University of Alberta

The (Pro)Creators of Culture:
Women Artists as Daughters and Mothers in Brazilian and Canadian Fiction

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

Fall 2012
Edmonton, Alberta

Dedication

To all mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, whose joy for life, creative aspirations, and ability to overcome their hardships have inspired the genesis of this work and showed me how empowering female existence can be. To all women whose silence and absence have also taught me how much we still need to advocate for the greater respect of mothers in society.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the female artist fiction produced between the 1960s and the 1990s in Brazil and Canada to show how women artists, particularly mothers, have challenged the economic, political, religious, and social constrains that prevented their predecessors from succeeding as artists. Although Brazilian and Canadian women writers celebrate women's increasing participation in the arts in the second half of the twentieth century, I argue that they question any simplistic resolutions to the conflict that women still perceived in their private and personal lives during that period. A woman's ability to combine her female and artistic identities depends on the maternal and artistic roles she inherits from her female ancestors and the discourses of motherhood and art that society imposes on her during the time she pursues a career. Specific cultural patterns in Brazil and Canada also influence these two factors. Brazilian and Canadian women have conveyed particular discourses of femininity and female art across generations while their societies and artistic communities have produced unique responses to women's identities and cultural productions. As I will show, these two developments affect the images of woman/mother and artist that Brazilian and Canadian writers create in their texts, leading their protagonists to overcome the conflicts between art and life in strikingly different ways.

Acknowledgement

To my dear father and sister, José and Aline, for your unconditional support and for understanding my choices. Despite our geographical distance, both of you will always play a significant role in my life and work.

To my husband, Peter, for your love, friendship, and guidance. Our dialogues about the role of mothers in society have inspired many reflections in this dissertation.

To my supervisor, Albert Braz, for your insightful comments and constructive criticism. Your mentorship and dedication have contributed not only to the existence of this work but also my learning experience as a writer.

To the members of my supervisory and examining committees. Special thanks to Patricia Demers, who provided thoughtful advice to develop this dissertation. To Russell Cobb, Nora Stovel, and Earl Fitz, for making this a better work. To Odile Cisneros, who assisted me in the early stages of my project.

To my old friends from home, who supported me in different ways and moments. Special thanks to Laura, Mylene, and Rodrigo. To my new friends in Canada, especially David, Danielle, and Evelyn, who encouraged me to keep going, shared valuable dialogues about life, offered professional advice, and/or helped me to develop my writing.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In the second half of the twentieth century, Brazilian and Canadian women writers produced many novels and short fiction collections centred on the lives of daughters or mothers pursuing careers as musicians, writers, or painters. Gabrielle Roy, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Carol Shields, Clarice Lispector, Rachel de Queiroz, Lygia Fagundes Telles, Lya Luft, Patricia Bins, and Helena Parente Cunha are but a few examples of women writers who contributed to the tradition of the *Künstlerroman*, an extended literary form developed in the eighteenth century. By creating a woman artist in their works, Brazilian and Canadian female writers celebrated their generation's participation in the production of their cultures, especially in comparison to their predecessors. Nevertheless, women writers in both literary traditions also challenged their generation's ability to make choices and find easy resolutions to the conflict between being a woman and being an artist, roles that often have been defined as incompatible. Although women artists' personal motivation helps them to develop their potential in their private and public spheres and find harmony between them, external factors also support or restrict their ability to do so. In their novels and short fiction, Brazilian and Canadian women show that the discourses of femininity and the ideas of female artistic identity affect how their protagonists perceive the relationship between art and life. Their central characters are exposed to external constructions of woman and artist in two ways: through their female predecessors' behaviours and attitudes when the central characters are children

and through other characters' views, opinions, and judgements when the protagonists become mothers.

The protagonists of the novels express their desires and needs to challenge confining views about their roles as daughters, housewives, mothers, and women artists, but significant external factors limit or enhance their ability to challenge those cultural and societal expectations. The female and artistic roles that their mothers, grandmothers, and other female predecessors play are passed on to the central characters when they are young, influencing their perceptions of femininity, motherhood, and art. At the same time, their families, friends, and communities voice their opinions about each role, similarly affecting how the adult protagonists understand and fulfil their identities as women, mothers, and artists. Canadian and Brazilian women writers show that in this interaction—or perhaps battle—between the individual and her society, a woman's perception of the relationship between her female and artistic identities depends on the particular experiences that the woman artist and her ancestors either have or are forced to have in their cultural environments. This dissertation examines the discourses of femininity and female art that Brazilian and Canadian women have conveyed across generations, as well as other societal, cultural, and political developments that determined women's experiences as mothers and artists during the second half of the twentieth century. Since Brazil and Canada have offered distinct cultural experiences of what being women and artists means, the female and artistic roles that the protagonists inherit from their mothers, grandmothers, and other female ancestors and that other characters expect the protagonists to

embody lead them to become women artists in different ways in each of these literary traditions.

Parallels and Dialogues:
Brazilian and Canadian Female Writing

The main question driving and at the same time questioning this project is cultural difference. What is the relevance of a comparative investigation of Brazil and Canada, two cultures that have been, according to Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, separated by the vast gap between their current social and political realities (57). I have to agree that the differences between Brazil and Canada pose problems for discussing the works by Brazilian and Canadian women writers and the cultural realities that inevitably inform their fiction. Nevertheless, while challenging my study, the unique cultural, social, economical, and political patterns of each country also allow for a valid dialogue between South and North America. As Sérgio Bellei explains, analysing the differences between Brazil and Canada requires "an impossible comparative method (contrasting, exploring the spaces of meaning and silence)," and yet, such a method "makes possible a more clear understanding of the nature of the theoretical practices north and south of the Equator. It is here that it is important to try to observe what the South has that the North lacks and vice-and-versa" (14-15). Indeed, one of my concerns is to explain the uniqueness of women's cultural experience, without polarising their art and lives in Brazil and Canada and enlarging the cultural gap between them. In comparative literature, especially, this methodology is dangerous. It creates "a

hierarchy in which some literatures, texts, and authors are always perceived to be at the top while others are automatically relegated to a secondary status" (McClennen and Fitz 2). To avoid this polarisation between South and North America, I attempt to explore the literary works by Brazilian and Canadian women as equally significant productions, despite the different expectations of what it is to be a woman in the cultural imaginary of Brazilian and Canadian nations and the different responses to a woman's career in the arts in each of these traditions.

Although the focus on cultural differences remains at the core of my study, I am aware that Brazil and Canada share more than similar historical developments, such as their "complex and plural social-cultural unity, resulting from the process of colonisation and continuous immigration" (Carvalhal 154). What I first hope to show is that, in the last century, women in both cultures increasingly participated in the public sphere and emerged as creative and artistic subjects. Whether such transformations resulted from the social need to include women in a space beyond the home, from women's commitment to change their oppressive realities, or from a combination of both, Brazilian and Canadian women artists faced similar experiences in their pursuit of personal and professional fulfilment in the second half of the twentieth century.

In the case of women writers, Brazilian and Canadian women from Clarice Lispector to Patricia Bins and from Gabrielle Roy to Margaret Atwood established themselves as members of two prominent literary traditions. The existence of female writers such as Catharine Parr Traill, Susanna Moodie, and

Pauline Johnson endorses the view that Canadian women were present in their literary tradition in the nineteenth century, particularly in the early 1850s, which Carol Gerson considers "a distinct threshold" in the print culture in English Canada (*Canadian* 25). However, Canadian women did not become prominent in that tradition until the second half of the twentieth century. At that time, a large number of Canadian "women beg[a]n to write about their own experience and consider their own merits" (Steenman-Marcusse 44) and were in "the enviable position of cooperating in the creation of their country's fictional landscape" (Irvine 242). Their valuable contribution goes beyond the construction of their literary tradition, for Canadian women also became increasingly involved "with the academic world and with the institutions of literature" (Steenman-Marcusse 49). During the 1960s and 1970s, as a new literary model emerged across Latin America, the new novel, Brazilian writers began to attract critics' attention because of their "unique handling of the issues of gender, voice, and characterization" (Payne and Fitz 15, 183). This period coincided with "the great boom of women's literature" in Brazil (Cunha, "Becoming" 227). Indeed, although women's literary voices were forgotten or silenced in the past, "many women writers" became "centrally involved in the Brazilian new novel" (Payne and Fitz 3). At the time, Queiroz, Lispector, and Telles were part of the group of women who became established writers and started to gain critical acclaim while Cunha, Bins, and Luft initiated their literary careers. Thus, it is not a coincidence that this study examines the works of influential women who, through their well-

known or new voices, contributed to the development of strong literary traditions in Brazil and Canada during the second half of the twentieth century.

Brazilian and Canadian women writers also share their views of their female conditions. In both cases, they have been particularly interested in discussing and representing women's experience. As Laurence explains, her "generation of women novelists […] helped younger women writers to speak with women's voices about sex and birth" (*Dance* 6). Above all, women writers in Brazil and Canada express their need to speak about the female experience through their novels and short fiction and, as a result, allow readers to hear mothers' voices. These writers do so when their fictional artists are daughters and use their music, texts, and paintings to pay homage to their mothers and also when their protagonists become mothers and express their voices through their art. Although "the mother's identity, particularly as it is lived outside motherhood, is rarely, if at all, examined" (O'Reilly, "Mothers" 498), Brazilian and Canadian women writers allow us access to the mother within and beyond the restrictions of the home.

These two groups of women writers have shaped their cultural traditions in significant ways, but their intellectual and artistic contributions have generally been ignored in comparative literature, since comparatists tend to privilege the works by women from Europe, the United States, and Spanish-speaking Latin America. Ignored by literary critics who often focus on "the better-known Spanish American new novel" (Payne and Fitz 15), Brazilian literature "continues to be placed in a peripheral position" (Oliveira n. pag.). Until late in the twentieth

century, critics and readers defined Canadian literature as "'second-rate,' 'provincial,' or 'regional'" (Atwood, *Survival* 181-82). The marginal status of Brazilian and Canadian literatures in world literature is a product of the cultural inferiority felt in both countries, as well as their dependence on the literary traditions of Europe and the United States. While the literary production of Brazil "follows the European and North-American models" (Oliveira n. pag.), Canada continues to be dependent on cultural production from England and the United States (Besner 10). By comparing Brazilian and Canadian literatures and emphasising the valuable contribution by their women writers from the 1950s onwards, I question the marginal status of both cultures. Most importantly, I show that women have challenged cultural constraints beyond what has been considered the mainstream in the Americas. Considering that the view that defines the cultural traditions in Brazil and Canada minorities is problematic, an inter-American analysis clearly enriches comparative studies. After all, it "is no exaggeration […] to speculate that inter-American literary study, featuring, as it does, truly outstanding texts from several literary cultures rarely heard from (English Canada, Québec, and French Canada, Brazil, and the Caribbean, for example) will not only renovate but also revive comparative literature as a discipline" (Fitz, "Spanish" n. pag.). When I explore artistic productions that have been considered less influential in world literature and argue that they are as valuable as the cultural hegemonies of the United States and Europe, I also wish to claim that comparative studies in literature and culture should be more inclusive and open to diversity.

The Brazilian and Canadian women writers emerging in the second half of the twentieth century established themselves in prominent literary traditions and celebrated women's experience as daughters, mothers, and artistic creators, but they were not naïve. They were aware that artistic experience is not universal or ideal, for the artist "ceases to be an ideal term when it is located in a particular time and place and endowed with a specific race, gender, and class position" (Barker 14). In both the Brazilian and Canadian literary traditions, the female protagonists are constantly reminded of the difficulties created by their female bodies, especially when they become mothers and realise that, in order to produce their art, they need to manage their time better, consume more energy, and deal with different psychological pressures. However, they feel restricted in their efforts to develop their artistic potential, and not only because of the physical uniqueness that they observe in their bodies. Social, political, and cultural discourses have for many years negatively emphasised the physical difference of the female body, projecting expectations, behaviours, and discourses of femininity that have become obstacles to women pursuing careers in the arts. For "both material and ideological reasons, maternity and creativity have appeared to be mutually exclusive to women writers" (Friedman 52). One of these ideological reasons is the tendency to exclude women from the production of culture, a task assigned to men, and to keep women restricted to their biological role as reproducers of the species. Whereas this discourse of femininity has often defined the "pregnant body" as "necessarily female," it has also reinforced the view that "the pregnant mind" is a space for the "inherently masculine" genius (Friedman

52). The Brazilian and Canadian women writers analysed in the following chapters challenge the opposition between artistic and biological creations in the lives of mothers who are also artists, because the cultural constructions that influence women's public and private roles have prevented them from attaining "success," whether their ideas of a successful career in the arts come from personal fulfilment, professional reputation, or both.

Different Perceptions of Female and Artistic Roles

Brazilian and Canadian women writers have played equally important roles shaping their literary traditions and contributing to critical and feminist discussions about women's issues. Their novels expose the similar dilemmas that women and mothers face in their social and artistic spaces. Nevertheless, the works that I analyse in the following chapters suggest that distinct social and cultural developments lead a woman artist to perceive her career, personal life, and the relationship between the two in very different ways in each country. Canada and Brazil illustrate how the unique cultural factors that constitute North and Latin America created two female models in the past and, in turn, generated two specific female artistic traditions in the second half of the twentieth century. I examine these distinct cultural factors by analysing the constructions of femininity and the images of the artist that the previous generations of women embody and that the protagonists' families, friends, and communities reinforce in the novels. These inherited roles and outside opinions clearly impose more restrictions upon the protagonists who play the roles of daughters and mothers in

Brazilian novels than they do upon their counterparts in Canadian fiction. Lispector, Queiroz, Telles, Luft, Cunha, and Bins portray women who feel divided between two incompatible roles: a powerful artistic identity and a restricted female being. Roy, Munro, Laurence, Shields, and Atwood do not simplify a woman's search for intellectual and personal realisation, for the protagonists of their works have to overcome many difficulties to achieve their goals. Nonetheless, the daughters and mothers portrayed in Canadian fiction believe that they can develop themselves as strong artists, just as they can also construct an alternative way of existing as women and, especially, mothers. Their motivation and courage allow them to combine their private and public spheres. Furthermore, as my analysis of the novels and short fiction collections will show, Brazilian and Canadian women writers choose strikingly different resolutions to their protagonists' dilemmas with the images of woman/mother and the artist that they have inherited from previous generations or that are imposed upon them by other characters.

The historical developments that defined these two complex constructions—woman and artist—frame my literary analysis. The fictional artists' struggles to combine their female condition and art capture the personal and professional anxieties experienced by the Brazilian and Canadian women who came to maturity and pursued a career in the arts in the second half of the twentieth century. Brazilian and Canadian writers show that the many economic, social, and political transformations throughout the century allowed their generations to improve their female roles and partake of their artistic traditions.

However, the discourses of femininity and the artistic communities that shaped the generations of women prior to the 1960s led Brazilian and Canadian women artists to inherit different female and artistic roles. The Brazilian modern women emerging from the 1960s onwards confronted their mothers' oppression and silence, while the same group of women in Canada could find exemplary models of women and women artists in the past. Similarly, the social expectations of femininity, the political context, religion, and the artistic traditions of each culture from the 1960s to the 1990s influenced women's female and artistic experience in different ways in Brazil and Canada. The typical Brazilian female intellectuals, artists, and activists of the time had to overcome the conservative mentality of their families and communities, the restrictive opinion of the Church, the intellectual censorship imposed by the government, and the exclusion of women in the arts. As a result, Brazilian women generally felt "surrounded by conflicts that divided [them]: on the one hand, the pressure [created] by the phallogocentric system and, on the other, the desire for independence" and the possibility of existing as "an active subject" (Cunha, "Mulher partida" 112). In contrast, their Canadian counterparts continued their female predecessors' work and, favoured by a social, political, and cultural reality that often allowed a woman to achieve personal and professional growth, could challenge her quintessential dilemma involving life and art. The novels that I examine create a fictional world that is consistent with the particular realities of two groups of women who became mothers and artists in Brazil and Canada in the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, I do not overlook the fact that these fictional works are also products of the writers' individual and subjective perceptions. I am aware that the works of both female traditions have verisimilitude, and yet I cannot ignore the fact that Brazilian and Canadian women writers capture their world through the creative, complex, and non-transparent lens of art. Even when an artistic representation captures some elements of an artist's society, which I believe art inevitably does, it cannot be strictly approached as a transparent mirror reflecting her historical reality. In comparison to what women artists generally experienced in Brazil during the second half of the twentieth century, Brazilian women writers often intensify in their novels the violence that effaced them from becoming autonomous and professional individuals. As such, their works may undermine the contributions of the group of women who, like these writers, shaped the cultural landscape of Brazil. In Canadian female fiction, the female protagonists not only attain professional success in the arts but also balance it with their personal ambitions. Such a perception of reality, however, may fail to represent the challenges Canadian women artists confronted from the 1960s onwards. The protagonists' material conditions, thus, resemble the unique economic, societal, political factors that affected women's ability to balance their private and professional lives in the second half of the century. At the same time, Brazilian and Canadian women writers produced their subjective versions of those lives, which can diverge from what is considered true in the experiences of women artists in their societies. Still, even such interpretations of what women artists

experience are valuable because Brazilian and Canadian writers offer alternative possibilities of what is to be women and artists in their cultures.

The Woman and the Artist in Female Writing and Feminist Thought

The artist novel, as Linda Hutcheon shows, evolved from the novel of education (*Bildungsroman*) and the coming-of-age novel (*Entwicklunsroman*). The *Künstlerroman*, with its preoccupation "with the growth of the artist," came out of these other literary forms (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* 12). Established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this literary genre celebrated the artist as a male hero who has a selfish temper and tries to develop an empowering personality. The female *Künstlerroman* coincides with the advent of women in literature in the early nineteenth century. While witnessing the growth of women in literature and other arts, women writers began writing stories in which their female protagonists pursue the excitement and freedom of artistic careers. However, when this group of female forerunners became interested in representing an artistic creator in their works, they first had to challenge the portrait of the artist as a Romantic and masculine hero in the European literary traditions.

Chapter One, "In Search of a Creative Room of Her Own: The Space of Female Art in the Nineteenth Century," traces the development of the female artistic tradition to the nineteenth-century Western traditions. In their social criticism, early women writers express their frustration both with the exclusion of women from the arts and with the dominance of restrictive female roles in their

societies. Their works show that the obstacles imposed upon women in these two spaces prevented them from participating in artistic positions. These pioneer women writers also suggest that, if women had an opportunity to become artists during that period, they could gain the same level of prominence and respect that their male counterparts enjoyed. In fiction, nineteenth-century women writers in Europe and the Americas produce women artists who dare to pursue careers in the arts. Nevertheless, their protagonists do not gain enough social respect and/or professional recognition. This chapter examines why early women writers cannot represent in their fiction the image of the woman artist that they propose in their criticism. I address this contradiction in order to show how women artists' conflicting reality in the nineteenth century left scars on their successors' artistic and female experience.

While nineteenth-century female intellectuals and writers generally perceive femininity and art as only binary oppositions, their twentieth-century counterparts define the connection between female experience and artistic identity in far more complex and diverse ways. For example, many women writers in the twentieth century believe that their distinct sexuality and body impede a woman's artistic potential; therefore, this difference should be transcended during the artistic process. In contrast, other women writers assert that the uniqueness of their sexuality not only shapes their experience with art but also empowers it. Roughly, writers "born women […] do not think of themselves—at least by their testimony—as women," whereas others "believe their writings to be conditioned at all times by gender" (Oates 7). These two attitudes also define the feminist

thought of the time, as feminists explain the relationship between artistic creativity and femininity. In their struggle to explain these two concepts that are influential parts of female artists' experience, feminists struggle to answer whether women need to reject any sexual difference because it effaces their artistic development or envision a discourse of femininity that can allow women to balance their careers and personal lives.

In Chapter Two, "Beyond the Woman Artist's Conflict? Twentieth-Century Feminist Discourse," I examine these two approaches in the theories of the most influential feminists in the twentieth century, from Virginia Woolf to Hélène Cixous. I believe that their discussions of art, femininity, and the possible relationships between the two are relevant for two reasons. First, they underline that, although feminist theories have been generalised as the prioritisation of a woman's intellectual and artistic potential and the rejection of femininity and motherhood, feminists have actually tried to find ways to reconcile these two experiences in a woman's life. Second, the two models for defining female and artistic experiences in twentieth-century feminist thought resemble the two unique, contemporaneous portraits of the modern woman in Brazilian and Canadian fiction. The existence of more than one way of approaching a woman artist's struggles with the incompatibility between art and life suggests that the solution to this conflict is not only a cultural construction but also a subjective view.

In Chapter Three, "Lives of Mothers and Daughters in Brazil and Canada: Perceptions of Art and Femininity across Generations," I argue that female and

artistic experiences result from the cultural discourses that the women artists portrayed in the novels inherit from their female ancestors. These two discourses affect the lives of distant ancestors, grandmothers, mothers and other women who raise and nurture the novels' protagonists. Maternal and artistic roles travel across generations and influence how the young female protagonists begin to pursue their artistic dreams and personal ambitions, but these discourses are influential according to the different cultural patterns that constitute the meaning of being an artist and being a daughter, housewife, and mother in Brazil and Canada. The protagonists of Brazilian fiction feel frustrated by their predecessors, who lack a voice as well as the ability to develop their artistic potential. In contrast, their Canadian counterparts are motivated by the presence of female models that teach them to challenge patriarchal discourses of femininity and to pursue their own careers as artists. I do not ignore the existence of other types of female models in Brazilian and Canadian societies, but this chapter focuses on the existence of two contrasting cultural patterns that define women's private and artistic experiences prior to the 1960s and influence the upcoming generations of women artists.

Chapter Four, "Procreators or Creators: Women's Attempt to Combine Motherhood and Art beyond Binaries," examines how particular images used to define artistic and maternal identities in Brazilian and Canadian cultures have different effects on the protagonists' lives when these aspiring or professional artists become mothers. Most of all, those cultural discourses affect Brazilian and Canadian women's struggles with the conflicts between their maternal and artistic roles in unique ways. In the Brazilian novels the opinions of the artists' families

and communities impose severe restrictions upon the protagonists and lead them to make extreme decisions that, in turn, destroy their potential to be "good" mothers and also "successful" artists. In Canadian fiction, however, the situation differs considerably. Canadian social and cultural environments generally provide the women portrayed in fiction with the support needed to develop their private and professional lives and indirectly encourage them to embrace motherhood and art at the same time.

