Indian Creek, Texas, on 15th May 1890, Porter escaped her provincial native region as a young woman only to return to it, time and again, in her fictional world.

The society in which Porter grew up also was preoccupied with a strong sense of identity, as it had fought a four-year war, to preserve its own way of life. It had developed this attitude through its own specific myths and history.

Porter was widely acclaimed during her long lifetime as a leading writer of her times, on account of a relatively small body of work. The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (1965), comprises just twenty-six pieces of varying length, published between 1924 and 1944. Her other writings include Ship of Fools (1962), a long novel as well as essays, reviews and miscellaneous pieces, but it is on the stories, that Porter’s renown securely rests.

Porter published Flowering Judas and Other Stories (1930), her first collection of short stories, when she was forty, although she contributed several stories in little magazines throughout the 'twenties. This collection includes the much anthologized pieces like "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall", "Theft", "Rope", and
the sensational stories set in Mexico. Her "Familiar Country" (1920) presents Mexican revolution, which she had witnessed in person. She lived in Europe during much of the thirties, publishing on her return "Pale Horse" (1931), "Three Short novels" (1939), "The Leaning Tower and Other Stories" (1944). A long period of artistic frustration followed this, as Porter attempted to complete an ambitious fictional account of her journey to Europe on board the ship Wera in 1931. The novel, Ship of Fools, eventually appeared in print in 1962 to great fanfare, followed by million-dollar sales and mixed reviews. The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter received the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1966 and 1967 respectively. In the words of Aldrige,

[. . .] Although Miss Porter is known chiefly for her stories of delicate and often times overly subtle psychological complication in which everything is tightly packed in the manner of a symbolist poem, her best work has not been done in this form at all, but in the form of the loosely organised, leisurely developed semifictional reminiscence, in which people and place are more meditated upon than evoked, the meaning is simple and plain and
there is no overt attempt to create an effect of art. (393)

According to James Reaney, "Canada is influenced by the American Culture, she being her nearest neighbor" (qtd. in Keith 1). The American culture is so domineering that most Canadians feel that they live in "the giant's shadows" (qtd. in Keith 2). It is precisely on account of this curious combination of cultures that Canada has failed to attain a distinctive culture of its own. In most of the Canadian works we do come across a certain rootlessness, often resulting from a crisis of identity, ultimately leading to a deeper quest for identity. The quest for individuality is a fate Canada shares with other post-colonial nations, as the Canadian Literature amply bears out. Significantly, in still more recent Canadian Literature, we find writers trying hard to keep out the cultural pluralism of Canada from their books in their obsessive quest for forging a recognizably homogeneous, 'Canadian' identity.

Ever since the British North American colonies came together in 1867 to constitute the Confederation of Canada, cultural naturalists like D'ArCY and McGee have been talking of the need for a national literature. Edward Hartley Dewart has published an anthology
entitled Selections from the Canadian Poets, and in his introduction declares:

A national literature is an essential element in the formation of national character. It is not merely the record of a country's mental progress: it is the expression of its intellectual life, the bond of national unity and the guide of national energy. (19)

Nevertheless, in the new trend of fictional art following the First World War, narrative strategies began to change. 'Objective' and omniscient narrators were giving way to a perceiving centre, 'I', who was generally untrustworthy, but often received as if truth were unaffected by point of view. With the advent of John Glassco (1909-81), Dorothy Livesay, Raymond Knister (1900-32) and Morley Callaghan (1903), concern regarding the ramifications of 'first-person experience' began even more perceptibly, and altered the literary form.

The foundations of autobiographical novel were laid in the 1970's by John Glassco's fictionalized Memoirs of Mount Barnarsse (1970). Dorothy Livesay's The Unquiet Bed (1967), autobiographical in form, exploits the new mode for depicting sensuality with hitherto uncommon degree of explicitness.
Atmosphere dominates Raymond Knister's (1899-1932) stories of farm life in South Western Ontario too. In the words of Catherine Sheldrick Ross:

The strongest qualities of his stories—characterization through dialogue and action; (and) strong evocation of locality — are achieved not simply by describing the physical, but also by conveying values and beliefs. (21)

His stories like "Peaches, Peaches", "The Loading" and "The First Day of Spring" are justly famous.