A woman's experience in the private sphere as daughter and mother and in her professional position in the public space of art and political activism changed drastically between 1807—when Germaine Staël wrote *Corinne or Italy*, generally considered the first female *Künstlerroman*—and the second half of the twentieth century, when women writers produced a similar literary genre in Brazil and Canada. In my conclusion, I explain that these external changes led the recent generations of feminists and female writers to challenge their predecessors' view that the roles of mother and artist are impossible to balance. These women writers are concerned about the old, conservative views that still efface their ability to find this balance. They are also aware that the new, demanding expectations have ironically pressured them into becoming successful in both positions. Most of all, Brazilian and Canadian female writers suggest that, when offered the opportunity to succeed in their social, political, and artistic realities, women can find their own idea of fulfilment without defining their different sexuality, identity, and maternal potential as obstacles to their careers.

Chapter 1. In Search of a Creative Room of Her Own:

The Space of Female Art in the Nineteenth Century

> [T]he opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born.
> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

> Drawing her life from the lives of Shakespeare's sisters […] she will be born. As for her coming without renewed and determined resistance to forces that would curtail women's freedom, this would be impossible. But she is coming—to be born again, but for the first time, and to dwell among us.
> Susan Gubar, *Rooms of Our Own*

Despite the differences in their plots, styles, and the cultural backgrounds of their characters, the Brazilian and Canadian novels and short stories analysed in the following chapters explore a major conflict in the lives of women artists who come into maturity in the later part of the twentieth century. When each of the young protagonists of the narratives discovers her artistic aspirations early in life and when her adult self pursues her career later on, she feels divided between the female roles that she is expected to perform in her society and her search for a challenging profession in the arts; this divide splits her between the physical constraints of her female body and the freedom and power she hopes to gain through artistic expression. Each protagonist's difficulty in feeling whole as a woman artist and reconciling the public and private sides of her life may become more complex because of many changes in society during the period in which the

Brazilian and Canadian artist novels were produced, but women's perception of this conflict is not new. The ambivalence between the discourses of femininity imposed by society and an intellectual and artistic woman's search for self-fulfilment in a career concerned many feminist critics and writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They asked, first of all, why women faced more challenges in participating in cultural and intellectual productions than did their male counterparts and, second, why many women who found ways to develop their potential disappeared from the history of the arts. Indeed, these critics underlined the fact that many aspiring women artists encountered the same destiny as Shakespeare's sister, a metaphor that Woolf employs in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) as she revises the representation of women in English literary traditions in the past (633). Just like this imaginary sister of Shakespeare, many women artists could have become prominent figures in the Western tradition, but instead they were forgotten, marginalised, and, most significantly, denied access to artistic careers.

This chapter shows that, when the forerunners of a feminist discourse and a female literary tradition focus on women's challenges to establish themselves in literature and the other arts, they identify the conflicting relationship between societal constructions of femininity and the image of the woman artist. In their essays, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century feminists denounce the marginalisation of women in their societies and propose solutions to the restrictive female roles that were reinforced during that period. Early women writers who represent women artists in their novels and poems also question the negative effects of that

social reality on the female experience. Nevertheless, despite the progressive views evidenced in the characterisations of their protagonists, most writers cannot escape the cultural mentality of the time. In the end of their journeys, the central characters have failed to attain their professional goals; those who succeed in the arts encounter a gloomy destiny. The writers' decisions to conclude their works with women who fail to pursue or maintain their public positions as artists endorse the dominant view that women are not able to combine public and private roles.

The first section of Chapter One examines the first wave of feminism in the European traditions during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in order to trace the centrality of this dilemma in the lives of intellectual and artistic women. These early feminists are relevant because, instead of accepting women's restrictions as a natural condition of their sex, they address them as a product of rigid female roles, as well as a result of the process of masculinisation of public positions in culture. I will focus on the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and Staël and how each writer perceives and questions the societal expectations of women in the private and public spaces. Furthermore, because their writings coincide with the advent of women's literature, this discussion of femininity should be contextualised with literary and cultural environment of the time and how it received women artists. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women with intellectual, literary, and other artistic aspirations confronted audiences and markets that were familiar with the image of the artist as a masculine and self-sacrificing figure. Whereas these feminists were aware of the negative reception

of women in their cultural traditions because of the process of masculinisation of the arts, they overlooked the fact that the very nature of art during that time was incompatible with the female experience.

Section two explores the response to this discussion of women's artistic experience in the female writing of the nineteenth century. Writers Staël in France, Elizabeth Barrett Browning in England, Kate Chopin in the United States, and Délia (the pen name of Maria Benedita Bormann) in Brazil initiate a new literary tradition, the female *Künstlerroman*, which introduces an artistic identity for women and questions the artistic experience that male writers represent in their works. Like the feminists of the time, these women writers initially envision in their narratives and poems a world in which women are able to transgress the confines endorsed by the current patriarchal discourses. Thus, my purpose is to explain why their fictional women artists nevertheless have a tragic destiny in the end. As I will show, this paradox between their feminist ideals and their literary representations was a product of the struggle faced by nineteenth-century women writers, who could not find solutions to the conflict between what they proposed in their theories and what women could realistically achieve in the public domain of the arts.

"Much Ado about Nothing":
The First Battles of Female Intellectuals and Artists

Women who pursued literary and other artistic positions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries faced more difficulties in order to succeed in their careers

than did their male counterparts. Two major factors precluded women from participating in the arts on equal terms with men. First, the patriarchal mindset of the time reinforced submissive ideas of femininity that excluded women from active and meaningful roles such as the production of culture. Second, the image of the artist was predominantly masculine, not only because of this social exclusion of women, but also because of the very nature of the artist in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetic theories and the demands for a superior and selfish personality. Indeed, the traditional discourse of femininity and the image of the masculine, Romantic creator of culture could not be reconciled. On the one hand, the traditional discourse of femininity imposed by society and reinforced by literature pressured women into conforming to the confines of traditional female roles. On the other hand, the defence of the Romantic artistic creator as an individual who was expected to transgress any social boundaries and sacrifice everything for the sake of artistic experience precluded women from becoming artists. Although eighteenth- and nineteenth-century feminist writings identified in their social reality and cultural community the negative consequences of the patriarchal discourse of femininity and denounced the dilemma that it created in the lives of intellectual/artistic women, these critics were not able to understand that the very nature of the Romantic creator also contributed to their exclusion from the arts.

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft exposes the detrimental effects of the discourse of femininity that prevailed in society in the late eighteenth century. Wollstonecraft claims that the philosophers,

doctors, and writers of the time created an inadequate representation of femininity that encouraged women to cultivate their sentiments instead of their faculties. Their definitions of woman's nature reinforced the perception of women as "more artificial, weaker characters" and "more useless members of society" than their male counterparts (21). According to Wollstonecraft, such negative images of femininity also placed women "below the standards of rational creatures" (32). She further explains that the difference between men and women was only a result of "the neglected education" of women (10). Toward the end of the eighteenth century, women "generally receive only a disorderly kind of education" and "seldom attend to [it] with that degree of exactness that men" are trained to develop "from their infancy" (22). Aware of intellectual expression as an important tool for resistance, Wollstonecraft demands space for women to develop their faculties (32), especially since their education at the time contributed to giving "the appearance of weakness to females" (22-23). Wollstonecraft does not ignore the danger of the ideologies that disseminated those dominant perceptions of femininity, which she sees as "misconstructions" and coercive discourses that maintain the image of women as "alluring" subjects instead of "rational" ones in order to preserve their status quo as being inferior to men (10). Her reflection may sound simplistic to the contemporary reader, but Wollstonecraft is ahead of her time when she defines femininity as a misconceived representation created by society instead of an unquestionable product of nature. Sandra Gubar explains that "[c]enturies before the word gender itself came into prominent use, feminists had struggled to disentangle the unstable

mobility of culture from the fixity of nature" (*Rooms* 21). Wollstonecraft's separation between what eighteenth-century women were and what society expected from them resembles the discussion about sex and gender in modern feminist theories.

Staël would probably agree with Wollstonecraft that a woman's "nature" or "being" is more complex and less passive than the image the patriarchal discourse paints. In *On Literature Considered in Its Relation to Social Institutions* (1800), Staël encourages women to "cultivate their minds so that men can talk with them about ideas that [will] hold their interest" (203). Like Wollstonecraft, Staël suggests that women's educational and intellectual developments can promote equality between the sexes. In her chapter "On Women Writers," she advocates for women's participation in public conversations, possibly in the cultural gatherings in French salons. The salon was a familiar place for the upper class Staël ever since her precocious childhood, when her mother, Suzanne Necker, founded a salon (Lewis 15). As "the patroness of her own salon" (Lewis 15), Staël became an active figure and questioned not only the political situation in France during the Old Regime and the Republic, but also women's seclusion in the home. Although she asserts that women are capable of pursuing roles outside the private sphere, she is concerned about the typical disdain toward the few female intellectuals that existed in her society in the early nineteenth century. Even when these women had the social status to cultivate their minds, as Wollstonecraft, Staël, and a few others did, they faced many prejudices that prevented them from developing their potential. Staël contends that only women

were subject to this rejection. A man of genius startled society and could "become a man of power," but a clever woman could only "surprise and annoy society," while her fame was considered "much ado about nothing" (202, 206). Dismissed as an exceptional case, the woman of genius was not accepted in her social circles. She was condemned to "exist on her own" as "the object of curiosity and perhaps a little envy" (208).

When Wollstonecraft exposes the different types of education provided to men and women and Staël contrasts the social acceptance of the man of genius with the rejection of the woman with the same potential, they both identify the causes of women's intellectual and artistic constraints as the dominant mentality of the time. This discourse not only determined the roles that women could play, but also controlled their aspirations and careers in the public domain, while favouring the positions of male artists and intellectuals. As Woolf claims, "in the nineteenth century a woman was not encouraged to be an artist" (597). The discourse of the time supported the view that women were "inferior" and men "superior," and, as a result, placed men "in [the] front of the arts" (597). But what are the origins of this mentality that was hostile to women's contributions to cultural production? Whereas "definitions of art, attitudes toward artists, and theories of artistic production have changed over time, patriarchal resistance to including women in the arts has been constant" (Dittman 133). This claim may seem exaggerated, but, although women carry the potential to give birth and thus create life, ancient religious and literary texts of the Western tradition mostly privilege men's creative power by portraying deities, geniuses, artists, and other

types of creators as masculine figures. The leadership role of Zeus in Greek mythology and the all-powerful position of God in the Bible illustrate well how the polytheistic and monotheistic religions of the West have always imagined a male individual as the one who creates and controls the world. But the masculinisation of a creative figure is not restricted to the world of gods. As Linda Huf, Linda Lewis, Grace Stewart, and Eliane Campello have observed, Greek myths and other ancient cultural traditions of the West portray mortal beings who defy the gods to attain creative power or develop artistic skills, but, like Prometheus and Orpheus, most of these characters are men.

Although eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women writers are aware that the celebration of the male artist excluded women from positions in the arts, their feminist reflections ignore a significant aspect that contributed to the "masculinisation" of cultural productions: the image of the artist idealised at the time. Staël believes that, despite the challenge faced by a woman writer, her works "may make her known in places where she does not live, in times when she will no longer exist" (207). Staël expects artists to hold a semi-divine power and achieve immortality through their works, for their audiences will remember them after their death. Many artists and art critics of the time similarly propose a powerful concept of art, but, in order to create such an ideal product and make it the centre of their lives, artists have to be independent, presumptuous, and egoistical. Whereas "many professions and other means of gaining a livelihood were concerned with repetitious tasks and bound to dull and degrading sites" in the nineteenth century, artists were perceived as free and "unique, imaginative

creator[s]" who could live and work "as the mood dictated." Their careers were considered "the complete antithesis" of industrialization and mass production, which were beginning to develop at the time (Jeffares 17). This belief in the unique nature of artistic work and the special status of artists may have led Percy Shelley to define poets and other artists as "the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (448).

The portraits of intellectuals and artists in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction also validate this Romantic personality. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1796) is generally considered the first novel to explore the life of an aspiring artist and the prototype for the fictional representation of the artist in literature (Beebe 37). Likewise, *Wilhelm Meister* focuses on the development of an artistic personality in the model of the Romantic tradition. From the beginning, Wilhelm idealises artistic experience. When he is experimenting with poetry, he claims that "a poem should either be perfect or not exist at all" (44). He believes that, by developing this concept of art, he can perfect his own self, for his "inner desires are directed toward the development and perfection of his predisposition, both bodily and mental, toward what is good and beautiful" (165). Supposedly, this ideal aesthetic form will allow him to attain power, escape the ordinariness and constraints of his reality, and become an independent being. Wilhelm asserts that the artist should not "lower himself to some miserable trade or occupation" because he is a "teacher, prophet, friend of gods and men" (45). The artist, he continues, is "well provided for"—not in the material, but the spiritual sense—and thus "need[s] little sustenance from outside"

(45). Goethe's novel echoes the typical artistic identity reinforced by Romantic theories when Wilhelm defines artists as superior and autonomous individuals who live apart from ordinary people. At the same time, Goethe's artist feels isolated from the world as a result of carrying this Romantic personality and elevating his artistic production as a work higher than a regular profession. An artist can accomplish the creative experience that Romantic theories idealise only after sloughing "off the domestic, social, and religious demands imposed upon" him or her (Beebe 6). For the sake of art, Goethe's character abandons the woman he loves, his best friend, and the family business that his father wants him to head.

Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-1885) portrays an intellectual and artistic character with similar Romantic traits. Like Wilhelm, the poet/philosopher Zarathustra believes that he can surpass the limitations of ordinary reality through his potential. In his view, "the human is something that must be overcome" (158). He wants to become the *Übermensch* and has the role of teaching others to do the same. After he fails in his mission, Zarathustra seeks seclusion on the top of a mountain. Yet Nietzsche fulfils in his hero the Romantic personality because Zarathustra becomes an independent and superior being, "glowing and strong, like a morning sun that emerges from dark mountains" (266). According to Linda Huf, "Since Zarasthustra raged on the mountaintop, proclaiming the exemption of the Poet-Prophet from the common morality, artists—male artists—have been expected to sacrifice others from their creations. Since the Romantic era," Huf continues, "the male artist hasn't had to obey the laws of human loyalty and love; he has been a law unto himself—a superior man

or *Übermensch*, one of the Elect" (149). Wilhelm, Zarathustra, and other male artists and intellectuals represented in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction consolidate the Romantic identity, but society only supported the development of such an identity in the lives of male artists and other creators of culture.

Clearly, the special and powerful artistic experience proposed by Romantic theories and novels is not accessible to everyone. During that period, women faced many obstacles to fulfilling the requirements expected of artists and intellectuals and transcending the laws of society because they were denied the possibility of power, independence, and self-consciousness in the first place. Indeed, in the case of women, particularly those who become mothers, they have traditionally "been encouraged to sacrifice themselves for others, not to demand sacrifice from others" (Huf 151). In times when female roles were expected to be even more self-sacrificial than they are nowadays, the discourse of femininity could not be compatible with the Romantic image of the artist. Many women who longed for an artistic career perceived the incompatibility between being a woman and being an artist and, as a result, felt discouraged. In the belles-lettres, the belief in a masculine cosmic writer "no doubt prevented women from ever 'attempting the pen'" and created "enormous anxiety in generations of those women who were 'presumptuous' enough to dare such an attempt" (Gilbert and Gubar 7). This presumptuous woman could be only "a great lady [who] would take advantage of her comparative freedom and comfort to publish something with her name to it" (Woolf 599). However, even a great lady who enjoyed a privileged social status that allowed her to publish her works was still subject to anxiety, for she was

often punished by public opinion. Whereas her male counterpart's freedom and power turned him into a Romantic hero, she was considered abnormal. In the eyes of early nineteenth-century society, an intellectual woman was a pedantic person who deserved pity (Staël 202, 208); in the nineteenth century, a female writer "would risk being thought as a monster" (Woolf 599). In fact, in both centuries, a woman who attempted the literary business could easily lose her sanity, for she "struggled in isolation that felt like illness, alienation that felt like madness, obscurity that felt like paralysis" (Gilbert and Gubar 51).

"Soaring above Tradition and Prejudice":
The Romantic Woman Artist

The typical struggle faced by women in the arts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries discouraged women writers from creating a female version of assertive artists such as Wilhelm Meister and Zarathustra. Perhaps early women writers thought that, just as their societies condemned them as pedantic, monstrous, and mad, their readers would similarly disregard their fictional women artists. The acceptance of female artist fiction depends on the recognition of a public professional identity, such as that of a poet and painter, but this identity was "closed to women" in the nineteenth century (Mahlendorf 148). The social rejection of an artistic identity for women thus explains the existence of so few novels of the woman artist during this time. In the English literary traditions, for instance, when "it came to creating fictional woman artists, not every Victorian novelist wanted into the act," and most of the renowned women writers of that

period decided not to do it (Lewis 243). In Brazil, until recently, literary critics were not aware of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels centred on women artists (Campello 36). Moreover, they still have not been able to locate many examples of this literary mode in early female writing in the country.

Ahead of their time, writers like Staël, Browning, Chopin, and Bormann finally dared to question what was acceptable in their societies and cultural communities and produced a few examples of female characters who pursue a profession in the arts. By writing *Künstlerromane*, these nineteenth-century authors could show how their cultures excluded their generation of women from artistic experience and ignored those who managed to establish careers as artists. They also "speculated upon whether one's gender contributes to or detracts from art, and whether genius is sexed" (Lewis 249). From this perspective, their works are clearly infused with progressive ideas about femininity and female art, a sign that the criticism and activism by the first wave of feminists influenced women writers to question societal misconstructions of the woman and the masculine image of the artist. At the same time, their fiction also reveals a contradiction between early feminist writers' assertion that a woman can be part of the production of culture and their surrender to society's view that a woman cannot succeed in an artistic career. Although the protagonists of these works manage to become artists after overcoming many social barriers, they fail to maintain their positions and, in most cases, encounter unfortunate fates. Several social developments and literary conventions prevented early women writers from fully articulating their feminist views in their artist fiction and from ultimately

reconciling the conflict between art and life in the experience of their artistic heroines.

The pessimism expressed in their fiction deserves further attention for three reasons. First, as literary works that portray fairly the social development of the time, Staël's *Corinne or Italy* (1807), Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1857), Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), and Bormann's *Lésbia* (1890) show that the aspiring women artists of their period were pressured into abandoning their artistic ambitions and remaining in the confines of the traditional female roles. Second, the contradiction between the feminist views that Staël, Browning, Chopin, and Bormann initially convey in their works and their characters' final conformist attitudes and actions reveals that nineteenth-century women writers generally could not overcome the restrictive characterisation of women in literature. As their readers were not familiar with strong female models such as women artists, they were more likely to accept the solution of the narrative when the central characters were ultimately punished for their transgressions. Finally, the aforementioned works suggest that nineteenth-century women writers supported the image of the artist in the ivory tower in such a way that they overlooked the fact that the egotistical, active, and powerful creator that Romantic theories idealised was not universal and did not accommodate a female identity.[1] Not only is the sacrificial role of a Romantic personality more destructive to

[1] I use the metaphor of the ivory tower according to Beebe's analysis of Romantic personality. The centrality of aesthetic experience in nineteenth-century artist novels established the tradition of the ivory tower in literary theory and criticism. The ivory stands for "the purity of the absolute" and the tower "height and open vistas"; in this view, art becomes the centre of the artist's life and, thus, his or her "private retreat" (Beebe 14-15).

women artists than to their male counterparts, but it also leads women to perceive art and life as binary oppositions.

Staël's portrait of a superior artist in *Corinne or Italy* is initially no different from the artistic identity that Goethe and Nietzsche embody in their male characters. Corinne believes that the artistic process "lifts [her] beyond her own powers" and "brings [her] to discover in nature and in [her] own heart bold truths and language full of life that solitary thought would not have bought into being" (45). Because of the intensity of her experience with art, Corinne becomes the typical Romantic artist depicted in literature: self-assertive, independent, and powerful. When she creates her music and poetry in her popular performances on the streets of Italy, Staël's artist experiences "a supernatural enthusiasm" (45) that makes her "a goddess amid the clouds" and "a person superior by her mind alone" (20-21). Nevertheless, as a woman, Corinne faces more obstacles in maintaining her special status of artist than do the male artists that Goethe and Nietzsche portray in their works. The restrictions associated with her female role can destroy the power that she gains through art. Staël's central character is the daughter of an Italian woman who refuses to live in a conservative society and teaches the child Corinne to pursue intellectual and artistic liberation. Nevertheless, after her mother's death, Corinne is sent to a small town in England to be raised by a strict father and stepmother. There, she confronts a different reality in which "actresses, musicians, artists [. . .] entertain society, but the only suitable life for women of [her] station is to be devoted wives and to raise their children properly" (323). Corinne twice escapes the pressure to become a passive woman. She leaves her

English family to reside in Staël's ideal Italy, where a woman artist can fulfil her creative aspirations and become independent. Later on, she refuses to embrace a relationship with a man named Oswald. Although she loves him, Corinne is aware that he can "only thwart her natural self, and repress rather than stimulate her gifts" (303). Torn between art and the traditional female experience of the time, she chooses her artistic career and rejects the roles of obedient daughter and self-sacrificial wife.

Browning's verse novel *Aurora Leigh* depicts a potential poet who also defies the gender constraints imposed upon women in the nineteenth century. While Corinne chooses only art, Aurora naïvely hopes that she can fulfil two roles that are considered mutually exclusive. The twenty-year old poet stands as "[w]oman and artist,—either incomplete" but "[b]oth credulous of completion" (37). Aurora, however, realises that her role as a woman in the traditional sense, dependent on the financial and emotional power of her husband, conflicts with her literary career. Before her cousin Romney asks Aurora to be his wife, he explains that society expects women to become "donating mothers, and chaste wives. Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints," but not poets (44). Aurora rejects this marriage proposal and pursues a different concept of femininity that can allow for women's independent and active lives. With little financial means, she becomes a poet and writer of prose in London, but constantly suffers for having to sacrifice her feelings for Romney.

To attain autonomy as an artist, the young woman portrayed in Bormann's *Lésbia* also rejects the expectations of her society. Like Corinne and Aurora,

Lésbia decides to become a writer despite the numerous "obstacles she would face […] for wanting to distance herself from the ordinary lot of women, by dedicating herself to letters" (*contrariedades que ela depararia [. . .] por querer afastar-se do comum das mulheres, dedicando-se às letras*) (87).[2] Initially, she succeeds as a writer with support from her family and close friends, but suffers from her society's antipathy toward intellectual and artistic women. Lésbia even compares her hostile environment with the social prejudice faced by two other nineteenth-century women writers, George Sand, who had to prove to Balzac "how much a genius can achieve in a woman's brain" (*de quanto pode o gênio em um cérebro feminino*) (97-98), and Germaine Staël, who "had been called not only immoral but even ignorant" (*não só havia sido chamada de immoral e até ignorante*) (108). The novel underlines the fact that, in nineteenth-century Brazil, an emancipated and artistic woman was even more discouraged in her community than her European counterpart: "Not only is the Brazilian spirit full of prejudices, but the majority of men do not see with good eyes the emancipation of women through education and freedom of speech" (*Não só o espírito brasileiro ainda se acha muito eivado de preconceitos, como também a maioria dos homens não vê com bons olhos essa emancipação da mulher pelo estudo e pela independência de opiniões*) (87). As I discuss in chapter 3, in the nineteenth century, the particular socialisation of women in Brazil reinforced female roles that were more restrictive than those imposed upon women living in Canada and other Western countries. At the same time, the consequences of this social rejection in Lésbia's life are not so different from what occurs in *Corinne* and *Aurora Leigh.* The social antipathy

[2] All translations from Bormann's *Lésbia* are mine.

toward the woman artist also forces Lésbia to perceive herself as an individual divided into two contradictory parts: "one is the writer, the other the woman: in me, these two entities are almost always in opposition" (*uma é a escritora, outra a mulher: em mim essas duas entidades estão quase sempre em oposição*) (129). To embrace the second entity, Lésbia believes that she must reject the first. She even begs one of her lovers not to be emotionally attached to her because "the purest part of my being, the heart, has died" (*Morreu […] o que de mais pura havia em mim – o coração*) (192). Like Corinne and Aurora, Lésbia sacrifices the part of her self related to femininity and privileges her artistic identity.

Chopin's *The Awakening* introduces Edna as a woman who, unlike the public and prestigious artists Corinne, Aurora, and Lésbia, embraces the traditional roles of mother and housewife in the Southern United States in the late nineteenth century. In an awakening process during a summer vacation, Edna discovers her urge to liberate herself from these typical female roles and to fulfil her artistic ambition. After this discovery, she feels torn between two opposing roles and must choose one of them. On the one hand, she is pressured into remaining in her current situation, but, unable to enjoy the sacrificial role of mother in the way most women of her community do, Edna cannot feel like "a mother-woman" (8). On the other hand, she is willing to pursue a career as a painter. In her initial artistic experiments, she feels a "satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afford[s] her" (11). After some practice, Edna finally "gain[s] in ease and confidence" (79). She chooses to become an artist, an option that only one other woman, her acquaintance Mademoiselle Reisz, has embraced.

Edna risks being condemned to a life of loneliness and misunderstandings because the image of the woman artist does not fit into the discourse of femininity reinforced in her time and space. The pianist Reisz is aware of this risk and tells Edna that the "artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies" (116). In the Romantic sense of artistic identity, any artist willing to transgress the constraints imposed upon his or her reality is expected to develop this strong personality, but Reisz's comment also suggests that a woman must embody the same soul in order to defy the repressive female roles of the time.

When Staël, Browning, Bormann, and Chopin represent women as strong and creative individuals who pursue artistic experiences instead of becoming submissive and weak characters, the four writers endorse early feminist discussions and challenge the dominant perception of femininity in their societies. However, while Aurora at least attempts to combine her literary identity with an unconventional idea of femininity, the social pressure that divides Corinne, Lésbia, and Edna into two incompatible selves finally destroys them. Despite their progressive opinions about female emancipation, Staël, Bormann, and Chopin call into question a woman artist's ability to reject the social "misconstructions" of femininity and embrace her artistic ambition.

Browning surprises us with an idealised reconciliation between femininity and art in the life of her female poet. At the end of the poem, even though the more mature protagonist has become a prominent intellectual, she has not succeeded in cultivating the complete female identity that the young Aurora

envisions earlier in her life. Thus, she fails her initial goal of establishing a harmonious relationship between her artistic and female sides:

> Betrayed by the thing I saw, and wronged my own life
> For which I pleaded. Passioned to exalt
> The artist's instinct in me at the cost
> Of putting down the woman's, I forgot
> No perfect artist is developed here
> From any imperfect woman. (341)

This sense of failure resembles the discontentment that Corinne, Lésbia, and Edna feel when they realise that they cannot be both women and artists, but there is a major difference. Aurora continues to believe that she can develop her self into a "perfect" artist and yet does not reject the view that she can also fulfil her feminine side in a relationship. *Aurora Leigh* and another portrait of the artist, George Sand's *Consuelo* (1842), are, according to Lewis, exceptional examples in which the woman artist's relationship with a male character is based on a "romantic/spiritual love that inspires art, rather than slaying it." Aurora, therefore, can "manage finally to have both art and love" (101). When she creates an optimistic destiny for her heroine, fusing her personal desire with her artistic ambition, Browning may be suggesting that women must be sceptical about conservative ideas of femininity, but not their womanhood. An alternative type of femininity may be the only way for women to transcend society's expectations, preserve their personal and professional fulfilment, and finally succeed as "complete" artists.

With a few exceptions following the literary models of Aurora and Consuelo, the majority of the women artists portrayed in nineteenth-century fiction is driven mad, commit suicide, or face other tragic endings that destroy both their womanhood and the artistic identity that they have made central in their lives. Corinne favours her independence and her art but neglects her feelings for Oswald, since their relationship could restrict her career. However, after her decision, Corinne no longer has the power and energy that once reflected her talent: "the fragile state of Corinne's health was the final blow in unsettling her talent." In a "fruitless" attempt "to recover her capacity for sustained work" (368), Corinne realises that "[her] talent no longer exists." She "mourns for it" and finally dies (369). Her rejection of her personal desire to be loved culminates in the destruction of her public and professional identities. Corinne's heart cannot survive without the brain and vice versa because her artistic expression depends on her personal circumstances as much as the satisfaction in her private life depends on the fulfilment of an artistic career.

Just as Corinne sees death as the only way out of her unbearable dilemma (Poortere 56), Lésbia encounters a similar destiny. She suffers from her decision to "kill" her femininity and tells Alberto, a younger poet, who adores her, not to love her because she has become "a type of woman who is completely hollow with an incandescent brain" (*uma forma de mulher inteiramente oca com cérebro incandescente*) (192). The novel remains ambivalent about its protagonist's decision to reject her femininity, especially her potential to mother. Lésbia is sceptical of the view that women can attain happiness only through their maternal

function. She needs to reject the traditional view that has for centuries defined the creation of culture as the product of a masculine mind and biological pro-creation as a woman's only duty. Before meeting Alberto, Lésbia claims that, "*For us, women, there is a period when we can only be mothers, and children constitute our only happiness*" (Para nós, as mulheres, há uma idade, em que só podemos ser mães, constituindo–se os filhos a nossa única alegria) (243). In contrast, the tone at the end of the novel suggests that Lésbia suffers from not being able to mother. Lésbia expresses resentment at not feeling the "affection that makes woman the most beautiful of God's daughters" (*afeto que torna a mulher a mais bela das filhas de Deus*) (243). Her celebratory opinion of motherhood shows that she accepts its value, but it is too late for her to unify her artistic and maternal sides. Unhappy and depressed, Lésbia commits suicide.

Edna also feels that she cannot balance womanhood and a career and, as a result, decides to destroy the ideal image of the mother and housewife. Early in the text, Chopin resolves this ambivalence by portraying Edna as a Romantic artist who "move[s] away from the others who represent the family and ultimately the mother" (Mahlendorf 152). Her conflict is even more complex than that of Corinne and Lésbia because Chopin's heroine is, in the first place, a mother. She avoids her maternal responsibilities and becomes involved in an extramarital relationship while believing that, as an artist, she can "soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice" (83), a metaphor for the artist's ability to transgress society's bias and pressure. Nevertheless, in the end, Edna realises that she cannot completely neglect her maternal responsibilities: "One has to think of the children

some time or other" (111). Right after she learns that society destroys her ambitions as a Romantic creator and does not allow her to escape her traditional female role, Edna runs away and swims into the open sea. This ending suggests that, like Lésbia and Corinne, Edna has chosen to destroy both the woman and the artist that wrestled inside her being. Edna's particular choice to drown herself celebrates but also condemns her awakening process (Duplessis 89).

But why did Staël, Bormann, and Chopin not envision a reality in which their protagonists could at least contemplate the possibility of reconciling personal fulfilment and professional ambition, as Browning did in her poem? Like many of their contemporaneous women writers, the three writers preferred the bitter fate that best represented what could possibly happen to the typical aspiring and professional woman artist of the nineteenth century. Moreover, by limiting their female characters' artistic potential and, in most cases, ultimately destroying their lives, Staël, Bormann, and Chopin denounce the harmful effects of traditional discourses of femininity on the professional development of female intellectuals, artists, and other emancipated women in their reality. Nevertheless, the negative tone expressed in the majority of woman artist fictions of the time minimises the discussions about women's intellectual and artistic equality in the feminist discourse of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In many cases, these works also underline that women could not defy the social roles expected of them or find alternative solutions to resolve the conflict between femininity and their artistic identity. For instance, Staël's novel "appears to challenge an ideology that would oppose the flowering of [Corinne's] talent" but, paradoxically, "endorses a system

of values that proves destructive to that heroine and ultimately calls into question the genius it claims for her" (Heller 16). Staël and her literary successors possibly doubted that women artists could secure prominent positions in the arts because their societies not only reinforced the view that women had no intellectual potential, but also failed to recognise the value of those who managed to develop this potential. Indeed, the artistic experiences of Corinne, Lésbia, and Edna show that the representative woman artist of the nineteenth century is often not able to endure the consequences of her ambitious choices.

At the same time, I do not believe that Staël, Bormann, and Chopin call into question the existence of female genius, for their works suggest that the three writers believed that women were capable of being creative individuals. Although the anxiety felt by the writers and their generation of emancipated women possibly explains the similar resolutions of their works, Corinne's death, Lésbia's suicide, and Edna's drowning should not be interpreted as their authors' individual acceptance of women's "failure" in artistic careers. Instead, their pessimistic solutions express women writers' awareness of the overwhelming power of a society that controlled and even annihilated women's creative and intellectual potential. Thus, when we take into account nineteenth-century women's historical constraints, the protagonists of the woman artist fiction I just analysed do not completely fail—not, at least, as artists. These female characters "do make it" because they "are brilliant and ambitions, fascinating and famous" artists (Lewis 6). In the case of Corinne, she is also successful in her attempt to pass on her artistic talents to her half-sister's daughter, Juliette—"like a legacy

she [is] so pleased to bequeath while she [is] still alive" (Staël, *Corinne* 411). As an artist, Corinne secures her public identity grounded in a female textual authority, by ensuring the continuation of the tradition of the artist-heroine (Campello 88). Metaphorically, her last creative task is also a maternal function, which suggests that alternative ways of mothering can be combined with an artistic identity.

The conventions of nineteenth-century literature also restricted women writers' ability to imagine successful women artists and escape the tragic destinies that befell emancipated female characters. The recurrence of death in the artist novels by Staël and her literary "successors" reinforces the existence of a pattern in the tradition of the woman artist novels of which *Corinne* is the prototype.[3] Staël and the other women writers whom she influenced could not escape the literary formulas of the time. Their choice of the woman artist's death might have been based on the limited range of alternatives available in the characterisation of women in fiction. Indeed, women writers were expected to portray in fiction a woman who sacrifices her ambitions for a heterosexual relationship, what Rachel DuPlessis calls the conventional heterosexual love plot. According to DuPlessis, in "a number of works that center on women artists, characters from the conventional heterosexual love plot [. . .] make strong demands for conformity to exactingly interpreted feminine roles" (91). As lovers and mothers, these female

[3] Many critics believe that Staël's *Corinne* is "the originary model of female genius" (Lokke 73) and prototype for the female *Küntlerroman* for several reasons. Corinne's death is only the first aspect that links Staël's novel to later female artist stories. Staël also influenced other women writers. While *Corinne* gained popularity among young female readers in England, including women writers Browning, Jane Austen, and Mary Shelley, Staël's work was often compared to that of other women writers in North America such as Chopin (Lewis 15-16). Bormann's references to Staël's heroine in *Lésbia* show that *Corinne* even reached South American female writers.

figures "compel the processes of silencing and thwart the preternatural articulateness of the female artists" (Duplessis 91). Therefore, the women writers who created a fictional woman artist were caught in a convention that destroyed their characters' independence and professional ambitions. While many female writers adopted this "happy" ending and placed "their final emphasis on the woman, not the genius" (Duplessis 87), those who made the woman artist's career the centre of her life until the end of their novel, poem, and short fiction had to justify her social and literary transgressions. One alternative was penalising this rebellious character. In the novels by Staël, Bormann, and Chopin, the woman artist is punished with social prejudice, loneliness, a felling of incompleteness, and ultimately the destruction of both her womanhood and artistic potential. In exceptional cases, such as Browning's *Aurora*, women writers revised the heterosexual love plot and allowed their female characters to keep both their relationships and careers. For that reason, *Aurora* is "shockingly candid" for Browning's time (Lewis 101).

Finally, the woman artist portrayed in nineteenth-century fiction does not reconcile her personal and professional identities because Staël, Bormann, and Chopin represent the concept of the Romantic artistic experience, especially the belief that an artist has to sacrifice everything for the perfection of his or her work. Aesthetic theorists and philosophers of that period identified the negative consequences of the idealised images of genius and the artist. Friedrich Schlegel, for instance, claims that the young genius "fails to recognize the value and dignity of self-restriction, which is, after all, for the artist as well as the man, the first and

the last, the most necessary and the highest duty." The artist, Schlegel continues, should bear in mind that, "wherever one does not restrict oneself, one is restricted by the world," but "one can only restrict oneself at those points and places where one possesses infinitive power, self-creation, and self-destruction" (147). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers, nevertheless, continued to reinforce this Romantic personality, even though it created a dilemma that jeopardises their characters' careers and lives. In *Wilhelm Meister,* Goethe uses the metaphors of two female figures who struggle "for possessing [Wilhelm's] worthy self" (15) to underline Wilhelm's conflict between the obligation of a life that he considers tedious and the excitement of a career that he perceives as special. On the one hand, a woman with "dignity and pride" symbolises "the Muse of Tragedy," and, on the other, a "quarrelsome and domestic, petty and pompous," old woman represents commerce (15). Wilhelm privileges a career as a playwright and actor while rejecting what his family and society expects from him, which divides his being. Nineteenth-century artist novels by women also "fail to show the artistic expression of the heroine in its plenitude, by focusing […] only on her creative potential" (Campello 69).

As the analysis of the aforementioned novels shows, Staël, Browning, Bormann, and Chopin were influenced by their male counterparts and attempted to capture in the lives of their women artists the same conflicts faced by the Romantic heroes, even though such conflicts largely contributed to their artistic failure. The protagonist of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) chooses suicide as a means of escaping the dilemma between life and art. In

Wilhelm Meister, Wilhelm makes a different choice. He gradually realises his need of "external means to promote effective activity" (300) and embraces the responsibilities that he once rejected in the real world. Toward the end of the novel, he decides to care for his family business and accepts the child he had with the woman he abandoned. He is still a thwarted artist because he abandons his work in the theatre. Thus, as Werther and Wilhelm attempt to make their work a central component of their lives, they fail as artists. Similarly, the preference for the ivory tower is not a solution to the dilemmas faced by Corinne, Aurora, Lésbia, and Edna. Aurora realises the detrimental consequences of the Romantic artist's limitation and isolation and attempts to integrate her two selves, but the other three women artists follow their male counterparts' experiences and destroy their artistic selves. Perhaps Goethe, Staël, Bormann, and Chopin ironically question this Romantic tradition, for they may be suggesting that, in order to succeed, artists must find a middle-ground position between the absolute adoration of art and their responsibilities in the ordinary world. Although artists need to retreat to an aesthetic experience, their commitments to their families, communities, and other responsibilities in the real world are also significant. As I will explain in the following chapters, the image of an artist engaged in both work and social reality is only established in the literary tradition of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, Goethe's central characters and other male artists portrayed in the literature of the time pay a lesser price for their transgression of the social norms and exclusive dedication to art than do the female characters who attempt

to develop the same artistic experience. In the case of male artists, their ordinary and artistic identities may be conflicting, but they offer these male characters meaningful positions. Although Wilhelm's ordinary life may not be as empowering and exciting as the artistic role that he romanticises, he can still become an active individual by running the family business, travelling around the world, experimenting with sexual pleasure, and so on. In contrast, if Corinne, Aurora, Edna, and Lésbia do not succeed in their careers, they will confront a reality that is far more restrictive than the life that Wilhelm ultimately accepts. In other words, the male artist is often divided between life and art, but his female counterpart "is not only torn between life and art": her choices are far more incompatible, for she must choose "between her role as a woman, demanding selfless devotion to others, and her aspirations as an artist, requiting exclusive commitment to work" (Huf 5).

Furthermore, another major difference in the experience of male and female artists in the Romantic tradition is the concept of choice. Whereas the male artist can at least select between two roles that are accepted and idealised in his society, Corinne, Aurora, and Lésbia are actually pushed to abandon their public identities as artists and remain in the confines of the public spheres as submissive daughters and housewives. Nineteenth-century artistic mothers like Edna do not even have the freedom to choose one of these two roles. The "self-preoccupied" artist who attempts "to become at all costs to others a Creator" (Huf 151) and the submissive woman who was expected to sacrifice everything to dedicate herself to her children cannot be reconciled. In Chopin's novel, Edna pursues her artistic

identity in the Romantic terms but has to conform to the sacrificial maternal roles of the time. It is not surprising that she fails to integrate her personal and public experience and cannot become the complete woman artist that Browning and Sand idealise. In fact, their ideal view of a woman who can combine these two identities does not apply to mothers, for Aurora and Consuelo are successful women artists, not mothers-artists. Edna's suicide therefore represents the tragic fate of the Romantic artist who feels frustrated at not surpassing her earthly limitations, but her death is also a symbol for the destructive effect of the rigid discourse of motherhood on women during that period of time.

A Transition to New Challenges

The first women artists represented in fiction feel divided between two incompatible roles. With the exception of a few works, fictional women artists generally take a tragic route to resolving this conflict because of their writers' literary and social conventions. Their restrictive experience reflects the social conditions of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women artists, when the majority of society could not accept a liberating discourse of femininity and public careers for women. Through their heroines' isolation, loneliness, and, in some cases, death, Staël, Browning, Bormann, and Chopin expose the destructive consequences of the patriarchal discourse of femininity of the time, even though they risk being complicit with this dominant view, especially the belief that a rebellious woman is doomed to failure. Furthermore, as their readers were probably in favour of a similar female model, nineteenth-century women writers

could not completely reject it. Regardless of how strong-minded their heroines are at the beginning of a novel, they either submit to a sacrificial relationship, becoming, thus, passive characters, or suffer from their rebellion. Without the recognition of women artists' identities in society and literature, nineteenth-century women writers had restrictive options. By accepting this conventional plot in their works, they killed the artist that lived within their heroines. Ironically, those writers themselves managed to publish their works, establish themselves as writers, and save their own artistic identities.

Like their male counterparts, nineteenth-century female authors were not able to challenge the perception of artistic experience and fuse life and art so that their fictional artists could succeed in their private and public roles. However, when early women writers appropriated the Romantic artist's conflicting and tragic life in their artist fiction, they ignored the fact that this artistic experience was not universal. The particular gender roles that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century societies assigned to men and women, therefore, affected the different solutions that male and female artists found to overcome the conflicts between their artistic identity and their society's expectations. Thus, the conceptions of masculinity and femininity at the time gave more options to male characters and forced women artists to take a destructive route. For the woman artist who fails to develop this Romantic identity and yet refuses to comply with a woman's ordinary life, secluded in the household, death can be the only way to escape the conflict between art and life.

If Woolf had witnessed major transformations in the second half of the twentieth century, she would probably have asked what changed in the artistic experience of the female creator: has Shakespeare's sister overcome the social and cultural challenges that constrained her life until the nineteenth century and finally become what Woolf once dreamt of? Perhaps, she would have also asked if new generations of women artists managed to integrate their conflicting identities and become whole the way Browning idealised in the past. Historically, women artists have, now and then, confronted different obstacles and yet tried to achieve what they believed to be self-fulfilment, be it in art, in personal life, or in both. It is too simplistic to claim that women writers in the nineteenth century were complicit with a woman artist's failure to resolve the conflict between art and life. It is also naïve to believe that their twentieth-century counterparts allowed their protagonists to go beyond the conflict between creativity and motherhood or other acceptable female roles. As "feminists made possible a *publicized* female identity" in the twentieth century (Mahlendorf 148), a woman artist's pressure to abandon her artistic career and comply with traditional social roles was reduced in many Western societies. Other obstacles created by the discourses of femininity, nevertheless, continue to restrict the woman artist and her female character depicted in fiction. According to Susan Gubar, "[c]ontemporary women's sacrifices are different from those of their grandmothers, but sacrifices they remain" (*Rooms* 32). In *Who Does She Think She Is?* (2008), a recent documentary addressing similar concerns in the lives of contemporary women artists, Pamela Boll and Nancy Kennedy underline the fact that many women are

not able to combine their roles as women, mothers, wives, and daughters with a successful career in the arts. As I will discuss in the following chapters, although political and social conditions, as well as economic inclusion, have improved the situation of women in Western countries, women writers continue to create anxious characters who are troubled by their choices between creativity and acceptable concepts of femininity. Their works still express a woman artist's old fears of restrictive binary oppositions and even failure.

Chapter 2. Beyond the Woman Artist's Conflict?

Twentieth-Century Feminist Discourse [4]

While Wollstonecraft and Staël attempted to convince society that women were able to have public roles when they had access to the same education and public space granted to their male counterparts, the feminist critics of the twentieth century realised that their generations of female intellectuals and artists had more opportunities to pursue careers than did their nineteenth-century predecessors. In the twentieth century, the image of the artist gradually shifted from a special creator who existed in the ivory tower, only accessible to those who could sacrifice their domestic lives, to an engaged individual. During this time, the redefinition of the artistic role allowed the entrance of marginal groups such as women. However, since the goals of twentieth-century women artists were far more complex than those of their female precursors, they still struggled to find ways to balance traditional female roles in the private space of the household, especially when they were mothers, with new career opportunities in the arts. Feminist critics of the second half of the twentieth century attempted to find solutions to women's conflicts with these two roles, but they faced a paradox. Whereas some feminists believed in the need to transcend their roles of women and mothers in order to become pro-active individuals such as artists, other critics celebrated their femininity and asserted that it was possible to integrate it with their artistic identities.

[4] A version of this chapter has been published. Cunha 2012. *International Journal of the Humanities*. 9.5: 223-234.