Morley Callaghan (b1903) succeeded where Knister failed. Callaghan's "A Girl with Ambition", which appeared in the winter of 1926, was revolutionary in its choice of subject, setting, style and structure. Like Knister, "Callaghan had a contemporary interest in human psychology" (qtd. in Djwa 2).

It was really in the 1920's and 1930's that Canadian Literature began to acquire a distinctive identity. In the Western plains a whole school of prairie realists emerged, led by novelists like Robert J.Stead Grain (b.1926), Martha Ostenso (b.1925) and most important - Frederick Philip Grove. (Woodcock 1987, 20)
With Robert Stead and Martha Ostenso, Grove stands for the beginnings of what eventually became a notable movement of prairie fiction that penetrated deep into the actualities of western life.

Frederick Philip Grove is known for his novels with Prairies settings. His best work was "Over Prairie Trails" (1922), a collection of seven sketches on a Manitoban canvas. He ushers in the flavour of literary sociology through his portraits of the typical people of the prairies in his "The Spendthrift", "The First Day of an Immigrant", "The Agent" and "The Dead-Beat". Perhaps "Settlers in the Marsh" is the most darkly realistic of his works.

In the 1940's, Canadian fiction took a new turn with the appearance of two classic novels, Hugh MacLennan's Barometer Rising and Sinclair Ross's As for Me and My house. Ross's book was clearly a study of the frustration of life in small prairie towns and also of the plight of the artists in the country just getting out of the strangle-hold of pioneer philistines. His best three short stories are "The Lamp at Noon", "A Field of Wheat" and "The Painted Door". According to a critic,

The strength of these stories lies in their powerful evocation of solitary men and women
lost in a vast inner and outer wilderness, a dilemma that is seemingly fated to crush life and spirit. (Woodcock 1987, 32)

It was Hugh McLennan who realized that literary imagination needed a focus, and in his own way, he achieved it, by daring to express in fictional form, what many artists of the day feared to do.

Ethel Wilson and Gerard Besette were two popular writers of the 1940's in Canada. Wilson’s stories focus on the interface between society and the internal lives of women. She deliberately employs a limited point of view in order to suggest multiple perspectives on events in her first short story "I Just Love Dogs". Social connection and family history inform her The Innocent Traveller (1949). A highly polished writer, Wilson fails at times, to convey a sense of felt experience in art, and some of her ironic denouements seem contrived. Gerard Besette's interest in writing stories began with her acute observation of the repressed lives of men in Quebec. She also writes about the marginalized such as St.Urbain Street Jews, the Catholic Labourers and the poor immigrants.

What is most remarkable about modern Canadian short fiction has been its ability to accommodate a profound scepticism about 'truth' and 'meaning' while
continuing to explore distinctly Canadian issues of a cultural and historical narrative. As Linda Hutcheon points out, the interrogation of history is not a theoretical development, but if modernism challenges the idea of the ultimate, verifiable truth located in the past, then post-modernism moves a step further to assert that we cannot know the past except through its textual remains:

What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past. In other words, the meaning and shape are not in the events but in the systems which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'. (1989, 89)

The most significant historical events to be recalled and remembered in modern Canadian short fiction, are those which are shaped by the consequences of two world wars and the intervening Depression. Thus generational conflicts, emotional turmoil, loss of innocence and geographical dislocation, fatigue as some of the themes which dominate Canadian short fiction. In the words of Sutherland, "the theme that dominates in
Canadian Literature in 1940’s and 1950’s is the break up of the old order" (412).

The switch-over to the politics of 'culture' from the politics of 'person' is seen in the short stories of the 1940’s. The connection between culture, person and language appears as themes in the stories of Helen Holder (b.1935), Sherley Faesler (b.1921), Terrence Heath (b.1936) and several other writers.

Malcom Lowry, W.O.Mitchell, Mordecai Richler, Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro have been the new writers of short stories who appeared between fifties and seventies in Canada.

Malcom Lowry, who lived sporadically in British Columbia between 1939 and 1954, wrote his famous novel Under the Volcano (1947), which produced a distinguished group of lyrical parables. His most artistically polished piece of writing with a Canadian setting is "The Forest Path to the Spring". W.O. Mitchell (b.1914), worked in the tradition of the realistic prairie story - varying the mould of Grove and Ross by adding his own salty humour and gentle iconoclasm. His best known short story is "The Owl and the Bene" (Djwa 36).
Mordecai Richler, excels in the creation of character and subordinates plot to the exploration of ideas. He writes of the urban jew and displays a distinct moral consciousness. Two of Richler's important novels are The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and St. Urbaine Horseman.