In this chapter, I argue that economic, social, and cultural developments in the twentieth century contributed to the redefinitions of art and femininity, leading feminists to view the relationship between their artistic and female roles as more complex than the binary oppositions that have been traditionally associated with the nature of a woman artist's identity. We often generalise feminist theories as a one-sided view that rejects femininity and, more specifically, motherhood, in order to privilege a profession. As I will show, the majority of feminists agrees that the incompatibility they perceive between their femininity and artistic identity is a product of the female roles promoted by conservative views, which feminists call patriarchy. Nevertheless, they propose two different ways out of this patriarchal mentality and the restrictions that it imposed on women throughout the twentieth century. Several feminists contend that the experience and practice of femininity have prevented women from achieving artistic, social, and political power outside the home. Since traditional female roles conflict with women's new identities and positions in the public sphere, traditional discourses of femininity, especially motherhood, should therefore be rejected. In contrast, other feminists do not desire to undermine the uniqueness of the female body, even though they are aware of the danger of the conservative image of the mother. Instead, they envision unconventional ways of being a woman and mother that could allow women to participate in the public space and achieve self-fulfilment in a career. In the context of mothers who attempt to become artists and artists who want to have children, the new concept of art and the alternative discourses of motherhood are

significant, suggesting that, as strong and creative individuals, women artists can reconcile the conflicting nature between their maternal and artistic roles.

In the first section of this chapter, I claim that the transformations of the theories about the function of art in the twentieth century led women to perceive a profession in the arts as more inclusive than in the nineteenth century. Since art was then defined as the political space to question and reflect upon the traditional values of their social reality, women artists became critical subjects who exposed the conflict between art and femininity—and between creativity and motherhood—or searched for possibilities of integrating these two. Either way, women artists viewed their work of art as a medium through which they could express their anxieties. In Section Two, I examine the feminist theories articulated by Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, and Judith Butler, who respond with pessimism toward the influence of femininity on women's artistic development. According to this first group of feminists, as femininity has been dictated by the male-centred mindset that dominates the structures and institutions of society, it is an obstacle to women's attempts to have an autonomous female self and pursue an artistic career. In Section Three, I analyse the theories of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, who define femininity and motherhood as more than restrictive behaviours and experiences imposed by patriarchy to prevent women from becoming creative subjects. In their view, the female body and its particular potentials can influence women's art in positive ways. Finally, in Section Four, I show that a larger number of women writers in the second half of the twentieth century use their works, particularly their artist

novels, to examine these two feminist models in order to challenge both the oppressive constructions of femininity and the exclusions of women and mothers from the production of culture.

The difference between these two perceptions of femininity—one rejecting its restriction, another celebrating female difference—is not clear-cut, however. As this chapter will show, feminists and female writers often identify their argument as lying between these two positions. They reject the discourse of femininity that becomes an obstacle to women's cultural production and yet propose a unique concept of female creativity and women's artistic tradition. Also, many feminists have contradictory positions when explaining how mothers can create art. As feminists express their uncertainties about the experience of motherhood in the lives of female intellectuals and artists, they emphasise that we still do not know much about the power and restrictions of the mother's role. Feminists have only recently begun to answer the questions raised about this female experience.[5] Thus, an understanding of the mystery of motherhood is still valid in feminist theories, women's studies, and literary criticism of female fiction. After all, we should be reminded that the "[m]others will continue to do battle inside us, and more especially in mothers-who-write, until humanity has become very much wiser" (Jouve 180-81). We have a long way to go before our society allows harmonious relations between intellectual/artistic women and the

[5] Several critics have drawn attention to this gap in feminist theories and their definition of motherhood. Feminists still "know very little about the inner discourse of a mother" (Suleiman 358). They have "no answers yet in the explorations" of "this huge and central experience for many women" (Malin 92).

restrictive forms of mothering—the absent, sacrificial, or oppressed mothers who continue to be present in their lives of modern women.

Socially Engaged Artists:
Women and Mothers in Artistic Production

The types of demands made of Corinne, Aurora, Lésbia, and Edna, as well as the types of sacrifices expected from them, gradually changed in the twentieth century, because the modern perception of the artist's roles opened up the possibilities for women artists. In the Romantic and Modernist views of art, the artist must transgress the norms of society and focus exclusively on the creative work. This view proposes that art creates a special and powerful position for artists, but such a position historically has been largely restricted to men. While aspiring male artists were encouraged to enjoy their creative role in the nineteenth century, women with the same artistic ambitions were not allowed to sacrifice their female roles, especially those of mothers, for the sake of their art.

The perception of the artist as the lucky individual sitting in an ivory tower and living solely for the sake of his or her artistic experience, nevertheless, continued to be part of aesthetic and literary theories in the early twentieth century. Following their nineteenth-century prototypes, the artists depicted in modernist literature sacrifice social experience for the development of their careers and the production of their art. In Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), for example, Stephen makes art the centre of his life while rejecting his social reality. He believes that the nets of "nationality, language, [and]

religion" prevent the soul of man from taking flight from the restrictions of real life and decides that he will "try to fly by those nets" (348). The artist portrayed in Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) also wants to escape the ordinariness of life. Aschenbach "yearn[s] for the far away and the new, this desire for release, freedom, and forgetfulness" (1842). Like Stephen, he attempts to find an ideal reality in which he can grasp "beauty itself, the pure form of divine thought, the universal and pure perfection that lives in the spirit" (1868). Both fictional artists believe that only through this liberation from the chains of society can they achieve aesthetic perfection.

Nonetheless, with the advent of technology and globalization later in the twentieth century, the intellectuals and artists of the time redefined the function of art and the role of the artist. They challenged the image of the uncommitted artist who believes in the transcendental aspect of art. Some critics also questioned whether artists have any power to control the meaning of their work. Other critics, however, acknowledged that artists can voice their political and social concerns through their art. Although these two perceptions are conflicting, they both challenge the superior position of artists that Romantic and Modernist artist novels idealise.

Critics and philosophers assert that art reflects ideological views and suggest that artists carry political and social responsibilities. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility (Third Version)" (1955), Walter Benjamin identifies significant transformations in the production of culture, which contributed to what he considers the "revolutionary demands in the politics of art"

(253). As technology and modern life influenced our perception of the world, art has lost its uniqueness, ritualistic basis, and role in the secular cult of beauty. Benjamin argues that "the whole social function of art is revolutionized" and "based on a different practice: politics" (256-57). As artistic creation becomes overly political, the work of art however gains an ambivalent function. Whereas it can manipulate the audience, it "can also promote revolutionary criticism of social conditions" (262). In "Commitment" (1965), Theodor Adorno questions whether artists can control the social and political meaning of their work, but he does not ignore the connection between art and reality. On the one hand, he argues, writers and other artists "apparently say what they in fact do not say" (179). The audience determines the meaning of an artistic piece, not the artist. On the other hand, the work of art "even in its opposition to society remains a part of it." Not even Modernist writers are able to escape the relation between art and reality because, in Adorno's view, "any literature which therefore concludes that it can be a law unto itself, and exist only for itself, degenerates into ideology no less" (193-94). Ultimately, Adorno questions the value of autonomous art: "[w]hen a work is merely itself and no other thing, as in a pure pseudo-scientific construction, it becomes bad art" (193-94).

Many of the aforementioned critics actually support Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's claims that individuals and their modes of production, including artistic and intellectual creations, cannot be separated from the external factors that sustain the structures of society.[6] As the editorial members of the

[6] According to Marx and Engels, "in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organisation necessarily following from it, form the basis

Canadian journal of social criticism, *Masses*, suggest in 1932, all artistic productions, "whether by the conscious will of the jingo intellectual, or by the self-styled aloofness of the ivory tower recluse," are generated by "the current (and previous) social and economic conditions" ("Our Credentials" n. pag.). Disillusioned by the economic crisis of the first half of the twentieth century and the negative effects of technology, particularly the two world wars, and attracted by socialist theories and criticism, intellectuals and artists endorse the connection between art and society and the artists' attachment to their environment. Moreover, these theories provide support to literary critics who, at the time, not only examined the linguistic elements of a literary text, but also believed that writers and their literary works were products of their social, political, and economic realities. In their opinions, artists are social beings and, as such, have the responsibility to represent, question, and even transform their realities through their works.

In this study, I support the view that art is a medium of political and social reflection; nevertheless, I do not ignore that such aesthetic theories can also be problematic. When the artist reinforces a particular ideological opinion in his or her work, art can be disguised propaganda and can be used for dogmatic purposes, such as the control and alienation of the audience. Although "art can be propaganda," these "two separate activities must not be confused" (Richardson n. pag.). We should not equate an engaged/committed artist with a propagandist.

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upon which is build up, and from which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of the epoch" (*Manifesto* 116). Therefore, since this material reality in society "conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life" (Marx, Preface 7), the same external factors inevitably influence artists and intellectuals.

Propagandists use their work to convince others of dogmatic views, as was the case with many artists who reinforced the ideals of socialism and fascism in the last century. In contrast, socially engaged artists capture the conditions of their societies to help their audiences understand and perhaps change this reality. Furthermore, the defence of engaged art can be challenged because artists and poets are "not under the obligation to furnish" their audiences "with a ready-made historical solution for the future" (Wilson 189). Artists can stand on the side of their societies and yet "must be free to create" (Richardson n. pag.). Despite running the risk of reinforcing the didactic function of art, theories of engaged art provide examples of how aesthetic critics become increasingly aware of the political value of artistic representations. More importantly, they challenge the Romantic figure of the artist in the ivory tower by suggesting that twentieth-century artists could no longer be treated as individuals apart from their political, economical, and social realities.

While some critics celebrate art as a space for social reflection, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida question not only the power and autonomy felt by Romantic and Modernist artists but also the belief that artists are able to capture their realities and express their political opinions. Artists, they claim, have no power over their works and cannot impose their subjective feelings or social perceptions because of the unstable and slippery qualities of representation. Analysing the relationship between writers and their texts, Barthes argues that "it is language who speaks, not the author" (189). Derrida is even more sceptical and claims that signification itself does not exist, challenging the ability of writers to

depict the world outside literature. Derrida also contends that in a similar way the audience should not expect art to reflect its social reality. The interpretation of a literary text, for example, cannot "transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text […] outside of writing in general" (Derrida 158). David Williams explains that these theories, which he calls postmodern, deconstruct both the contemplative and timeless aspects of art and the belief in the self-sufficient artist. Besides shattering the artistic experience and identity portrayed in Romanticism and modernism, postmodern critics capture an age of profound scepticism and intellectual crisis. Any idea of centre and power, "whether political or theological or literary," becomes "necessarily arbitrary." However, the postmodern rejection of meaning and artistic authorship also creates, Williams continues, a serious "cultural impasse" for the artist (8). Defining art merely as a self-conscious product can in fact minimise the social value of the artist's creative production.

The late twentieth-century aesthetic critics are divided between those who support the postmodern rejection of the artist's abilities to create meaning and to establish a connection between art and the world and those who believe in the impossibility of this connection and of the artist's social and political responsibilities. Their differences are of course not clear-cut, for critics develop aesthetic models based on theories of engaged art and postmodernism while exposing the flaws of each side. Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon, for instance, is sceptical about a "naïve" stand that "asserts that the postmodern is disqualified

from political involvement" (*Politics* 3). After arguing that art is "inescapably political" (*Poetics* 4), Hutcheon does not define this new type of art as the ideological works popular in socialist and fascist societies. Rather, she analyses the artistic representations born from the progressive movements of marginal cultures in the 1960s, which bring issues of race, gender, sexuality "explosively into the foreground, as the political and the aesthetic merged in the so-called counter-culture" (*Poetics* 61-62). Furthermore, she contends that "the postmodern has no effective theory of agency that enables a move into political *action*," but "it does work to turn its inevitable ideological grounding into a site of de-naturalizing critique" (*Politics* 3). From this perspective, even though art may not promote changes, it is highly politicised, so that the artist is often engaged in social and political reflections. Consequently, the "artist is no longer the […] alienated creator of the romantic/modernist tradition" (*Politics*18).

Female fiction about women artists also benefits from this engaging value of art, for women writers use their works to criticise the socially alienated (and usually) male artist figures of the Romantic and early Modernist novels. It is true that the artist-heroine of the late twentieth century gives birth to a woman who does not sacrifice her ambitions exclusively for others (Huf 153). Women writers "increasingly accept the need for women who write to become less available to others"; nevertheless, they do not support the "seductive assumption of the mystique of the male artist" in which "autointoxication is necessary to creation" (Huf 157). After all, to promote any potential change, found a new cultural heritage, and question the confined female roles imposed upon women, the

woman artist in fiction, as well as those whom she represents in reality, need a small dose of selfishness after a long period in which she faces guilt, anxiety, and disbelief regarding her artistic skills. In contrast to the portraits of female characters that I analysed in the previous chapter, the twentieth-century woman artist is more self-assured, but her confidence in general does not turn her into the self-preoccupied creators that Romantic and modernist traditions idealise. Because the women writers of the time represent "the ethical role of the artist" in their novels, they create women artists who "depict and try to change the life in which she is also immersed"; these fictional artists also counter "the modernist tradition of exile, alienation, and refusal of social roles" (DuPlessis 101).

The typical woman artist of the twentieth-century artist fiction is committed to creating a work of art that examines her social and political realities. Most of the female protagonists of the novels I examine expose the discrimination against women and other marginal subjects in their communities and often use their art as a medium to reflect on the discrimination of others. In Laurence's *The Diviners,* for instance, writer Morag is aware of the problems of the Métis people in Canada. One of the women artists represented in Bins's *Pele nua no espelho* (*Naked Skin on the Mirror*) becomes actively involved in social programs. In Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, visual artist Elaine questions representations of the female body in the media and in the visual arts, while the nameless painter depicted in Cunha's *As doze cores do vermelho* (*The Twelve Colors of Red*) exposes the difficult lives of prostitutes. The same applies to the women writers who produced artist fiction. The Canadian and Brazilian women writers that I have selected for

this project use their texts as a space to question how the economic, political, social structures of their countries have precluded women, and especially mothers, from fulfilling themselves as speaking and artistic subjects. When these writers create women artists concerned with others, they emphasise the twentieth-century view that the artist is an individual engaged in his or her social problems, as well as the feminist idea that the woman artist has the responsibility of questioning and even modifying the oppressive structures of patriarchy in her society.

Artists' interest in counter-cultures coincides with, and possibly affects, the feminist reaction to the marginal status of women in society in general, as well as in the arts. Together, these two cultural phenomena contribute to women's entry into their artistic cultures. They also reinforce the view that, as engaged artists, women and even mothers can use their art to expose and understand their social, economic, and political struggles. Instead of having to transcend their female bodies to become the narcissistic figure of the artist that Romantic critics and writers celebrate, women can now use their art as a space to resist the constraints imposed upon their bodies, sexualities, and identities while still leaving traces of their particular female experiences in their works. However, before the reconciliation between femininity and artistic creativity becomes possible, feminists must challenge traditional female roles and propose alternative ways of being women and mothers. As the next two sections will show, it is not easy to do so, because feminists have opposing opinions about how to reconcile a woman's public and private identities in the twentieth century.

Mother Trouble:

Transgressing Femininity and Motherhood in Feminism

Just as the social and economic structures have conditioned the production of the arts, and, by extension, the roles of artists, such structures have also modified women's experience in public and private spaces. According to Marx, "In the social production of their existence," individuals "inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production" (Preface 7). As a result of the transformations of these material forces in the twentieth century, women witnessed significant changes in their roles in Western cultures. In a 1930s essay, Canadian critic Margaret Gould observes that women gained emancipation in the first two decades of the century: "They could earn good livings for themselves, they could marry or not as they pleased, and whom they pleased; they could do work they cared for and experience the joy of doing it well" (18). Although this economic system led several generations of women to redefine their identities beyond the private sphere of the home, Brazilian and Canadian cultures did not respond to women's emancipations in the same way. The different responses to the economic development in the lives of women in each country will be addressed in Chapter Three.

The inclusion of women in the economic force affected their roles in positive ways, but, at the same time, this new reality pressured women into

believing that they could not compete with their male counterparts because of the particular characteristics of the female body. This paradox created a climax of uncertainty and anxiety, and many women began to voice their concerns about the way class, income, and other economic factors controlled their mobility or the lack thereof. They became increasingly aware that they were still "held back by various social and economic considerations from doing what they might do and becoming what they might become" in the early twentieth century (M. Gould 18). During this period, women also realised that this economic system used their sexual difference, particularly their potential to mother, to manipulate their bodies. Some feminists even speculated that a mother's social dependence lies in the origins of the capitalist system, which has destroyed the idea of maternal property and authority. If maternal authority ever existed in Western civilisation, as Simone de Beauvoir claims it did, it was replaced by "paternal authority," because "property [was] inherited from father to son and no longer from woman to her clan." Thus, mothers became socially oppressed because of their economic oppression (49). This economic system also degrades the value of women's maternal potential and function because the lack "of economic security makes above all a poor type of mother" (21). In agreement with early twentieth-century feminist theories, contemporary critics often argue that the economic structure controls mothers' existence and behaviour. Motherhood "is economically and culturally devalued" because "reproduction is materially and ideologically *essential* for the continued functioning of capitalism and patriarchy" (Still, "French" 276). Mothers are not simply subject to financial instability, but, since

they lack "economic power," they "are much less able to access political and social power" (Turnbull 15). Furthermore, although mothers may still live in a prosperous economy that offers many professional opportunities, they are not necessarily able to take advantage of this system, especially if they live in societies that still endorse conservative maternal functions. Even when the family "household requires more income" and "job opportunities are" abundant, women "cannot enter full-time employment if [their] reproductive responsibilities are too all-encompassing" (Tiano 282-83). Therefore, the very economic system that has emancipated many mothers has often made them pay a high price, a price that men and women who choose not to have children usually do not pay (Turnbull 15).

In the dubious climate of development and uncertainty in women's lives in the twentieth century, a group of feminists, from Woolf to Irigaray, capture women's suspicions of their femininity and sexual difference and define these concepts as obstacles to female emancipation. Not all feminist critics discussed in this section focus on the ambivalence that the economic system created for women. Often, they also blame the discourse or ideology of patriarchy, the institution of motherhood, or specific social, cultural, and religious values and traditions. In their view, these powerful structures create, control, and constrain femininity, womanhood, or female identity, if such an essence ever exists outside the domain of those systems. Not surprisingly, the feminists who are sceptical about motherhood expose the destructive psychological, physical, and professional restrictions that it has imposed upon women. Asserting that the

concepts and roles of femininity, especially motherhood, prevent women from developing a self that is necessary for them to become active subjects, this group of feminists proposes that female intellectuals and artists should transcend and, in some cases, completely reject the discourses and roles associated with femininity.

Woolf is not able to decide whether the personalities and experiences of genius and the artist carry sexual differences or transcend them. She identifies in women's eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries literatures a specific pattern, different from male writing. Women's "creative power differs greatly from the creative power of men." Woolf suggests the existence of a female literary genealogy, which she initially urges other contemporary women to develop. In fact, she is sympathetic toward the feminine characteristic that her literary predecessors expressed in their writing: it "would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men" (617). Paradoxically, Woolf rejects this view when she argues that the typical female writer of the early twentieth century realised the importance of writing beyond her feminine condition and "mastered the final great lesson." She "wrote as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages were full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself" (619). While congratulating her female contemporaries for forgetting their femininity, Woolf expresses her generation's doubt about the possibility of combining genius or creativity with femininity. To create great art, a woman must liberate herself from the consciousness of her female sex. According to Woolf, the mind of a great artist and genius is actually androgynous. She argues that "there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to

the two sexes in the body," but the "normal and comfortable state of being" occurs when the male and the female sides of the mind "live in harmony together" (623-24). A "mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine," but when "this fusion takes place […] the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties" (625).[7]

By fusing these feminine and masculine sides, male and female artists erase the particular traits that make them different from each other. Woolf may be proposing that, to develop a mind that "is naturally creative, incandescent and undivided" (625), male and female writers must reject their femininity and masculinity. Because she attempts "to flee her female gender identity by embracing the idea of androgyny," twentieth-century feminists have accused Woolf of being "insufficiently feminist" (Moi 7, 28). Toril Moi, nevertheless, claims that Woof "is indeed authentically feminist" because her theory of the androgynous artistic mind demands "the deconstruction of sexual identity" (14). When Woolf calls for other artistic women to transcend their female consciousness, she suggests that in her early twentieth-century society, women can only create and write on equal terms with their male counterparts if they transgress traditional female roles. I believe that by criticising rigid views of gender, Woolf presents a valid response to the anxiety felt by women who did not know whether they should transgress or embrace their femininity in order to become artists. At the same time, her theory of the androgynous genius is flawed by her initial assertion of a female literary tradition. Her idea of genius is also

[7] Her argument seems to be based on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous claim that "a great mind is androgynous" (v. 14:2; appendix H, par. 436).

problematic because, by suggesting that a woman artist can fuse the feminine and masculine, but not the feminine and art, Woolf questions the existence of a solution to women artists' conflict with their womanhood.

Whereas Woof leaves women uncertain about the possibility of solving the conflicting relationship between their artistic and female identities, some decades later Beauvoir underlines that women and especially mothers must renounce their female condition to escape their social oppression and exclusion from public careers. Early in *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir appears to reject the biological differences of the female body, particularly a woman's potential to mother. This interpretation of her work has, in fact, given Beauvoir "the reputation of evincing an aversion to 'femininity'" and "denigrat[ing] the usual functions of motherhood" (Ward 191). Beauvoir expresses her aversion toward the female body when she emphasises the physical violence of pregnancy, childbearing, and maternity on women. She believes that "gestation is tiring work that offers woman no benefit as an individual but demands serious sacrifices" (42). Her descriptions of the maternal experience as a process of "alienation" (42), "possession," and "mutilation" of the body (538) suggest that in Beauvoir defines motherhood as a negative experience that women should reject.

Nevertheless, she challenges the view that the physical functions of the female body are the sources of female oppression. Female physical differences, Beauvoir writes, "do not explain why woman is the Other" (44). To question the view that women's physical potential to mother limits their lives, she examines several autobiographical and fictional narratives in which women describe

pregnancy, delivery, and nurturing in different ways, from oppressive to liberating. If maternal experience can be "extremely variable" (554), why is it often perceived so negatively? Beauvoir blames the patriarchal beliefs reinforced by our social and economic structures for empowering men and alienating women, especially mothers, from the possibility of becoming active subjects. From "patriarchy's earliest times," men have used their power "to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes were set up against her; she was thus concretely established as the Other" (159). In the case of mothers, given the social and economic conditions of the first half of the twentieth century, their "enslavement" depends on "the economic and social situation," as well as "on how many births the society demands" (46). They are not free beings because the "social norms do not allow the woman to procreate as she pleases" (735). Beauvoir does not ignore the significance of the biological experience itself, for she is aware that "the value of maternity, like pregnancy, depends upon the […] the attitude" that a woman "takes toward these experiences" (Ward 191-92). Although she separates the physical experience of being woman and mother from the discourses of femininity and motherhood that women are forced to accept, Beauvoir fails to explain how women can separate the discourses of femininity and motherhood from the particular physical functions that they emphasise. In other words, she may be suggesting that women still need to reject their female and maternal roles.