In the 1940's, writers of the short story started dwelling on the experience of a particular ethnic group, a series of semi-documentary work, that in fiction, took the form of the Bildungsroman or novel of growing up:

A more common species involves a child of immigrant parents who adapts himself to the new land's mores more readily than its parents do; the tendency to reject old values often stands between the individual and the majority. Of these writers, Marika Robert (emig.1952) traced the plight of the Hungarian refugee, Jan Drabek (b.1935) that of the Czech, Lorris Eliot and Austin Clarke (b.1934) that of the West Indian in Urban Canada [...]. (Djwa 42)

The Bildungsroman patterns also appear in fiction by Paul Filion (b.1927), Keith Maillard (b.1942) and Ann Copeland (b.1932). The 'initiation stories' of Alistair MacLeod (b.1936), especially, "The Boat" in the The Lost...
Salt Gift of Blood (1976), was popular during the period.

In the period from 1960 to 1985 nearly four hundred new serious writers appeared on the literary scene in Canada. In the sixties, the search for truth and quest for identity began to take shape in the Canadian fiction:

A number of writers present characters for whom the traditional values mean nothing at all [. . .]. They begin at zero; they have no values, and they are searching for some kind of vital truth or substitute reason d'etre [. . .]. It is a big leap from the total life-controlling old order to a state of nothingness. Then added to the shock is the problem of identity, both group and personal. (Sutherland 412-13)

Wayne Grady's Penguin Anthology identifies the short story as "Canada's healthiest and most versatile literary genre" (6), and George Woodcock is of the view that "Today the position of the short story in Canadian writing is unassailable" (1986, 181).

The Seventies are likely to be viewed as the Golden Age for Canadian Literature, for that was a
period when creativity and critical enthusiasm reached their highest levels in the country's cultural history. In retrospect, the literary bonanza of the seventies can be traced back to the vital stimulus provided to the Canadian publishing industry, by the founding of the Canada Council in 1957.

One of the distinctive features of the seventies in Canada, has been the emergence of a number of proficient women writers like Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro. These women writers, "tend to write more as women than as social critics or crusaders of culture" (Ramamurthy 182). They focus mainly on the inner world of feeling and sensibility. So their general tendency is to turn inward, towards the body, the emotions and, ultimately, to the mind. These are areas that had not hitherto received any serious attention from male writers in Canada. Particularly, Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence have successfully revealed their talents in writing novels. Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro are at their best in the realm of short story or novella. To W.J.Keith, Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro "reconstruct the more recent past of their own childhoods" (157).
Margaret Atwood writes on the themes of self-reflexivity of language and marginality. Most of her short stories in Blue Beard's Egg and Other Stories (1983) can be read as both feminist and post-modernist texts. Principally concerned with the presentation of the woman's experience in different situations, and at different periods in her life, Margaret Atwood employs a post-modernist episteme of analysis. Her collections of stories include The Dancing Girls (1977), Murder in the Dark (1983) and Wilderness Tips (1992).

Atwood has been taken as the spokesperson of her times, for representing in a strong satiric light, the anxieties and aspirations of the present day. Her celebrated novels are The Edible Woman (1969), Surfacing (1972), Lady Oracle (1976), The Handmaid's Tale (1985), Life Before Man (1979), Bodily Harm (1989), Cat's Eye (1989) and The Blind Assassin (2000).

Margaret Laurence, is another most distinguished Canadian novelist, greatly interested in the drama of life and the nature of human encounter with life's vicissitudes. She admits that she writes "in order to clarify, proclaim and enhance life - not to obscure and demean and destroy it" (qtd. in Findley 53). According to W.J.Keith, Laurence "offers a broad panorama of the Twentieth Century Canadian experience" (157). She is
the author of the four famous Manawaka novels, namely, *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969) and *The Diviners* (1964). *This Side Jordan* (1960) and *Heart of a Stranger* (1977) are Laurence's other novels. *A Bird in the House* (1970) is a linked series of episodic stories, cast as the memories that free Vanessa MacLeod from constraints of family history. Laurence's four Manawaka works have female protagonists with Scots-Presbyterian backgrounds. Each of them struggles with her own complex, cultural and religious heritage, in her quest for self-definition and individuation. In the words of Sandra Djwa "Laurence's Canadianism, her sense of place, and her honesty in describing the situation of women helped to shape a whole generation of writers" (72).