In the case of intellectual and artistic women, Beauvoir believes that their public identities provide them with the opportunity to find an ideal self and escape their marginal positions in society. She claims that "when [a woman] is

productive, active, she regains her transcendence; she affirms herself concretely as subject in her projects" (721). However, Beauvoir does not believe that intellectuals and artists can combine femininity with their active subjects, for women can only become creative and develop an artistic identity after freeing themselves from their sexual constraints. Beauvoir does not doubt that some women are able to express a feminine quality in their art, but claims that those who do so "remain divided between their narcissism and an inferiority complex" (744).[8] A great woman artist achieves an independent self and does not falsely escape from her female condition. She goes "beyond the given in the way she expresses it" and is a true "artist, a creator who gives meaning to her life by lending meaning to the world" (741). In fact, Beauvoir defines the artistic experience in the same way that critics and artists theorise art in the Romantic tradition. She argues that art, "literature, and philosophy are attempts to found the world anew on a human freedom: that of the creator," but "for one to become a creator, it is not enough to be cultivated" (748). Artists must apprehend culture "through the free movement of a transcendence," and, to attain freedom and transcendence, they must understand and challenge their human condition. According to Beauvoir, male writers have completed this process, but women

[8] Narcissistic female artists take pride in their female condition, which "contribute[s]—as for males—to their sexual worth." They are financially independent, find the "meaning of their existence in their work," and attain "professional successes" and "accomplish themselves as women." Narcissistic female artists "are *not torn between contradictory aspirations*" (741, italics mine), but their narcissism precludes them from becoming the independent subjects that Beauvoir idealises. A woman artist who feels inferior because of the limitations she perceives in her femininity "seek[s] salvation in literature and art" (742). She uses art to "assert herself against the given [conditions] that she endures in revolt, so as to create a world other than the one in which she cannot succeed in reaching herself." Nevertheless, although this female artist "wishes to reach her *being*," she "is doomed to failure." When ignoring her sexual condition through art, she "can only recover [her self] in the realm of imagination" (742).

"have barely begun to be able to assume" this human condition (748). Women will become successful artists when they are able to exist "above sexual differences" (750). Women artists must reject their self-consciousness, as well as their sexual consciousness. Developing an independent and genderless subject seems to be the only solution to overcome the binary opposition that women perceive in the relation between femininity and creativity.

Just as Beauvoir claims that motherhood is "almost impossible to undertake in complete freedom" (735), Rich emphasises that the restrictions of this role become an obstacle to women's agency, and in the context of women artists, their creative drives. In *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), she describes maternal functions as "the heaviest of social burdens" and states that they "cannot be compared with slavery or sweated labor" (52). Her own maternal experience, she explains, brought her "grief and anger" (33). Rich makes a clear distinction between the "*potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children" (13) and the institution of motherhood, "the foundation of human society" (39). When Rich separates a woman's potential to mother from the institution of motherhood, she questions and rejects the latter, not the former. As Suleiman has observed, one "can argue, as Rich and others have done, that the internal conflicts are the result of institutional forces." Even though "this argument can help us understand *why* the conflicts are internal, it does not eliminate them" (362-63). Rich's theory does not present hopeful solutions for women to overcome the overreaching power of the institution and restore the control of their maternal experience. The institution of

motherhood allows women to have "only certain views, certain expectations" (39) and ensures that their potential to mother "shall remain under male control" (13). To illustrate how this institution controls women, Rich contends that Christianity, for instance, has always identified motherhood as a negative experience in Western societies. In Judeo-Christian theology, "childbirth is punishment from God." Even the pain of childbirth was for many years justified as divine punishment in the past: "[s]ince the curse laid on Eve in Genesis was taken literally well into the nineteenth century, the mother in labor had to expect to suffer" (128). The views that a mother has to suffer and that childbirth is her punishment for defying her male god have reinforced the functions of birth, childrearing, and mothering as demeaning.

Because the institution of motherhood "insists that" women are "destined primarily for reproduction" (160) and "demands of [them] maternal 'instinct' rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self" (42), Rich also claims that it jeopardises women's potential to develop an artistic self, creating a conflict in their lives. The female intellectuals and artists of the twentieth century feel "that the choice [is] an inescapable either/or: motherhood or individuation, motherhood or creativity, motherhood or freedom." Having to face this choice is such a complicated feeling that Rich even compares the situation of a woman artist with that of a woman in poverty. In both cases, "the child [could] be perceived as a disaster, as an 'enemy within'" (160-161). In her negative perception of the relationship between motherhood and artistic production, Rich expresses her own personal experience,

for she is both mother and writer. Her "intellectual life, as a poet, is in constant opposition to the emotional and physical experience of maternity" (Malin 97). Aware of her own struggle with these two experiences, Rich seems convinced that "poetry can only be written by the part of the self that is not mother" (Jouve 164). If primitive societies once identified something powerful in women's potential to give birth (Rich 193), this power has been lost, and their womb, "the ultimate source of this power—has historically been turned against us and itself made into a source of powerlessness" (68). Rich, thus, suggests that, if a modern woman pursues a career in the arts, she must reject the mother to preserve the artist.

Whereas Beauvoir claims that women once experienced their femininity in motherhood in a natural way and Rich believes that, before the institutionalisation of women's experience, their maternal potential was a powerful function, Butler questions whether any female essence has ever existed. Woolf, Beauvoir, and Rich have ambiguous arguments about the existence of something essentially female and feminine and shared by all women. Instead of trying to separate this essence from the female and maternal roles that the patriarchal institutions have thrust on women, Butler more explicitly defines femininity and motherhood as simply social and cultural constructs. In *Gender Trouble* (1999), she argues that what we call maternal nature and instinct is merely "a culturally constructed desire" and "a product of an historically specific organization of sexuality," a discourse that is "itself suffused by power relations" (116, 118). Butler suggests that women cannot defy the oppressive discourses of femininity imposed upon them. Her theory is also gloomy because, while Woolf, Beauvoir, and Rich at

least hope that women can find ways to transgress or reject their femininity, Butler does not think that they can create alternative ways of being women and mothers outside patriarchy.

By questioning the existence of anything valuable in their female identity and proposing that women should transgress or completely reject it, Woolf, Beauvoir, Rich, and Butler believe, in different ways, that their radical solutions can solve the problems that women face in society. Clearly, their criticism tells many twentieth-century female intellectuals and artists that what is considered essential or natural about being a woman is actually a role that economical, social, and institutional structures have imposed upon them to control their experiences as daughters, wives, and mothers. As a restrictive construction, femininity is truly an obstacle in the personal and professional development of women searching for participation in engaging and meaningful positions in the public spheres. Particularly in the case of women who are mothers, these critics are adamant: the image of the mother becomes a "haunting presence" that "estranges women from themselves" (Jouve 164). Nevertheless, the feminist rejection of femininity and, particularly, of motherhood, leaves generations of women with many challenging questions unanswered later in the twentieth century. They asked if women's desire and potential to mother are only constructions forced by a society that aims to demean women as inferior individuals. If this is the only available narrative of motherhood, women artists following such feminist views may not succeed in using their artistic experience to transcend the female roles that patriarchy constructs and maintains in society.

In the lives of women who want to become mothers and at the same time search for engaging and active roles as artists, the uncertainty behind those questions and the decision to reject femininity and motherhood create even more anxiety. Dissatisfied with the rejectionist view expressed in the aforementioned theories, another group of feminists in the twentieth century asked if women could experience their female difference beyond the patriarchal construct of femininity and develop female discourses and practices that might give them agency and power. Furthermore, they also wondered whether women artists could use their empowering femininity—whether it is inherited or constructed—to create an unconventional and unique experience in art. Even though I agree that the discourses and systems that prevail in society have always conditioned female and maternal roles, I believe that women are able to find ways to challenge these roles while imagining alternatives that allow them to fuse the woman (or the mother) with the artist. For women writers who live in conservative cultures, the belief in women's ability to find powerful ways of existing in their female bodies or to construct meaningful discourses of femininity is particularly important. Through a feminine or feminist artistic expression, marginalised groups of women artists can defy their social, economic, and cultural restrictions and, at the same time, celebrate something powerful in their feminine condition.

"We Want Courageous Mothering":
The Maternal as Power in Feminism

Like Beauvoir, Rich, and Butler, feminist critics Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray are also concerned about the way conservative ideas of femininity and motherhood have dominated Western cultures, forcing women into accepting physical and psychological restrictions. In their view, women, especially those who are mothers, are subject to the objectification of their bodies, the loss of sexual power, and social rejection. However, becoming aware of this negative discourse "doesn't mean that we have to burn every thread of the myth of the natural mother as an utterly worthless and pernicious legacy" (Hall 343). Instead of completely rejecting motherhood and other so-called feminine and female roles, this second group of feminists propose the existence of innate characteristics in a woman's body, which are empowered and empowering. In their view, once women liberated this strong *féminínité*, they could use it against the male-centred thought and fight their social repression. Moreover, Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray suggest that women do not need to transgress their female existence to become artists. Since their female existence can be as powerful as active, artistic, and even political positions in society, women are able to combine their maternal and other female roles with an artistic identity, particularly with the image of the engaged artist that emerges in the twentieth century. This second group of feminists, thus, criticises traditional female roles while searching for ways to encourage their generation to participate in cultural production as both engaged artists and as powerful women.

Whereas the feminist critics whose works I just examined analyse women's oppression as the product of social, economic, and institutional structures, Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray focus on psychoanalytical and poststructuralist theories and believe that women have been objectified in society because of male-centred mindsets, which they call patriarchy or phallocentrism. Patriarchy dominates the construction of our being, thoughts, language, as well as our relationships with others. To secure men's authority in society, patriarchy controls the construction of women's identity and represses the power that women potentially have if allowed to develop their female nature. Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray "share a common opponent," patriarchy, but they "envision different modes of resisting and moving beyond it" (Jones 8).

In both her celebrated book *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) and a later article called "Stabat Mater" (1983), Kristeva argues that the restrictions created by the symbolic repress our mother's bodies. Roughly, Sigmund Freud's "Fetishism" and Jacques Lacan's "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" propose that an infant constructs his/her identity while becoming increasingly aware of his/her separation from the body of the mother and the phallic power of the father. During this moment, a child enters the symbolic, the space in which he or she learns to communicate and relate with others and apprehends the laws of society, the symbolic order. Freud and Lacan prioritise the dominance of the phallus, which they identify with the order of the symbolic. In contrast, Kristeva challenges their male-centred perspective and evaluates the role of the mother in the pre-symbolic phase, the semiotic. Prior to our entrance in the

symbolic system, we are immersed in a chaotic and yet powerful process, in which the *chora*, or "a nonexpressive totality [. . .] full of movement" allows the existence of our drives (*Revolution* 25). Kristeva's counter-discourse associates the semiotic drives to the body of the mother, since they "involve pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother" (27). The mother's body also "re-establish[es] what is nonverbal and show[s] up as the receptacle of a signifying disposition that is closer to so-called primary processes," which turn "culture into nature" ("Stabat Mater" 250, 259). In other words, the mother plays a valuable role in the formation of a powerful and creative part of our identity. However, at the same time that Kristeva believes that the maternal body "mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*" (*Revolution* 27), she minimises the subversive effect of the feminine semiotic and emphasises the supremacy of the patriarchal law. How can the female/semiotic fight the male/symbolic system if the former is negated and controlled by the latter? According to Butler, since "the semiotic is invariably subordinate to the symbolic" and because the semiotic drives "constitute a pre-discursive libidinal economy which occasionally makes itself known," Kristeva's theory "alternatively posits and denies the semiotic as an emancipatory ideal." Therefore, as a political practice, her strategy of subversion is not sustainable (Butler, "Body" 192-93).

The mother's body is undermined by institutions that reinforce the symbolic law in society, such as religion. Kristeva claims that "the *consecrated*

(religious or secular) representation of femininity" is "absorbed in motherhood" ("Stabat" 234). One example is the iconic figure of the Virgin Mary in the Catholic Church, which has supported a negative, weak version of motherhood that "gratifie[s] a male being" (236). In a collaborative work with Catherine Clément, Kristeva argues that women knowingly embrace this discourse of femininity because of the ambivalent maternal image that the saint represents. As "Mary, Mother of God (theotokos)" and "Mary the queen (regina)," the Virgin Mary provides women with "a very flattering picture of their own phallicism." While this religious image maintains women's "participation in the order of the powerful," it also encourages their "latent paranoia" (Clément and Kristeva 61). Promoting "a suffering lined with jubilation," this religious discourse leads women to allow their selves "a coded, fundamental, perverse behaviour […], without which society will not reproduce and will not maintain a constancy of standardized household" (Kristeva, "Stabat" 260). The institutionalisation of this representation of femininity is dangerous and, as Kristeva warns us, has "been used by totalitarian powers of all times to bring women to their side" (260). For that reason, feminists have negated this religious discourse and demanded "a new representation of femininity," but Kristeva claims that some feminist groups "identify motherhood with that idealized misconception and, because it reflects the image and its misuse, feminism circumvents the real experience that fantasy overshadows" (234). By separating the institutionalised image of the mother in religion from the "real" maternal experience, Kristeva distances herself from the

group of feminists who fail to understand the difference between the two and negate motherhood all together.

If the pre-symbolic stage offers women some level of power, how can they restore it, fight the patriarchal law of society, language, and even religion, and exist beyond their restrictive influence? Kristeva offers one answer to this question: art. Artistic expression can allow a subject to regress to the semiotic phase and momentarily overcome the symbolic order. Kristeva argues that in "'artistic' practices the semiotic—the precondition of the symbolic—is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic" (*Revolution* 50). The "semiotic expresses that original libidinal multiplicity within the very terms of culture, more precisely within poetic language," which "is the recovery of the maternal within the terms of language, one that has the potential to disrupt, subvert, and displace the paternal law" (Butler, "Body" 192). By claiming that this feminine semiotic can surface in artistic expression, Kristeva establishes a link between the feminine/maternal body and art and identifies them as liberating spaces that can be used to contest the constraints of the symbolic language and patriarchal society.[9]

Furthermore, Kristeva offers reassuring arguments for mothers who search for meaningful identities in art and other professions. A woman's procreative potential does not cancel out her possibility of developing other roles: "the mother

[9] Kristeva does not define poetic language as specifically female. In fact, when proposing that the powerful chaos of the semiotic comes to the surface in poetic language, she analyses literary works by male writers. Her omission of female literature suggests that she conceptualises sexual identity as a mutable process rather than as an essential and fixed entity. Kristeva's shifts in the references to the physical body, social gender, and psychic sex "can prove a great deal more fluid" than other theories about femininity (Still, "French" 269).

also remains a woman, with her desires and her erotic or professional 'doing'" (Clément and Kristeva 57). In "A New Type of Intellectual" (1977), Kristeva argues that "far from contradicting creativity (as the existentialist myth would still have us believe), maternity as such can favour a certain kind of female creation, provided that the economic constraints are not too heavy, at least in so far as it lifts fixations, and circulates passion between life and death, self and other, culture and nature, singularity and ethics, narcissism and self-denial" (298). The act of mothering, she continues, "may thus well be called Penelope's tapestry or Leibniz's network, depending on whether it follows the logic of gestures or thought, but it always succeeds in connecting up heterogeneous sites" (298). Kristeva not only compares the maternal role with Penelope's artistic creation—the ancient myth of the mother as an artist—but also challenges the typical feminist perception of these two positions as contradictory. After all, "real female innovation (in whatever social field) will only come about when maternity, female creation and the link between them are better understood" (298). Kristeva's theories represent "an important turn of French feminist theory" because she "rejects the either/or dilemma and suggests that motherhood and feminine creation go hand in hand" (Sulleiman 366-67). Hence, although she recognises the restrictions imposed upon mothers by the symbolic system, religious views, and economic limitations, Kristeva believes that motherhood is not an obstacle but a tool for creative productions such as art.

In "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), Cixous does not ignore that the phallogocentric logic—centred on both the laws of speech and the phallus—

establishes linguistic and societal relations based on binary oppositions such as the masculine/feminine. These oppositions are problematic because "[f]or one of the terms to acquire meaning [. . .] it must destroy the other" (Moi 105). In this battle, the male holds power while the female is denied any signification and is "reduced to being a servant of the militant male, his shadow" (Cixous 880-81). However, instead of defining femininity only as a set of restrictive roles and behaviours thrust upon women by the phallogocentric logic, Cixous describes femininity and motherhood as meaningful endeavours. In a system that has denied women access to the logos and, therefore, the possibility of articulating their voices, women must speak from and through their bodies and exist "in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic" (881). Whereas the phallogocentric/symbolic logic defines the female body as a space of emptiness, lack, and silence, Cixous believes that a woman's body can actually "articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction" (885). During her communication, a woman "throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the 'logic' of her speech." Although she lacks a logos, a woman "physically materializes what she's thinking" and "signifies it with her body" (881).

While the female body can literarily generate meaning, a mother's body and its reproductive potential create life. According to Cixous, "giving birth is neither losing nor increasing" as we have traditionally thought; it is "adding to life an other" (891). When a woman embraces "the unsurpassed pleasures of

pregnancy," she "takes on intrinsic value as a woman in her own eyes and, undeniably, acquires body and sex" (891). Cixous may echo "the coercive glorification of motherhood that has plagued women for centuries" (Jones 14), but she does not celebrate the traditional image of the mother that her feminist counterparts have feared and rejected. Cixous does not "mean the overbearing, clutchy 'mother'" (882). On the contrary, she proposes the existence of an empowering experience of motherhood that

> touches you, the equivoice that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the rhythm that laughs you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body (body? bodies?), no more describable than god, the soul, or the Other; that part of you that leaves a space between yourself and urges you to inscribe in language your woman's style. (882)

Cixous, thus, struggles to develop unconventional ideas of motherhood in which a woman's body does not negate female expression. In general, the female body facilitates the invention of an alternative language that "will wreck partitions, classes, rhetoric, regulations and codes" (886). The maternal body similarly provides mothers with "a force that […] will knock the wind out of the codes" (882). Instead of reinforcing those codes, the female body can actually help women fight the repression of the patriarchal system.

When women finally uncover the meaningful potential of their bodies, they can also create a powerful type of art or, more precisely, a mode of "writing,

from and toward women" (881), which Cixous calls *écriture féminine*. Just as men's traditional writing has "been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy" (879), women's writing artistic experiences have been shaped by the "cosmic" libido of the female body (889) because literary production is "determined particularly by sexual difference" ("Reaching" 2). For instance, Cixous examines Clarice Lispector's novels and short stories and argues that her female characters embody a strong and fluid concept of femininity. Their identities constantly flow, "continuing" and "extending" (20). At the same time, Lispector's writing serves as a model of *écriture féminine* (9), as I will later discuss in the context of the woman artist in Brazilian literature. However, even though Cixous envisions an empowering female experience and artistic expression, her theory is flawed, idealistic, and over-generalised. First, like Kristeva, Cixous does not clearly explain how the new language and artistic expression can resist female oppression. She even discredits the ability of this female language to dismantle the silencing of women when claiming that it "is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded" ("Laugh" 883). One might ask, thus, how women can react if they do not know how to consciously employ *écriture féminine*. Second, Cixous has been criticised for idealising femininity and proposing a "utopian evocation of the imaginative power of women" (Moi 126). Finally, when she claims that "a woman is never far from 'mother'" (881), Cixous runs the risk of imposing the traditional view that motherhood is a pre-condition for femininity, which

oversimplifies women's experience. By believing that women share something "in common" (875), Cixous may be overlooking particular ethnical and cultural contexts: "is women's sexuality so monolithic that a notion of a shared, typical femininity does justice to it?" (Jones 14). Yet, Cixous does not ignore the plural nature of female identity, for she actually emphasises that "there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman." Because of "the infinite richness of [women's] individual constitutions," Cixous continues, "you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes" (876). As I show in Chapters Three and Four, women's specific environments affect their ontological experiences and the development of their artistic expressions.

Nonetheless, Cixous's definition of *écriture féminine* is particularly significant because it emphasises the subversive function of women's art. Despite Cixous's refusal to be labelled a "feminist" (Moi 103), her arguments are more politicised than Kristeva's study of the semiotic. Kristeva does not explain how the female body and its semiotic can serve as a counter-discourse to resist the hegemonic power of the symbolic. Cixous, by contrast, argues that female literature provides women with the possibility of becoming the "I-woman," a subject who can "blow up the Law" ("Laugh" 887). It "can serve as a springboard for subversive thought," as well as "the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (879). Moreover, Cixous proposes an intimate relationship between this special artistic expression and motherhood. While a woman's procreative potential allows her to write "in white ink" (881), the gestation drive is also "like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a

desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood" (891). By comparing maternal experience and practice with literary creation, Cixous suggests that motherhood is not a threat to the artistic self. On the contrary, women artists can challenge the view that motherhood restricts and destroys their artistic identity and reconsider an alternative solution: their ability to generate meaning in art can be as empowering as their potential to create life.

Irigaray is also aware of the crushing force of patriarchal values. In *This Sex which Is Not One* (1977), she claims that patriarchy defines a woman as "a beautiful object of contemplation" (26) and a "chaste retreat in order to stimulate the drives of the [male] 'subject'" (26). Patriarchy also represents the female body through ideas of "lack" and "deficiency" (78). Such negative definitions of femininity are products of women's relationship to men and children in the patriarchal tradition and reinforce the view that, as an empty space, the female body is complete only through sexual intercourse with a man and the conception of a child. In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1984), Irigaray argues that a mother is deprived of her subjectivity because she "is supposed only to be a container for the child" and "for the man," "[b]ut not for herself" (41). Indeed, "the maternal-feminine" simply "serves as an *envelope*, a *container.*" When a woman is defined as "*a thing*" (10), both femininity and the experience of motherhood are devalued. However, patriarchy has convinced women to accept the images of their bodies as a space of void and to comply with negative perceptions of motherhood. In Irigaray's view, women believe that, by becoming mothers, they will fill out this void and restore the power taken away from them by the symbolic order.

Nevertheless, they can only be phallic mothers, a term Irigaray takes from the psychoanalytic theories that define the mother only in opposition to the authority of the phallus. The phallic mother's power is illusory because it "exists only 'within' a system organized by men" (*This Sex* 142). In fact, mothers who play this role never gain any agency. This maternal experience only "fills the gaps in a repressed female sexuality" and reduces women with their "own complicity, to sexual impotence" (27, 30).