The short stories of Mavis Gallant assert their claim to recognition on the ground of their specific historical and cultural determinants, as issues of gender and nationality continue to shape creative writing in Canada. There is, undoubtedly, a search for visibility and identity so characteristic of women's fiction and the Canadian search for a distinctive cultural self image, as exemplified by Mavis Gallant's fiction. (Howells 2)
Gallant's Selected Canadian Short Stories was published in 1981 as Home Truth. From the Fifteenth District (1974), The Four Seasons and Green Waiter, Green Sky (1959) are some of her novels.

A careful examination of the contemporary Canadian short fiction shows that most of these women writers tend to withdraw into their own distinguished inner selves. They are sensible, sensitive women, capable of diving into the ocean of their inmost depths. Their unique capability of incisive, intuitive insight enables them to write fictional works which are pronouncedly lyrical - hence, more real than documentary - though several of their stories may be called as 'private' works.

Many Canadian writers who were using realist conventions tried to counter the attitude that realism customarily relied upon.

'Orality' was one such method, disputing the written characters of historicity. Disrupting the narrative sequence was another, as in Tremblay's Enpieces Detaches (1970) or Keith Maillard's fictional trilogy about growing up American in the 1960's. Fracturing form was a way of exposing a false notion of psychological 'wholeness' or cultural 'unity'.

(New 1989, 250)
Some of the famous novelists such as Frederick Philip Grove, Morley Callaghan, Hugh MacLennan and Mordecai Richler use techniques generally regarded as "realist". And Realism has almost always turned out to be one of the secondary elements in what is primarily "a moral (Grove), a homiletic parable (Callaghan), an imaginative gloss on history (Mac Lennan) or a satire (Richler), which uses fantasy as much as realism to gain its ends" (Woodcock 1945, 72), and

Fracture was even more readily apparent in short fiction, especially in the linked - but broken series of stories that in Canada by the 1960's had become a familiar pattern. Malcolm Lowry spelled out the theory behind the form, when, in 1940, he wrote to the Irish writer James Stern that he thought it possible "to compose a satisfactory work of art, by the simple process of writing a series of good short stories, complete in themselves [. . .] interrelated, correlated [. . .] but full of effects and dissonances that are impossible in a short story" [. . .]. (New 1989, 250)

One of the most adept practitioners of short fiction in Canada was Alice Munro, who transformed her native Wingham, Ontario, into the fictional town of Jubilee, let it live its own life and with a poet's eye
for evocative detail, and "crafted a set of literary 'rooms' (Munro's metaphor) in which reality might happen" (New 1989, 250). Among the many women writers who were published and enjoyed critical success in the 1970's, Alice Munro has emerged as the most accomplished artist. According to Grayme Gibson, "her reputation as one of Canada's best writers was not easily achieved" (qtd. in Stouck 7).

Munro was born in Alice Laidlaw in 1931 and brought up near Wingham, Ontario, a rural community, not far from Lake Haron. Her childhood was spent on an impoverished farm, where her father raised silver foxes and her mother fought a losing battle with Parkinson's disease. She attended the University of Western Ontario for two years, then married and moved with her husband to British Columbia, where the latter worked, first, for the T.Eaton company in Vancouver, and later, opened a successful book store in Victoria. Munro had begun writing and publishing short stories at the university, but while she raised a family of three daughters, her work progressed very slowly, with some of them appearing occasionally in Canadian Forum, Chatelaine and the Tamarac Review.

Alice Munro drew very little public attention then and even when her first collection of stories, Dance of
the Happy Shades (1968), won the Governor General’s award, she remained a relatively obscure figure in the Canadian literary scene. However, when her second book, Lives of Girls and Women, was published in 1971, the literary climate had changed, and though Munro had been publishing fiction for nearly twenty years by then, she was suddenly hailed as an important ‘new’ talent. Another collection of stories, Something I’ve Been Meaning to Tell You, appeared in 1974, and a series of connected stories entitled Who Do You Think You Are? was published in 1978 winning the author, another coveted Governor General’s Award. This was followed by her other works such as The Moons of Jupiter (1982), The Progress of Love (1986), Friend of My Youth (1990), Open Secrets (1995) and The Love of a Good Woman (1998). Of these works "... The Moons of Jupiter - as its title suggests - has a tighter organization and is more like a single system" (Martin 128).