The phallic maternal is, nevertheless, not the only threat to women. The relationship that a mother has with her child, particularly a daughter, is harmful because the patriarchal mindset—including the discourse of psychoanalysis—encourages daughters to reject their mothers. Roughly, in Freud's analysis, although a female infant initially longs for a union with her mother in a moment of self-identification, her entrance in the symbolic order is only complete when she rejects her mother and desires her father. In Freud's view, the female infant, on the one hand, renounces her mother out of the fear of identification with her deficient body and, on the other, becomes envious of her father's phallus. Irigaray claims that Freud's theory is problematic because the daughter's envy "*leads her to turn away from her mother*, whom she blames for having so badly endowed her, sexually speaking, and whose fate […] she herself shares: like her mother, she herself is castrated" (*This Sex* 40). In other words, if the female infant continues to believe in the deficiency of her body, she will constantly search for an idea of completion that will transform her into another phallic (m)other. Freud's psychoanalytic discourse reinforces a negative view of femininity that

places mother and daughter on opposing sides. Most of all, Irigaray criticises Freud for simply accepting that "the daughter has to turn away from her mother" and "'hate' her, in order to enter into the Oedipus complex" (143). Even though Irigaray partially agrees with Freud in the sense that a daughter may reject her mother, the feminist critic looks for an alternative that does not construct the maternal in such negative terms. She "insists on the need for *redefining* the process of maternal identification, but she does not try to *deny* the psychic and cultural processes of assimilation and aggression that are still with us" (Carrière 47). Like the example of the female infant in Freud's theory, we have all been rejecting the figure of the mother not only in patriarchal societies but also in feminist theories.

Searching for a new concept of the maternal that could challenge the objectification, deficiency, and rejection of the mother figure in our culture, Irigaray argues that the negative images of the female body disseminated by the patriarchal thought are only "masquerades of 'femininity' that are expected of" women (*This Sex* 27). Motherhood is not, or at least should not be, a practice that objectifies and negates a woman's body: "Hasn't woman been imagined as passive only because man would fear to lose mastery in that particular [maternal] act?" (*Ethics* 44). By suggesting that this passive view of femininity is the product of an image imposed by society, Irigaray gives women hope. They can develop an empowering way of being a woman and mother from the uniqueness of their *sexué* body and its *jouissance*. Female sexuality cannot be reduced to those negative images precisely because of the complex nature of a woman's sex

organs. Since a "*woman has sex organs more or less everywhere*" and "finds pleasure almost anywhere," Irigaray claims, "the geography of [female] pleasure is far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than its commonly imagined" (*This Sex* 28). Irigaray uses this space of intense pleasure as a metaphor for a strong concept of female existence/identity because the female body allows women not only to experience sexuality in powerful ways, but also to exist as a subject—not an object—in an open, elusive, almost poetic existence. In *The Speculum of Other Woman* (1974), she also suggests that female subjectivity cannot be simplified, since the "indefinite, in-finite, form" of a woman's identity "is never complete." A woman, Irigaray continues, "is not infinite but neither is she a unit(y), such as letter, number, figure in series, proper noun, unique object (in a) world of the senses, simple ideality in an intelligible whole, entity of a foundation, etc." Instead of minimising the elusiveness of female condition as a deficiency, Irigaray celebrates it: "This incompleteness in [a woman's] form, her morphology, allows her to continually become something else" (229). Although Irigaray has also been accused of theorising essentialist ideas of femininity, she actually describes femininity as existing beyond the rigid roles imposed by the patriarchal discourse and beyond essential biologism. If we understand that she conceptualises the female body as a space in which femininity is subject to a process of continuous transformations, then Irigaray does not suggest that female identity and sexuality are fixed or natural but, rather, fluid endeavours.

Even though patriarchy pressures women into perceiving their bodies as incomplete, closing themselves "off as volume," and renouncing their physical "pleasure" (*This Sex* 30), Irigaray still believes that mothers should not give up their empowering sexuality and identity. She does not ignore the fact that, even under the control of the patriarchal thought, women are granted "social power" (30). Nevertheless, a truly liberating discourse of motherhood can only be found when women reconcile with their mothers and when society in general learns to respect both of them. According to Irigaray, "[t]his is one of the most difficult gestures for our culture" because the father-son relationship has dominated our traditions for centuries (68). However, Irigaray claims, "[w]omen must love one another both as mothers, with a maternal love, and as daughters, with a filial love" (*Ethics* 105). If women can develop this type of love, they will be able to respect themselves in childhood and later on in their "creative maternal function" (*This Sex* 68). Moreover, when mothers and daughters manage to have loving relationships, women can implement changes in their social and political realities: they "must successfully create an ethical order and establish the conditions necessary for women's action" (*Ethics* 108). Irigaray's focus on alternative types of relationships among women is, thus, a starting point to redefine alternative discourses and practices of motherhood, not only in the private world of families but also in the large level of society. Marie Carrière explains that if, "as Freud's and Lacan's theories have presupposed, the relation with the mother is considered an archaic, asocial fusion that must undergo a hostile separation so that subjectivity can socially constitute itself, what hope would there be for a relational

ethics among adults?" The answer to this question, Carrière adds, "at least for Irigaray, lies in the rethinking of the mother-child bond" (45). Irigaray's critique of daughters' rejection of their mothers in psychoanalytical theories is therefore an attempt to make society in general learn to respect mothers. According to Judith Still, Irigaray expresses the "urgent" need "to address the devaluing of the maternal" and to question "the crime that founds our civilization," which is, for her, "an originary matricide" ("Continuing" 268). Instead of rejecting maternal experience, she proposes an ethical relationship with mothers in the domains of family and society.

Women can find their alternative female and maternal existence outside this patriarchal society and logic, in the "*elsewhere of female pleasure*" (*This Sex* 77). Irigaray believes that in this alternative space, women's articulation becomes possible (100). Their articulation is particularly significant because women have been excluded from the active production of culture. While "[m]an has been the subject of discourse, whether in theory, morality, or politics," women have been left with "the so-called minor arts: cooking, knitting, embroidery, and sewing; and, in exceptional cases, poetry, painting, and music" (*Ethics* 7). To challenge the male dominance in the tradition of arts and even in language itself, women should create a powerful mode of expression, a speech that can capture the elusiveness and complexity nature of their femininity. She proposes the existence of a female language that subverts the foundations of traditional language. Such a language has "contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason" (*This Sex* 29-30). Its style "does not privilege sight;" it is, rather, "tactile,"

simultaneous, and "fluid." Irigaray's concept of female expression is as subversive as that envisioned by Cixous, but also equally problematic. Since the style of *écriture féminine* "resists and explodes every firmly established form, figure, idea or concept," it cannot be heard or formalised, otherwise it is reduced into the discursive economy of the symbolic, the "fully elaborated codes" (79, 29). Therefore, *écriture féminine* can never exist in the concept of language that we know. Irigaray is conscious of the flaw in what she proposes, but "how can women analyze their own exploitation, inscribe their own demands, within an order prescribed by the masculine?" (81). The cyclical logic of Irigaray's theory also undermines the possibility of developing this female writing: the existence of a complex discourse of femininity and female identity can only be captured through a fluid language that, in turn, only exists through the liberation of an empowering female condition. Perhaps the elusiveness and obscurity of her theory make Irigaray's text an example of *écriture féminine* that she so passionately defines.

As a reaction to the female role thrust upon women throughout centuries of oppression, the theories by Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray manage to combine women's unique experience with female artistic expression. Even though they are aware that society has restricted women because of the difference of the female body, particularly women's potential to become mothers, the three feminists do not dismiss the image of the mother as the objectified and passive being that modern women should surely reject. Instead, Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray attempt to understand the problematic representations of the mother in Western

society. They also refuse to perceive the maternal discourses and practices dictated by the large structures of society as the only option available to the individual. Their feminist counterparts' view forces women to hate not only the discourse of motherhood that patriarchy imposes, but also the variable and complex nature of maternal experience itself. In different ways, the three critics discussed in this section believe in alternative ways of existing as a woman and mother. Their "turn to *féminité*" represents "a challenge to male-centered thinking" (Jones 7). At the same time, their strategies suggest that it is possible to revalue motherhood as a meaningful, pleasurable, and empowering practice that is not an obstacle to female artistic creativity.

Mothers as Artists and Artists as Mothers in Female Writing

> When I was born, one of those svelte angels
> Who plays a trumpet proclaimed:
> this one will carry a flag.
> A heavy load for a woman,
> even nowadays such a bashful species.
> [. . .]
> well, yes and no, I believe in childbirth
> without pain.
> But what I fell, I write. I make good on the
> prophecies.
> I establish lineages, whole kingdoms
> (pain is not bitterness)
> [. . .]
> It's a man's curse to be lame in life,
> woman's to unfold. I do.
> Adélia Prado, "With Poetic Licence"

> Woman's creation far from being like man's
> must be exactly like her creation of children,
> that is it must come out of her own blood,
> englobed by her womb, nourished with her
> own milk. It must be a human creation, of

> flesh, it must be different from man's abstractions.
> Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*

Feminists have exposed the societal, psychological, and professional restrictions faced by mothers who want to pursue careers in the arts. While in "the sixties, feminists repudiated the excessive Romantic vision of motherhood, identifying in it the roots of oppression" (Forna 21), in the seventies and eighties, they "questioned Motherhood as an institution" and "worked at separating motherhood from mothering" (Jouve 180). In their theories, feminists escape the constraints of patriarchal motherhood not only by rejecting the burdensome albeit mysterious role of the mother, but also by finding meaning in the maternal experience. As I have also shown, when discussing the relationship between women's experience as mothers and artists, feminists respond with ambivalent positions. Their views express the eagerness of women artists to gain more space in cultural production and their uncertainties about the threat and power of motherhood. Woolf, Beauvoir, and Rich doubt that women can reconcile the conflict between femininity and art and between motherhood and art unless they shatter the institution of motherhood and become courageous mothers. More optimistically, Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous believe that women should rescue the maternal role—which is as empowering as artistic expression—from the oppressive phallogocentric system. In the second half of the twentieth century, women writers also represented in their works the modern woman artist's personal and professional experience, particularly when this woman artist is a mother.

To begin examining their perception of a woman's private and artistic identities, I would like to analyse this section's two epigraphs, which are taken from the works of two women writers, and were produced when Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous were exploring the concepts of female subjectivity and art. The speaker in the poem by the Brazilian poet Adélia Prado explains that women carry a flag from their birth, "a heavy load for a woman" (6), but neither their burden nor the pain they feel through childbirth intimidates Prado's poetic persona. Instead of rejecting the difference of her body, she celebrates women's procreative potential and links it to their creative potential to "establish lineages" and "whole kingdoms" (6). Therefore, the difference of the female body does not necessarily make women vulnerable. Prado's speaker actually believes that women can unfold their selves, a view that underlines the powerful quality of female identity. When the French-American writer Anaïs Nin claims that women's literary creation should come out of a woman's "blood, englobed by her womb, nourished with her own milk" (*Diary* 2: 233), she distinguishes female writing from men's creative production. More than simply celebrating the uniqueness of female art, Nin also recognises the value of women's maternal potential and places it on the same level as art. Both writers express great confidence in their potential to mother and erase the boundaries between this function of their body with their ability to create art. This attempt to question the apparent conflict between maternal and artistic identities is not restricted to women writers. Many feminist artists and activists in North American in the 1970s and 1980s "collapsed the distinction between the private world of

motherhood and public realm of activism to create art works that brought their perspective as mothers to feminist causes" (Moravec 70).

The attempts of both feminists and artists to reconcile private and public spheres in the late twentieth century deserve further analysis. Possibly, the theories proposed by Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigaray influenced women artists such as Prado and Nin in the second half of twentieth century. Or, perhaps, women writers' works only captured the changes in their realities during the time as women expressed their desire to restore the value of female difference and the maternal body and reconcile femininity with public identities, accessible in the political, economical, and artistic spaces. I believe that the two processes cannot be separated and that they happened simultaneously. The increasing number of fictional representations of women who try to combine their female difference and/or their maternal potential with their public roles as artists was not simply a coincidence. Female literature that examines the concerns of women artists and mother-artists is inevitably under the influence of the feminist analysis of motherhood during this period. After the second wave of feminism, there is "an explosion of women's writing about pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, and motherhood" (Friedman 67). At the same time, the large number of works exploring women's feelings of hope and anxiety toward the relationship between motherhood and creativity is also representative of how women artists felt in the second half of the twentieth century. Many artists of that period realised that overcoming the restrictive maternal roles, which haunted women artists throughout the century, may be arduous but not impossible.

Although the fictional representation of women artists and mother-artists in female literature in the second half of the twentieth century is optimistic, it is not generally idealistic. Just as the feminists analysed in the previous two sections expose the restrictions that women, particularly mothers, face in a system that devalues their roles and identities, the women writers who produce artist fiction believe that their societies do not respect the uniqueness of their bodies and thus use female differences to control and undermine their potential. I do not claim that, by writing about women's artistic experiences, women writers find easy and romanticised solutions to the problems that twentieth-century women artists encountered in the maternal roles imposed on them, their mothers, grandmothers and other female predecessors. Rather, in their artist fiction, female writers show that their roles as women and especially as mothers inevitably continue to influence their artistic careers in negative ways even though they face fewer restrictions in pursuing public positions than do their female predecessors. Indeed, their works suggest that the women who wrote in the second half of the twentieth still agreed with their nineteenth-century counterparts that maternal roles create limitations that are different from those experienced by male artists who have children. A man's parental experience rarely restricts his literary career, for he can easily "find a woman partner who will take on the family while the man gets down to writing" (Cowan, Lam, and Stonehouse xix). Furthermore, "Men do not usually have to choose between art and family: they can have one or the other or both fully, and keep the family at arm's length, or even abandon the family with impunity" (xix). As I will illustrate in the subsequent chapters, the conflict

between professional interest and maternal obligations in a woman's life is perhaps the major obstacle that prevents the protagonists of Brazilian and Canadian artist fiction from perceiving the relationship between motherhood and art as harmonious and complementary as Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous propose. Often, the woman artist portrayed in fiction in the second half of the twentieth century struggles with the conflicting nature of this relationship and feels that she has to reject either the mother or the artist. This divide, as well as the lack of choices, is destructive in the lives of the majority of the female protagonists of the artist fiction of the time. When this literary figure sacrifices her professional ambition, she clearly fails as an artist. A woman artist who has children and neglects them for the sake of her work often becomes "a 'thwarted mother' type of artist" (DuPlessis 92). Even the female character who rejects her maternal potential is led to perceive her devotion to artistic expression as something "unfeminine" (Stewart, "Mother, Daughter"130).

The following chapters will show that the female protagonists of Brazilian and Canadian artist fiction cannot easily escape the duality between the maternal body and the creative mind and between the private space assigned to women and the public identity developed by artists. Still, when the fictional woman artist represented in female fiction produced in these two countries in the second half of the twentieth century feels trapped in such binary oppositions, their entrapment should not be considered a complete failure. Their authors dare create mothers who are for a short time engaged in an artistic and even political act. Although their heroines may not succeed in completely merging their public and private

lives, women writers' portraits of the artist are important because they challenge both the masculine figure of the artist in cultural production and the devalued role of the woman in their societies. As such, their works are political strategies, especially when women writers represent conservative communities that endorse both the masculine image of the male artist and the cultural restriction of mothers. This conservative background is usually represented in the works by Brazilian women writers.

I do not overlook the fact that such a conflict continues to be part of the way modern women artists perceive the relationship between their female condition and their professional careers in the arts. However, I avoid emphasising the view that only those binary oppositions define women artists' experiences. I believe that examining their artistic and personal development beyond the either/or approach is indeed more productive. It also reflects women's criticism of such dualities in the second half of the twentieth century. After all, many of the female intellectuals and writers of that period ask whether there are "alternative to the either/or" and whether they are always "forced to write the book and deny the child […] or love the child and postpone/renounce the book"(Suleiman 360). The same women who often "feel torn apart by the conflicting pulls of work and child" can also believe in the possibility of "[i]ntegration" and "connection" (Suleiman 365) and address the need "to look for ways to 'bridge' and ultimately live and work on this bridge that can connect the woman writer's work to her motherhood" (Malin 93). As a result, many female writers begin to write the woman artist's life in ways that could give their heroines the opportunity to go

beyond that two-way route in the end of their narratives. The novels that I analyse in the upcoming chapters suggest that some women writers express constructive and optimistic views in two ways.

First, they challenge the image of the woman artist as an individual who must transgress her female condition. The typical portrait of the woman artist in the second half of the twentieth century celebrates "female artistry" and "revaluates the woman as the exemplary creator" (Gubar, "Birth" 25-26). Artist fiction by Canadian and Brazilian female writers frequently depicts women who underline their female experience in their texts, panels, and music. Although these authors reject the restrictive narratives of femininity that their societies create, they do not detach themselves from their female condition upon artistic production. Those who find an empowering discourse of femininity and motherhood in their lives and in the lives of their mothers and predecessors, as it the case of many women artists represented in Canadian fiction, use their art to show the value of their experience as women and mothers. In contrast, women artists who feel discriminated against and/or surrounded by women who live in the margins use their art to expose the social, political, and artistic restrictions of women. They denounce their marginalisation while still creating works that express the subject matter of the female body or female identity. Thus, their art is no less feminine than the works of women artists who celebrate an alternative discourse of femininity and more explicitly adopt feminist views.

Second, a group of women writers emerging at the time redefine the experience and practice of motherhood in valuable and empowering ways in their

artist fiction. They begin to see motherhood as "a way to relate, a way to write" (Suleiman 365). In their view, motherhood can become productive acts and discourses that not only "foster creativity" (Jeremiah 235), but also "confer to mothers the agency, authority, authenticity, and autonomy denied to them in patriarchal motherhood" (Podnieks and O'Reilly 18). While the feminists "sought to give voice to maternal subjectivity" (O'Reilly, "Mother" 500), the women writers who followed feminist concepts of motherhood produce in their artist fiction a mother who can exist as a subject and a meaningful creator. Furthermore, when the authors create a female character who attempts to combine art and motherhood, their works become political statements because "[t]he figure of the mother-artist represents the possibility for social change" (Gerber 9). Indeed, the constructive cycles in which women writers place their heroines inspire changes in women's lives and challenge their quintessential conflict between art and life. When mothers have the opportunity to become artistically and politically empowered, they can develop alternative discourses and practices of motherhood that, in turn, allow them balance their positions as mothers and artists. I am aware of the danger of romanticising women's integration of their biological and artistic roles. At the same time, I believe that affirmations of a positive connection between the two roles can be "subversive" strategies in cultures that have "relied on the public/private, mind/body distinctions" (Jeremiah 235). As I will argue throughout the rest of my study, the suggestions, critiques, and perhaps idealisations of the lives women artists in female fiction can serve as a starting point for understanding the figure of the mother in our cultures, redefining the

concept of motherhood beyond patriarchal discourses, and finally creating possibilities of connecting women's roles as artists with their experiences as mothers.

Chapter 3. Lives of Mothers and Daughters in Brazil and Canada: Female Art and Femininity across Generations

> I wanted to write more about my feelings about mothers.
> Margaret Laurence, *Dance on Earth*
>
> How to get straight with the mother? How to celebrate her? How do get rid of her? How to get the end of this shame?
> Magdalene Redekop, *Mothers and Other Clowns*

When their novels depict women increasingly aware of the significance of their mothers, Brazilian and Canadian female writers validate Woolf's belief that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (610). The modern women artists' attempt to establish connections with their female ancestors (mothers, aunts, grandmothers, stepmothers, foremothers, and other mothers figures), however, depends on more than emotions shared between mothers and daughters. Mothers pass down discourses of femininity that frustrate their intellectual and artistic daughters or inspire them to fight for the active roles of writers, artists, and political thinkers. Cultural factors also influence those discourses and, in turn, affect women's process of maturing into artists. Indeed, "sexuality [...] and the meaning and practice of motherhood, are experiences [that carry] strong cultural boundaries" (Sarti, "Feminismo brasileiro" 44). According to Butler, "what passes as 'maternal instinct' may well be a culturally constructed desire" (*Gender Trouble* 116). The female ancestors' impact on the careers of the young women represented in the novels I examine must be understood within the cultural contexts of Brazil and Canada because the structures and beliefs that sustain each

of these societies—religion, gender expectations, and literary representations—define and manipulate the mother's roles and agency.

I will argue that the cultural constructions of motherhood that shape the central characters' female ancestors in the past affect differently the fictional women artists' aspirations in each of these literary traditions. Their female ancestors are literary manifestations of the generations of mothers who existed from the late nineteenth century (grandmothers and foremothers) to the first half of the twentieth century (mothers, aunts, and mothers-in-law), whereas the young protagonists represent the group of women who were actively involved in feminist discussions and/or creative productions in the second half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, the dominant discourse of femininity in Brazil confines the protagonists' mothers to submissive roles in the same way that it silenced former generations of women and marginalised those who questioned their oppression before the 1960s. These silent and silenced mothers paralyse the protagonists just as the belief in the lack of strong female models was one of the factors that frustrated women's feminist activism and artistic production from the 1960s to the 1990s. On the other hand, the protagonists' ancestors in Canadian fiction exist as speaking and often artistic subjects and symbolise the unconventional and artistic ancestors who challenged—albeit not completely changed—rigid female roles in the past. They teach the young protagonists of Canadian fiction to be as courageous as the Canadian feminist and female writers who inherited from their female ancestors the example, as well as the motivation,

to embrace alternative discourses of femininity and ensure their inclusion in the arts.

I have organised my analysis of the protagonists' mothers in three different categories: mothers who have been silenced or erased from the aspiring artists' lives in Brazilian fiction; maternal figures who inspire the young protagonists in Canadian novels; and a group of mothers that embody transitional constructions of motherhood in both literary representations of the woman artist. The first two sections trace typical models of female ancestors in Brazilian and Canadian artist fiction whereas the last section examines novels in which the protagonists' mothers challenge the dominant narratives of motherhood of each culture from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s. For each category, I examine the roles, behaviours, and attitudes of former generations of women in the novels and their influence on the protagonists' artistic development in early stages of their lives. This division of the protagonists' maternal characters into three groups, instead of two, will provide distinct discourses of motherhood and allow for the variations that the authors perceive in their specific cultures, as well as the transitions that occurred in the life of their female ancestors.

Silenced and Missing Mothers:
Oppressive Models in Brazilian Artist Novels

In Brazilian female artist novels, the protagonists grow up in a cultural environment in which mothers are often silenced, thwarted, or completely absent. The previous generations of women do not seem to affect the fictional artists'

maturing process. However, the lack of powerful female models has detrimental consequences on the lives of young women who grow up in the transitional period in the middle of the twentieth century, such as the protagonist of Lispector's *Perto do coração selvagem* (1944), and those who become adults after 1950s, such as the female characters represented in Cunha's *Mulher no espelho* (1983) and *As doze cores do vermelho* (1988) and Luft's *O quarto fechado* (1984). The concepts of femininity and motherhood silence the female figures who nurture the main characters and contribute to the creation of insecure young women who postpone or abandon their artistic careers in the early stages of their lives. But before explaining the impact of earlier generations on the novels' protagonists, I will argue that a similar discourse of motherhood prevailed in Brazil in the first half of the twentieth century, constraining the lives of the women who were mothers and placing those who were considered rebellious in the margins of society. In Brazilian fiction and the social reality it represents, this conservative image of the mother effaces empowering female models for subsequent generations.

In Brazil, the control of women's sexuality, rights, and maternal roles developed from conservative ideologies, exploitations, and power conflicts. Rita Schmidt argues that "to evaluate the function and symbols of a cultural discourse based on the subjugation and control in social relationships, [we need to examine] the perspective of groups [that have held] power in the history of Brazilian society and the prevailing tradition of patriarchal and conservative mindsets, which do not follow contemporary critical reflections" ("Refutações" 775). Two of these powerful groups, the state and the Catholic Church, have been responsible for

defining maternal roles in Brazil (Schmidt 777-78). For example, the discourse of motherhood was under the influence of the government in the nineteenth century. During this time, the typical image of the Brazilian Republic was a mother (in Portuguese, the word *pátria*, or motherland, is also a feminine noun). Initially, as a national symbol, the mother holds power, but this metaphor suggests the opposite. This portrayal of the *pátria* as a mother was "based on [the figure of] a woman in the context of marriage and family, in which she plays her role as procreator of citizens who are intimately linked to a theological perspective" that defends women's "great national destiny" (Schmidt, "Refutações" 781). The Catholic Church also sustained a patriarchal image of motherhood embodied by the Virgin Mary. In Brazil and other Latin American countries, the cult of the Virgin Mary survived well into the twentieth century in the ideology of *marianism*, which according to Susan Tiano, "glorifies motherhood and cultivates women to be self-sacrificing moral guardians of the family" (265). By celebrating only the mother's great destiny, these societies restricted the idea of motherhood to women's reproductive functions and excluded their contribution to the public sphere. The cult of this traditional image of the mother in the nineteenth century explains why the woman artist represented in Bormann's *Lésbia* rejects these maternal expectations to pursue her career as an artist.

Moreover, the cultural production of that time reinforced similar ideas of femininity and motherhood. Brazilian women were discouraged from participating in their culture not only as writers but also as readers. Whereas upper class women received an education and began to take part in the literary and

intellectual productions of Europe and North America, wealthy families in Brazil widely accepted female illiteracy. Until the 1820s, when the first girls' school was founded in Rio de Janeiro, women's illiteracy was considered "a sign of nobility" and "an essential contribution to morality, for [it] prevented women from corresponding with their secret lovers" (Hallewell 160). Even though a larger number of upper-class families allowed young girls to join those schools in the major cities of the country by the mid-nineteenth century (Hallewell 160), the discourse of femininity made available to literate female readers did not change. The artistic production and criticism of the nineteenth century supported a passive image of femininity. Male "literature, plays, and newspaper articles" of the time "attempted to ridicule the [few] female doctors and insist[ed] that it would be impossible to […] take care of children and follow a career" (Duarte, "Feminismo" 206). During the same period, literary criticism and history acknowledged the existence of female celebrities; however, even the concept of women's celebrity "was based on the metaphor of the 'republican mother'" (Hollanda, ""El estraño" 109-10).

In the first half of twentieth century, this traditional discourse of femininity continued to control women's roles in society and, by extension, silenced or marginalised their creative potential. It is true that some women gained more public space than their nineteenth-century ancestors had been allowed. Significant changes in the period around the First World War, such as technological innovations and the development of the mass media, contributed to transforming the lives of young women in Brazil. Aware of the changes in female

behaviours in North America and Europe, these young women became "more conspicuous" and participated in public events (Rachum 120).[10] Unfortunately, "the number of Brazilian girls who took full advantage of the social and cultural climate of the postwar period was small" (Rachum 121). As a result, many women writers who came to maturity in the second half of the twentieth century were aware of the oppressive status of their mothers and foremothers. Telles, for instance, explains that the typical Brazilian women of earlier generations were "confined in the house […] imprisoned, illiterate" and "subject to a servitude that was worse than in other countries" ("Mulher escritora" 57). Cunha also expresses her "perplexity" at the submissive roles of the women she "saw in [her] childhood and teens, in the 30s and 40s" ("Becoming Whole" 229).

I do not wish to claim that women writers did not exist in Brazil prior to the 1960s. Even in the nineteenth century, a small group of women received an education, rebelled against the dominant discourse of femininity represented in literature, and, finally, had the courage to pursue a literary career. Nevertheless, Maria Bormann, Júlia Lopes, and the few other female writers who managed to establish a career during this time confronted a biased literary market and readership that rejected their books and discredited their value. Bormann seems to be an exceptional case, but her critics also regarded her writing as scandalous (N. Telles, "Introdução" n. pag.). Moreover, the nineteenth-century female literary tradition "disappeared" as these authors were "excluded from the canon by the [literary] history and critique," which "systematically eliminated women from

[10] In the period between the wars, "Daughters of respected families began to be seen on the beaches, attending rowing contests or soccer games, and being driven in automobiles" in the larger cities of Brazil (Rachum 120).

belles-lettres" (Duarte, "Arquivos" 65-66). Women writers were barely mentioned in literary criticism and anthologies until the 1980s, when researchers decided to uncover and study the works of female writers from the past (Duarte, "Arquivos" 65).[11]

As had happened in the previous centuries, a small number of women artists attracted attention in Brazil's cultural community in the first half of the twentieth century. In the visual arts, the painters Tarsila do Amaral and Anita Malfatti challenged their society "with an alternative system of values" (Rachum 122). As an influential example, Amaral established a prominent career abroad, while playing a major role in the construction of Brazilian modernist art with the famous Group of Five (Lamas 59-60). Meanwhile, in literature, Queiroz "made her way into the literary, journalistic and political scenario, spaces defined as exclusively masculine" (Duarte, "Feminismo" 212). However, the omission of other female writers in the anthologies of the time suggests that an artistic career was still restricted to men.[12] Since professional female writers were being ignored, many women might have abandoned their pursuit of a literary career. Telles's

[11] Besides restricting women's literary production, the traditional perception of femininity that prevailed in the nineteenth century undermined women's political activism in the first wave of feminist movement. Although Brazilian women founded and circulated magazines and journals during this time (Duarte, "Feminismo" 201, Muzart par. 2, Tiano 272), "the feminist campaigns in England and the United States in the years prior to World War I did not have an immediate impact on Brazil" (Rachum 120). Indeed, in comparison to Canadian women, who participated in meetings and forums that were organised overseas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—such as the International Woman's Suffrage Alliance and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom—few or no female activists represented Brazil in those meetings. Information on their attendance can be found on reports available in *Women and Social Movements, International—1840 to Present*, an online archive.

[12] For example, Antônio Amora's *História da literatura brasileira: Séculos XVI-XX* (1960) lists thirty six writers who contributed to the modernist literary movements, from the 1920s to the 1940s, but only two are women—Queiroz and Cecilia Meireles. José Castello's collection, *A literatura brasileira: Origens e unidade 1500-1960* (1999) identifies over one hundred writers as influential figures in the modernist movement, but he discusses the lives and works of only nine women writers and briefly mentions the relevance of other two female figures.

aunt, for instance, "would write poems in secret, closed in her room, [with] cramped letters, purple ink." Repressed by Telles's grandfather, her aunt "secretly hid her prohibited work." After all, "who would dare," Telles asks, "defy family and society?" (59). In most cases, these mothers, aunts, and other women who lived in the early twentieth century were not able to leave an artistic legacy for their daughters and nieces. Telles's mother left only a recipe book that had been, in turn, inherited by her own mother. Whereas this household item represents the constraining role that these two generations were not able to escape, Telles believes that the "shy inspirations in this thick book" can also be interpreted as "a symbol for Brazilian women's first attempts in literary careers—a profession for men" (60).

The novels by Lispector, Cunha, and Luft capture the oppressive status of these earlier generations who had little or no motivation to challenge and redefine motherhood and pursue careers in the arts. The three writers show that outside views of femininity prevent their central characters' mothers from expressing themselves and playing strong female roles. By deliberately silencing these maternal figures or eliminating them from the protagonists' lives, Lispector, Cunha, and Luft do not support the image of the mother as a weak and mute woman or blame women for not encouraging their artistic daughters in the past. Instead, they expose and question how their society repressed their foremothers' voices and agency prior to the 1960s.

Lispector's *Perto do coração selvagem* (*Near the Wild Heart*) depicts Joana, an imaginative child who loses her mother at a young age. Joana possesses

many artistic traits. She enjoys the "freedom she often experienced." This feeling does "not come from lucid reflections, but from a state that seemed to consist of perceptions, much too organic to be expressed in thoughts" (39).[13] Her need for freedom, as well as her reflections on the human condition, sets Joana apart from the people around her. Although Joana does not produce any writing in the text, she has developed a powerful imagination and a curiosity about poetic language. Lispector examines the anxieties, roles, and influences that a girl must confront before she can establish herself as an artist. This genesis of female creativity is significant because Lispector wrote this novel before becoming a prominent literary figure, and she did so in a society in which few women had much agency and even fewer women writers attained critical acclaim. Lispector's "fiction tends overwhelmingly to focus on the psychic and social existences of modern urban women," but, particularly in *Perto do coração selvagem*, she "established herself as one of Latin America's pioneer feminists" (Fitz, *Clarice* 23). Her novel was published in the 1940s, yet Lispector anticipates two feminist developments. First, she supports an alternative discourse of femininity when she depicts a young woman who, like herself, is ahead of her time and shares similar artistic interests. Second, she denounces the silence of previous generations of women in Brazilian society.

Joana's mother is silenced through death, but the child Joana learns about her when she overhears a conversation between her father and a friend. Her father describes Joana's mother as far from the conventional middle-class woman in Brazilian society: "she was called Elza. [...] She was slender, disdainful—you

[13] All English references are taken from *Near the Wild Heart*, translated by Giovanni Pontiero.

know what I mean, don't you?—intimidating. So quick and harsh in making judgements, so independent and embittered that from our very first meeting, I accused her of being shrewish" (25).[14] Elza possessed so much strength that her husband once refers to her as "the devil" (25). As he describes her mother, Joana is "frightened of Elza," but at the same time, she knows that she has no real reason to fear her mother, who "was like a father" (26). By reimagining her mother as her father, Joana attempts to preserve the image of her lost mother as an influential part of her life. Early on, Lispector does not depict Elza as a weak and victimised woman and places her in the same position of power as a paternal figure, suggesting that mothers can be as strong as the patriarchal society that attempts to control their authority and voice. Nonetheless, as soon as Joana's father introduces Elza to his family, "it was as if [he] had brought in some contagious virus, a heretic" to their homes (26). When his family perceives Elza so negatively, Lispector reminds us of the existence of strong and independent women who were disregarded as non-feminine and rejected in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, Elza is erased from the narrative just as the atypical women of earlier generations were silenced in Brazilian society. Joana's father does not talk about Elza anymore, other than to emphasise her brutality, an unconventional female quality that he does not want his daughter to inherit. He hopes that Joana's personality does not resemble that of her mother, stating that "even I prefer that this little one shouldn't take after her" (26). This is

[14] In the Portuguese version, Joana's father refers to Elza as a woman "full of power" (cheia de poder) and a "brute" or "savage" (bruta) (27). Pontiero translates these two adjectives as "intimidating" and "shrewish," which suggest that Joana's father focuses on Elza's bad character, whereas he actually emphasises her strength.

not the case, however. Elza gradually disappears from her daughter's memory, but she continues to live in the kind of woman that Joana chooses to become.

The artistic child who appears in the first frame of Cunha's multi-layered novel, *As doze cores do vermelho* (*The Twelve Colors of Red*), never mentions a mother in the formative years of her childhood and adolescence. Her mother's voice, as well as the voices of any female figure from earlier generations, is silenced by other voices that the protagonist constantly hears: "Many voices were the voices [that could be] often [heard] in our ears. Voices saying. Be careful. Use your head. Behave yourself" (*Muitas vozes eram vozes e vezes na vigência dos nossos ouvidos. Vozes dizendo. Cuidado. Juízo. Bom comportamento*) (36).[15] Imposing the proper female roles on a young girl from a patriarchal middle-class family in Brazil, the voices control not only the young protagonist's femininity, but also her first signs of creativity. When still a teenager, she announces her artistic ambitions to her family, but their "[v]oices would tell her that a woman has to privilege the home" (*Vozes rangiam que mulher tem que colocar em primeiro lugar o lar*) (56). Initially she defies the voices and decides to buy an easel, brushes, and paint, which are later destroyed likely by the same people who constantly criticise her artistic endeavours. In *Mulher no espelho* (*Woman between Mirrors*), the authoritative voice of the central character's father silences her mother's expression. In her childhood, the young narrator feels oppressed by her father's authoritarian figure and perceives him as "[l]ord and master." He "was overwhelming and crashed everyone around him," whereas her "mother's

[15] All translations from *As doze cores do vermelho* are mine.

voice couldn't get through" (14).[16] Indeed, the young narrator only hears her mother speak "softly and seldom," and often her "silence [was] dense" (15). In Cunha's novels, the voices suppress mothers' expression in a similar way that Joana's family members attempt to erase the memories of Elza.

In *O quarto fechado* (*The Island of the Dead*),[17] Luft reduces Renata's mother to a shadow or ghost in the narrative to expose the silencing and marginalisation of women who have children prior to the central character's generation. Renata briefly mentions her parents as two people who "treated her as someone special, leading her to think innocently: I'm different from others. I am an artist" (12). The adolescent Renata enjoys the freedom and power that she gains through her art, but gradually realises that society casts away unconventional women like her. During this time, she learns that, because of "the secret power she displayed at the piano, she may have intimidated young people of her age" (12). Even though her parents initially encourage her to develop her talents, neither of them interferes with Renata throughout her childhood and adolescence, which she recalls many years later as "a peaceful existence closed up in the large, well-lighted room of her music." She "had been a solitary girl, a quiet adolescent, not sad, but isolated by discipline and solitude" (10). Her mother even questions Renata's dedication to music and tells her that "[n]o one has everything at the same time" (10), which indicates that this woman does not support her

[16] All English references are taken from *Woman between Mirrors*, translated by Fred Ellison and Naomi Lindstrom.
[17] A literary translation of the title of the novel would be *The Locked Room*, but all English references are taken from *The Island of the Dead*, translated by Carmen McClendon and Betty Craige. The "island of the dead" is a mysterious island represented in the painting that Renata often describes in the novel.

daughter's artistic aspirations during those difficult times. Whereas mothers are silenced in Lispector's works and barely exist in Cunha's novels, this early generation appears in *O quarto fechado* but suddenly vanishes from the central character's life. Her mother is part of Renata's life, but only as a ghost or shadow, so she does not actually have material existence for her daughter. As Donizete Batista claims, the absence of mother figures in Luft's fiction "is emphasised by the paradoxical presence of the mother" (1). In *O quarto fechado*, the mother's absence also suggests two possible interpretations. First, that the mother's generation does not accept Renata's unconventional femininity. Second, that Brazilian society undervalues the opinion of women like Renata's mother who, as a result, lacks a voice to provide the young heroine with the emotional foundations needed to pursue a career. Whether Renata's mother is complicit with this system or feels unable to challenge it, the discourse of femininity reinforced by her society constrains her life and agency.

In contrast to Renata's mother, her mother-in-law, whom everyone calls Mother is "a symbol of dedication" (39) , especially maternal dedication. Renata is surprised by Mother's attention to her stepchildren. She "had been more of a mother to [her step-children] than had she, Renata, been to her own children" (45). Mother also carries her heavy burdens and, without any complaints, takes care of her disabled daughter Ella. Still, although this maternal figure serves as a counterpoint to the absence of maternal affection typical of Luft's female characters (Lima 33), Mother is also silenced and, like Renata's mother, does not offer any help to her daughter when she most needs it. In the past, Ella pursued a

non-traditional relationship with her lover. Because Mother does not accept her choice, Ella escapes but, tragically, falls from a fence while waiting for her lover. This accident paralyses Ella's body and, gradually, her mental capacities. Living in a confined space, Ella constantly rings a bell and demands the emotional attention that her mother previously refused to give her. Thus, Mother is an extension of Renata's mother: Mother endorses patriarchal views instead of supporting Ella's unconventional choice, just like Renata's mother fails to nurture and help the young protagonist during her moments of isolation and social exclusion.

The artist novels I examine provide a partial perception of the experiences of mothers who raised the women who established themselves as artists in the second half of the twentieth century. I do not claim that the Brazilian authors try to capture the lives of their own mothers and other female ancestors in fiction because, as Luft explains, in her "novels everything and nothing is autobiographical" (Interview 23). Nonetheless, the situation of the mothers of the central characters in the works by Lispector, Luft, and Cunha is comparable to the cultural experience that shaped the reality of many middle-class women in Brazil prior to the 1960s. Brazilian women writers could have chosen to represent the protagonists' mothers as unconventional women, thus, liberating these earlier generations at least in fiction. If they opted to produce texts that completely diverged from their historical reality, these writers could have perhaps set an example for their female readers. However, when silencing their fictional counterparts in the novels, Lispector, Cunha, and Luft do not endorse their female

ancestors' situations. Di Brandt and Heidi Harms claim that women's literature in the Western traditions expresses "an ongoing lament for the missing, silenced, absent mother and her mediating, nurturing presence, in social institutions and discourse, and in story" (14). Likewise, the repression of maternal voices and actions in the novels discussed above suggests that the Brazilian authors express their sorrow over the fact that their society disregarded the few strong female ancestors and, in some cases, erased them from their culture. Thus, by exposing these women's passivity and complicity, Lispector, Luft, and Cunha actually challenge the oppressive conditions that restricted their mothers and foremothers.

I take into account the perspective of the silent and silenced mothers portrayed in the novels and the earlier generation of Brazilian women they embody. Since they are not interested in changing their oppressive situations and those of their daughters, one could claim that the women who raise the young protagonists knowingly accept the dominant opinion reinforced by their societies. Cunha has claimed that the development of a strong female identity "did not attract the majority of Brazilian women" but, in a country that has historically promoted female oppression, they "could not be aware of both their [state of] dependence in the patriarchal order and their annihilation as a subject" (108) ("Mulher partida" 108). Even when they are complicit with this system and join the authoritative voices of the people who support the patriarchal discourse, we cannot blame these mothers for not supporting their young daughters' ambitions. I doubt that Brazilian women writers believed that the anxieties that they experienced in the decisive years of their literary careers were created only by

their mothers' weak roles. At the same time, I do not ignore the negative effects of these oppressed mothers on the protagonists and the group of women they represent. When a society silences women with rigid maternal roles and erases their artistic and political voices from history, it prevents upcoming generations of women from developing alternative female discourses and pursuing public positions as writer, painters, and activists.

The "daughters" of silent mothers do not have female examples in the past that can legitimise both their transgression of rigid female roles and their choices for a career that prioritises their male counterparts. As Huf asserts, in "a society in which celebrated artists are overwhelmingly male, the creative heroine lacks a 'mother'; that is, a mentor of her own sex who has also thrown in the kitchen towel. Without a female model who has given her life over to paper or palette," Huf continues, "the woman artist must become her own model or mother" and "give birth to herself" (153). Furthermore, in the artist novels by Lispector, Cunha, and Luft, the young heroines' acts of self-creation, symbolically their attempt to become exemplary and self-made women, are a difficult task. Women who "saw their mothers as dupes at worst and victims at best of the patriarchal constructions chocking women's lives" typically "lived in fear that they too, upon becoming mothers, would live constricted, devoid of any individuality or freedom" (Kinser 33). The protagonists of the aforementioned Brazilian novels face similar fears and are pressured into accepting the negative roles that their mothers could not escape. Because of the lack of alternative models, Joana,

Renata, and Cunha's nameless heroines feel paralysed and uncertain about their future ambitions at an early age.

Without an acceptable female model that could validate Joana's alternative femininity and artistic singularity, the protagonist of *Perto do coração selvagem* is subject to the harsh critique of her society. Her family members reject Elza and are also not ready to understand Joana. After her father's death, she is left to the care of her aunt and uncle who perceive her singular femininity as deviant from traditional female roles and, therefore, unacceptable. Her aunt is puzzled by Joana's desire for freedom and assertive power: she does not need anyone in the house and tells her aunt that she can do whatever she likes (46). Her aunt also contrasts the protagonist with her own submissive daughter and finally concludes that Joana is "a little demon" (46), echoing the biased view that her father and other relatives have toward Elza, as a devil-like and heretic woman. Furthermore, both Joana's independence and her mother's powerful femininity challenge the traditional image of the Virgin Mary that the Catholic Church thrust upon women, disturbing the religious patriarchal order. The religious views of this conservative Catholic society drive Joana's family to consider her angelic cousin as an ideal woman, or, in other words, the embodiment of the Virgin Mary. In contrast, her father's family condemns the protagonist and her mother as satanic and, thus, profane. Her aunt even asks the town's priest for advice, but the priest is also disturbed by Joana's behaviour (46). Because Joana represents a threat to both systems, her aunt and uncle send her away to a boarding school, whose strict discipline might "help tame her" (46). Perhaps, it could also silence her.

Deliberately or not, Lispector silences Joana during this time because the narrator moves forward to the beginning of Joana's adulthood without describing her experience in the boarding school. By erasing her protagonist's voice and actions, Lispector exposes the dangers of patriarchy, which can control even an unconventional woman like Joana.

Joana's subjection to conservative religious views and an oppressive education affect the young woman's confidence just as the social rejection imposed on Elza undermines and finally "kills" her powerful female personality in the past. As a result, like her mother, Joana cannot completely enjoy her demonic femininity and creative mind. To emphasise Joana's stagnation and uncertainty, Lispector closes *Perto do coração selvagem* with an ambivalent conclusion and, according to Earl Fitz, a central character "torn between her impulse toward self-affirming action and acquiescence to her social role as an urban middle-class wife." Joana, Fitz explains, "attempts to vent her frustration through artistic creation, but this only serves to frustrate her even more" (*Clarice* 71). Initially, the frustrated young woman becomes aware of her limitations and considers suicide: "Ah, so she would die. Yes, she would die" (178). Lispector, however, rejects this fate for Joana and resumes the novel with the young woman's decision to live on and become "as brutal and misshapen as a stone" and "as light and vague as something felt rather than understood." Joana also promises herself that she "will transcend myself in waves, oh, God, and may everything come and fall on me, even the incomprehension of myself at certain blank moments." From "any battle or rest," the young woman continues, she will rise

"strong" and "comely" (186). Lispector's paradoxical conclusion suggests that Joana will continue to be misunderstood and misjudged. Indeed, just before this monologue, Joana has walked away from her marriage and begun an extra-marital affair with a young sailor, two decisions that are socially unacceptable. Also, Lispector is still reticent about Joana's professional career, but the protagonist's closing monologue is optimistic and underlines the fact that she will continue to embrace a powerful femininity despite the danger of doing so.