Progress of Love (1986), is a distillation of all the works of Munro, exploring with increased profundity the problems of the times and the narrator’s response to them. Incidentally, it also won for her another Governor General’s Award.

The Friend of My Youth (1990) is undoubtedly one of Munro’s, most formidable experimental works. In a
beautifully orchestrated way, it brings by sheer subtle modulation of tense, the interplay of diverse and retrospective voices. Its main theme is consideration of a woman’s sexuality, from the perspective of a rural Canadian community, presented as an enduring legacy of the last century.

Originally seven of the eight stories in Munro’s *Open Secrets* appeared in *New Yorker*. Daniel Menaker, a senior fiction editor at *The New Yorker* made the following comment on its publication:

She’s a distinctive, original and complex voice [. . .]. And the things she says with that voice - her stories - are vastly interesting and complicated, and work on every single level that you would ask a piece of writing to work on. She has very few equals in the entire history of short fiction. (qtd. in *Turbide* 47)

In the words of Michael Gorra,

[. . .] *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998) does clarify one’s sense of Munro’s work as a whole. Only one of these stories is rooted in the present, and though an element of retrospection has always been prominent in her
work, never before has she seemed so autumnal, so concerned with mediating between the way we live now and the way we lived then. (2-3)

What is most remarkable about Alice Munro's fiction is her style. In her prose, the sentences are painstakingly crafted; and their effects carefully weighed and balanced.

Significantly the works of Porter and Munro lend themselves to a highly relevant and purposeful comparative study, as they reflect several vital aspects of the countries and cultures these two eminently insightful authors have inherited. Such a study is bound to reveal not only new insights into their own respective works of art and redefine the legacy they have left behind for posterity but would render mutual illuminations of arts, one in the light of the other highly feasible. In the words of Weisstein,

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts, [...] philosophy, history and the social sciences, religion, etc., on
the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expressions. (23)

By studying Katherine Anne Porter and Alice Munro against their respective backgrounds and analysing their works, the present thesis aims at analyzing the vision of the two authors in question, relating it to their respective national, social and cultural milieux and times.

Perhaps the most singular factor that brings Porter and Munro together is their ultimate realization that it is not mere vindication of womanhood alone that can bring about a better world order, but rather a more refined and mature understanding of interpersonal human relationships, by deliberately dwelling on what has been generally excluded in art in the past, namely, an uninhibited, in-depth depiction of the felt experience of women, a position which is now being increasingly perceived as universally valid.

Porter's pronouncedly naturalistic art, by and large, probes the depths of women's sensibilities, passions and feelings in all their intensity, which renders it highly dramatic. Her men tend to become
blanched when viewed by the side of the intrepid, enterprising protagonists of her gyno-centric art. The high-pitched intensity of feelings expressed during crises by women are expressly delineated in Porter’s art with a passionate intensity, hitherto not focussed with much vividness or sharpness in fictional art pertaining to women, all wrapped in a highly metaphorical language, replete in rich tapestry of imagery.

On the other hand, Munro who belongs to a much later period and a more ‘advanced’ age, finds no particular compulsions to dwell on the emotional territories which Porter and other great early women writers of the twentieth century who immediately followed her generation tried to deal with. Instead, she sets a higher goal for the emerging women of her age, staking greater claims of equality with men in the intellectual and psychological spheres. Most of her protagonists are intellectuals, incisive, highly analytic and ironic. They are far more capable of keeping their emotions under control and getting the better of situations where men and women confront with one another. In short, Munro’s realistic art reflects the emancipated spirit of the women belonging to the closing decades of the twentieth century Canada.
Both these eminent writers challenge the times and the societies in which they found themselves, and aim most unflinchingly at bringing about a healthy change that might enable women to resolve their domestic, personal and sociological problems, thereby facilitating the realization of healthier and more enlightened societal goals, which somehow will eventually render the woman's lot less frustrating, and more secure, dignified and fulfilling. Hence, in a vital sense, their creations mark a significant contribution to their respective artistic cultural and national heritage.