In *O quarto fechado*, because Mother and Renata's mother are silent during significant parts of their daughters' lives, they are not able to have a dialogue with their offspring and understand their professional aspirations and personal ambitions. The "ghost" mothers portrayed in Luft's works create a gap between themselves and the upcoming generation of women. The "presence of these mothers, who also stand for the ideal maternal type defended by the dominant discourse, will expand the abyss in which Luft's characters exist" (Batista 1). Renata pursues her dreams as a musician until her life is turned upside down and she feels trapped just like Ella. Their mothers' absence becomes an obstacle for Ella and Renata when they try to develop unconventional female roles. Other factors contribute to the pianist's stagnation, as I will discuss in Chapter Four, but the image of femininity represented by her "ghost" mother and the submissive character of Mother precludes Renata from finding an alternative in her own life.

When young, the central character of *As doze cores do vermelho* also has to tolerate the same pressure to accept this discourse of silence and submission

that earlier generations of women have embraced in the novel. This pressure, however, compromises the girl's artistic aspirations. Although her art instructor's lessons about art and freedom of expression motivate the protagonist to pursue her ambitions during her adolescence (100), she is forced to give up her plans. She will "no longer join the school of fine arts" (*não vai mais entrar para a escola de belas artes*) because she "promised her groom that she will no longer paint" and "is ready for the wedding" (*prometeu ao seu noivo que não vai mais pintar […] está preparada para o casamento*) (15). In *Mulher no espelho,* the silent mother figure has a strong—yet negative—influence upon her daughter. The central character confesses that she "would like to be just like my mother" (15), but this female model prevents the writer from developing an empowering female role later on. Indeed, *O quarto fechado*, *As doze cores do vermelho*, and *Mulher no espelho* foreshadow a gloomy future for these young women. When they become adults and become mothers, the danger of patriarchy will continue to thwart their artistic potential and transform them into a remnant of their mothers, a topic that will be explored in the next chapter.

Perhaps only in *Perto do coração selvagem* does the mother partially succeed in passing on a meaningful female model. Even though the protagonist faces uncertainty, Joana develops personality traits similar to Elza's. In the novels by Cunha and Luft, however, the oppressive status of earlier generations of women intensifies the central characters' struggle to embrace alternative discourses of femininity and become an artist in a similar way that the suppression of empowered women in Brazilian society often led to the frustration and anxiety

of a group of feminist critics and women artists who, from the 1960s to the 1990s, felt that they could not fully develop their intellectual and artistic potentials. In "a system which has persistently stolen women's bodies and egos" from women, the daughter's empowerment "is extremely difficult," especially if "mothers who have not simply been robbed of their egos […] are unavailable to their daughters" (Rich 245). In the case of young women artists, this absence also has harmful consequences because "daughters of mothers who are absent, psychologically damaged, or emotionally distant […], lack a mother who can nurture their artistic creativity" (Gerber 11). If artistic daughters feel empowered when their mothers are role models and supportive women, it is thus not surprising that Joana, Renata, Cunha's heroines, and other Brazilian women artists do not easily achieve their personal and professional goals. The only way to restore the gap between mothers and daughters is by creating "a kind of strength which can only be one woman's gift to another, the bloodstream of our inheritance," but "[u]ntil a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness" (Rich 246). Wandering in the wilderness, Lispector, Cunha, Luft, and other twentieth-century Brazilian women writers depict the gulf between their own generations and that of their silenced mothers.

Inspiring and Creative Mothers:
Pre-Feminist Models in Canadian Artist Fiction

Canadian women writers Gabrielle Roy, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, and Alice Munro also portray female ancestors who face conservative female roles. However, the grandmothers, mothers, and aunts who nurture the aspiring female artists portrayed in Canadian fiction do not easily accept the typical discourses and practice of motherhood. The earlier generations of women portrayed in Canadian fiction contribute to the creation of confident young daughters and influence them to establish artistic bonds with their mothers and maternal women who precede the central characters. As empowering female models, their ancestors symbolise the women who initiated the critique of the traditional discourses of femininity in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century and have inspired, since then, a large number of Canadian feminist critics and women artists to embrace unconventional female roles.

Although I emphasise that Canadian women writers acknowledge their female ancestors' constructive roles and represent a more "optimistic" idea of motherhood in their novels than their Brazilian counterparts, I do not ignore the fact that Canadian society thrust negative roles on women in the past. Before the 1960s, many women did not have access to an empowering discourse of motherhood in the communities in which they suffered from the pressure of extreme patriarchal views. An example is the case of Franco-Canadian women, who still struggled with the power relations imposed upon the Québécoise mother in the early twentieth century. In this reality, patriarchy reinforced "the grim

reality underlying a survivalist ideology dependant upon the servile reproduction of women," producing, as a result, "disempowered, mute mothers" (K. Gould 114). The mothers of earlier generations could not diverge from the norm and were not able to support their daughters. Afraid of the patriarchal views their mothers embodied, some feminist critics and women writers in Canada reacted with alarm and rejected their mothers and other female precursors as role models. In fact, "for a number of feminists writing throughout the 1970s, it seemed that the mother could not be modern;" as a result, they "turned away from the traditional patriarchal family—and from the patriarchal mother as well" (K. Gould 114-15). The Canadian artist novels discussed in section three of this chapter are responses to this oppressive model of femininity. I do not believe that the active and creative mothers who nurture the central characters in Canadian fiction are simply naïve and over-generalised representations of motherhood by a few Canadian women writers. These courageous maternal figures embody the many Canadian women who initiated the critique of traditional discourses and practice of femininity, attempted to envision pro-active female roles, and promoted the inclusion of women in public careers such as that of the artist long before Roy, Laurence, Atwood, Munro, Shields and others established their prominent generation of women artists.

Despite their difficulty in resisting the dominant discourses of gender, race and class[18] that prevailed in England and Canada in the eighteenth and nineteenth

[18] Similar to what happens in Brazil in the nineteenth century, Canadian society imposed strict female roles upon women. Canadian women writers were at a "disadvantage as a marginalized sex" (Gerson, "Anthologies" 59). Moreover, they could not easily resist the dominant view of race. For instance, Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague*, Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*,

centuries, women artists Frances Brooke, Anna Jameson, Anne Langton, Catharine Parr Traill, Susanna Moodie, and others started questioning restrictive ideas of femininity. Indeed, these women re-inscribed female roles when they showed, in their experience and works, that women could perform active roles as travellers, settlers, and strong mothers. One of these pioneers was Traill, who emigrated with her family from England to Canada in 1832 and became a mother of eleven children, a writer, and a botanist. Traill advises other prospective female immigrants to take a "cheerful and active part" in the preparation of their journey (*Canadian* 14) and believes that women should "spend [their] time on practical, domestic duties and not on an activity perceived as unproductive" (Hammill 25). Her writing reflects a woman whose confidence, according to Marian Fowler, "came through doing" as she "chased her backwood's dragons with mop and broom" (80). Many of these women settlers did not deliberately choose to transgress submissive female roles; they were forced to leave behind the class privileges and the cultural mentality that sustained what Traill defines as "lighter feminine accomplishments" (*Backwoods* 4). Traill's active and practical idea of femininity was, thus, a matter of adaptation and survival in the harsh environment of Canada. Moreover, when Traill insists that women should be constantly occupied in domestic duties—even in cases of emergency, "it is better to be up and doing" (*Canadian* 196)—she endorses the dominant view that maintains women within the confines of the home. Her defence of an energetic life as an

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and Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada* create romantic portraits of the First Nation inhabitants they encountered and reinforce their status of victims. The works by many women writers living in Canada during this time also endorse the typical discourse of class. One example is *Roughing It in the Bush*, in which Moodie often supports the superiority of British upper class families and undermines North-American and European working-class immigrants.

ideal model of femininity has infuriated many contemporary women, who have asked whether "*any* woman [could] be as proficient as [Traill] claimed to be" (Fowler 80).

Nevertheless, Traill encourages women to be productive beyond a domestic life and challenges the idea of femininity that dominated her British society during that time. As Traill, her sister Susanna Moodie, and other women settlers "performed traditionally masculine labours as ploughing, sowing, and harvesting," they "blurred the conventional distinctions between the sexes" and "forged in their lives and in their writings a new role model for Canadian women in the pioneering and post-pioneering periods" (Bentley 95-96). Besides showing that women could endure the physical activities that were traditionally assigned to men, Traill incites her female counterparts to use their "*mental* refinements." In her view, "gentle and well-educated females" should "cultivate all the mental resources of a superior education, as she is to discard all irrational and artificial wants and mere useless pursuits" (*Backwoods* 4). Traill "s'est trouvée aux prises avec une conception de la féminité qui l'empêchait de participer, de tout coeur, à l'entreprise de colonisation" (Roberts 49), but in her own experience as a writer and botanist, she employed her intellectual potential to develop the colony. Most importantly, when Traill and other engaged women of her time used their mental refinements to write books for children, potential immigrants, and admirers of wild plants, they helped to promote the acceptance of women's participation in public positions in Canada, especially those of writers.

In contrast with the discouraging situation of Brazilian women writers in the nineteenth century, significant factors allowed a large number of Canadian women to pursue a literary career and understand their female identities. First, whereas Brazilian upper class families usually forbade daughters and mothers to obtain an education, women in England and Canada took a more active part in education despite the inadequacies in the instruction of young women. Carole Gerson argues that the need to improve children's education encouraged women's literacy and valued their roles as educators of children and writers of juvenile literature. The "spread of literacy and compulsory schooling through the nineteenth century made it increasingly acceptable and profitable for women in Britain and English-speaking North American to write for young readers" (*Canadian Women* 74). Second, the Catholic Church in French-Canada indirectly led women to develop their teaching and writing skills (Gerson, *Canadian Women* 27). The Catholic Church had a contradictory position in the construction of the discourse of femininity in Canada in the nineteenth century. It used the image of Virgin Mary to defend women's obligation to become sacrificial mothers, but paradoxically encouraged women to play a meaningful, active role as educators. According to Gerson, the "Catholic Church emphasized mothers' duty to instruct their children, a responsibility that required reading aloud to them" which, in turn, led to women's "early involvement in writing for children" (*Canadian Women* 26-27). The role of the mother-instructor, Gerson continues, "received iconographic emphasis in the recurring image of Sainte Anne, mother of Mary" (26). Indirectly, this religious image provided mothers access to the public role of teachers as well

as writers in Canada, whereas the Catholic Church cultivated the submissive aspects of the Virgin Mary in Brazil. Finally, the increasing development of popular print and the establishment of cultural periodicals created opportunities for women to make a living as journalists, literary writers, and feminist activists. During the period when the cultural market completely excluded women from literary and other artistic positions in Brazil, it offered fairer chances for potential female writers in Canada because, as Gerson claims, "rates for literary products were based on the reputation rather than explicitly on gender" (*Canadian* 84). The periodicals of the time also "welcomed women's writing" (Gerson, *Canadian* 25). As a result, nineteenth-century women had access to a public space to write critically about their female conditions. They used this vehicle to demand "an inclusive citizenship" (Strong-Boag 349), challenge "marriage and conventional domesticity," and claim their "right to higher education, the ballot, unescorted travel, sexual freedom, and a professional career" (Gerson, *Canadian Women* 166).

Because they rejected some of the dominant ideas of gender and legitimised artistic identities for women and even mothers, early Canadian women writers became exemplary models for the upcoming generations, especially those of Roy, Laurence, Atwood, Shields, and other women who emerged in the second half of the twentieth century and, according to Donna Smyth, claimed those forerunners as their "ancestral voices" (15). While none of the recent Brazilian artist novels I analyse portrays a distant female pioneer, twentieth-century Canadian women writers frequently acknowledge the significant of these literary

foremothers in their works. They do so by representing their literary precursors as characters in their texts and, in other cases, by creating fictional women who share similar experiences.[19]

Roy celebrates the strength and pioneer spirit of women who settled in remote parts of Canada in *The Road Past Altamont*, a short story collection originally published as *La route d'Altamont* (1966). In the opening story, "My Almighty Grandmother," Roy focuses on the life of Christine's grandmother, to whom the young narrator refers as Mémère. Like the women of the late nineteenth century, Christine's grandmother has to endure the responsibility of childbearing and nursing a large number of children. She is also forced by her husband to leave Québec in search of better opportunities in Manitoba. However, instead of underlining the fact that this woman is oppressed by her maternal obligations and male partner, Roy celebrates Mémère's power and independence. Whereas the generation of women who precede the protagonists of Brazilian novels are all silenced, Mémère has a voice, despite her "curious way of speaking" (3). She is as also a self-sufficient and dynamic woman who, even in her late years, is capable of taking care of herself and creating "a huge garden" to "grow enough vegetables to feed a whole township" (17). More than having a voice and an active role in her society, Mémère introduces Christine to the constructive force of art. One day, during the summer that Christine spends with her grandmother, Mémère makes a doll out of ordinary objects. Enlivened by the discovery of "the infinite and

[19] Examples of these pioneer female figures are not limited to the two works I analyse in this section. They can also be found in Carol Shields's *Swan: A Mystery*, *The Box Garden*, and *Stone Diaries*, Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and *Alias Grace*, and Alice Munro's short story "Meneseteung."

ingenious resources of [Mémère's] imagination" and "creative talent," Christine feels "a joy [she] found […] impossible to contain" (9-10). For many years afterwards, the old woman becomes a creative goddess in the eyes of the child. Christine even believes "that it could not possibly be a man who made the world" but "an old woman with extremely capable hands" (16). This metaphor of her grandmother's talent as divine power is significant for two reasons. First, Roy emphasises the valuable aspects of motherhood by placing the mother's role on the same level of pro-active creation. As Lewis explains, "C'est l'image positive de la femme puisssante et maternelle, qui revalorisera chez Christine l'image de la femme créatrice et restera longtemps dans son esprit" ("Trois" 170). Second, Mémère teaches Christine a lesson about the artist's role. Like mothers and grandmothers, artists are capable of bringing life and meaning to the world.

Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974) also portrays two female pioneers who introduce the central character to the possibilities of being an independent and creative woman in Canada just as the nineteenth-century female writers set the example for Laurence's generation. When Morag is still a child, she discovers the existence of powerful maternal figures in her family through the bedtime stories that her foster father Christie tells her. She is fascinated by Christie's stories about Piper Gunn and his wife Morag Gunn, who are supposedly her ancestors. Both Gunns left Scotland and settled in Canada in search of a better life. Christie initially celebrates the male pioneer, depicting Gunn's wife in the background of the story, but in "Christie's Tale of Piper Gunn and the Long March," she emerges as a heroic figure, who has "wisdom and the good eye and the warmth of

a home and the determination of quietness." Through her assertive words, Morag Gunn encourages her husband to continue playing his pipe and resume their journey to the New World (98). While Christie's tale of this female pioneer shows young Morag that an unconventional model of femininity was possible in the past, Catharine Parr Traill becomes a character in the novel, underlining the existence of women writers in the nineteenth century. Morag has imaginary dialogues with Traill—C.P.T in the text— and asks her for advice on writing and mothering. Morag respects Traill's phenomenal versatility, which includes her ability to publish her works with "some modest degree of success" (197). In Morag's view, Traill and her sister Moodie belong to the few women who "wrench[ed] up their guts and hearts etcetera and sent these carefully down on paper, in order to live" in the nineteenth century (110). Furthermore, Morag admires her ability to manage a busy domestic routine and can imagine Traill only as a super-woman who would wake up very early in the morning, feed a multitudes of mouths with breakfast, bake two hundred loaves of bread, feed the chicken, take care of the children's education, and clean the house (111). In fact, Traill's ability to combine her public roles with a demanding domestic life intrigues Morag: how can a woman be "drawing and naming wildflowers, writing a guide for settlers with one hand, whilst rearing a brace of young and working like a galley slave with the other" (110)? However, this passage is ironic. It suggests that Laurence is suspicious of the excessive optimism of Traill's biographical works and perhaps questions her success as both a super mother/housewife and an eminent writer.

In first half of the twentieth century, women continued to fight for empowering female roles in the home and professions in the public sphere in Canada. Some mothers could enjoy a certain level of agency even though the traditional division of labour between male breadwinners and female caregivers remained "virtually unchanged" until the 1960s (Arnup 116). At the time, however, changes in women's reproductive roles and their entry into the economic market contributed to the redefinition of female roles in the private sphere. The birth rates among middle- and upper-class English Canadians had declined since the late nineteenth-century and "that trend gradually spread throughout the rest of the Canadian population" (Arnup 4, 21, 125). The period of wars also forced women to establish themselves in public positions, which, in turn, affected their roles as mothers. For instance, during the Second World War, "[m]any Canadian mothers found themselves in the paid labour force for the first time in their lives, and, in a limited number of cases, their children were cared for in publicly funded, licensed child-care facilities" (Arnup 9). Even when society "reinforced once again the centrality of full-time motherhood for Canadian women" in the post-war period, they "attempted to control and change the circumstances of their own lives" (Arnup 9, 12-13). In the early twentieth century, Canadian women did not receive passively the discourse of motherhood imposed by society and the government. For example, they "did not always fall neatly into step with the scientifically prescribed and state-enforced norms" and, instead, "attempted to prevent conception, resisted the elimination of midwives, engaged

in pre-marital sexual intercourse, and either resorted to abortion or gave birth out of wedlock" (Arnup, Lévesque, and Pierson xxi).

At the same time that these external factors changed their private (sexuality and reproduction) and public roles (employment), Canadian women in the first half of the century continued to show that, like their nineteenth-century predecessors, they were eager to secure a social identity outside the boundaries of the home. Even tough the conflict between femininity and a profession invited discouraging responses in the social and feminist discourses of the time, Canadian critics were often optimistic and believed that society changed to accommodate women's public positions.[20] This combination of societal acceptance of female employment and women's commitment to battle for their professions was also visible in Canadian publishing, especially in the production of literature. For instance, "The founding of the Canadian Women's Press Club (CWPC) in 1904 by thirteen feminists […] confirmed a long-standing commitment to equal treatment and public recognition" (Strong-Boag 350). A few Canadian female writers also became prominent figures in the first half of the twentieth century. Anne Dagg's 1986 study estimates that in "English Canada, from the beginnings to 1950, women have represented 40 per cent of the authors of books of fiction and 37 per cent of the authors of books of poetry" (qtd. in Gerson, "Anthologies"

[20] Some Canadian critics who analysed the conflict between femininity and a profession in a woman's life during this period often perceived these two as naturally incompatible. In *The School of Femininity* (1936), Margaret Lawrence questions whether femininity and an artistic "temperament" can "go together." When a young woman pursues a career in the arts, "she tries to escape the fate of womanhood" (339). Historically, Lawrence continues, all female writers were imperfect women because they "were damaged biologically in some form" (340). Other critics, however, believed that society had positively accepted women's public careers. In a 1936 essay, Margaret Gould claims that "we have accepted grudgingly enough the theoretical right of women to do work that they like and are fitted for" (20).

57). Many women could not reconcile motherhood and a writing career, but they became literary mothers to women writers in the next half of the century. Ethel Wilson, for example, was considered "an influential figure in the literary community, a 'doyenne' and later a 'Grande Dame'" and she "could use her position to encourage younger writers," such as Munro and Laurence, who deemed Wilson "their 'literary mother'" (Harrison 449).

Both this supportive cultural context and the presence of women engaged in establishing their public identities as activists and writers made possible the validation of less submissive maternal roles than those that Brazilian society imposed upon women during the same time. Although "mothering is reproduced through daughters who become mothers" (Gerber 9), we overlook the influential role that mothers play in society, often promoting changes in their daughters' lives. As Rich once noted, "a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create liveable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist" (247). Perhaps Canada was a potential "liveable" space in which a large group of women could support their daughters in the early twentieth century. I do not believe that the upcoming generations of Canadian women writers wrote autobiographical texts and attempted to depict the real women who had nurtured them in their early years. As I discussed earlier, viewing literature as a faithful portrait of one's historical reality can be problematic because of the complex nature of representation. Munro, for instance, "struggled with the "impossibility of picturing her own mother" in her fiction (Redekop 4). According to Redekop, Munro depicts a

"mock mother," a representation "constructed as a result of the impossibility of picturing the 'real' mother" (4). Nevertheless, like the women who raised Roy, Laurence, Atwood, Munro and other female writers who were also successful in the second half of the twentieth century, the mothers portrayed in the works analysed in this section defy the conventional female roles in their societies. These maternal figures are fictional creations and yet represent the several empowering women who shaped Canadian women writers' determination to fight for their personal and professional ambitions.

In Roy's *The Road Past Altamont*, young Christine gains the self-confidence she needs to set on a journey to explore the world, develop her creative skills, and become an artist largely because the women who teach her about life and imagination are strong maternal figures. Christine's mother, Eveline, marries young and quickly gives birth to children as her own mother did. Nevertheless, although Eveline suffers from comparable gender oppressions, she does not easily accept submissive ideas of femininity and motherhood. Thus, she is the typical mother of Roy's fiction (Lewis, *Literary Vision* 86) and an example of the ambivalent opinion that Roy had of the French Canadian discourse of motherhood.[21] *Rue Deschambault* (*Street of Riches*), for instance, emphasises Eveline's independence when she travels to Quebec with her daughter Christine and experiences a glimpse of freedom. Eveline is a dominant figure in the family

[21] Roy has been praised for "underscoring the important role of the mother" in her fiction (Lewis, *Literary Vision* 59). Her late writings are often considered traditional because Roy emphasises the Québécoise mother (Lewis, "Trois" 166). However, I disagree that her fictional mothers are traditional and naïve. Roy respected the women who were mothers in French Canada and particularly recognised their hard work. In contrast, her maternal characters "represent an attack against this maternal myth" because, through her feminist consciousness, she questioned the "the dangers that are inherent in an obsessive maternal instinct" (Lewis, *Literary Vision* 77).

in *Rue Deschambault* and continues to be a "proud and powerful mother" in *The Road Past Altamont* (Lewis, *Literary Vision* 86, 91). Moreover, in the section entitled "The Old Men and the Child," she also transgresses traditional female discourses when she allows a young Christine to explore the world outside the confines of the home. In this tale, the trip with Monsieur Saint-Hilaire to Lake Winnipeg leads Christine to initiate the development of her individuality and artistic vision. She learns that a free and creative mind needs moments of autonomy and, perhaps, solitude to make profound reflections on the self and the world. At the same time, Christine realises that her mother is not able to reach this level of self-development:

> when and how could she have yielded for even a day to the still eager desires of her own spirit—those wideranging desires that were turned always toward water, toward the open plains, and toward those distant horizons which alone reveal to us some part of our truest selves? And was she not beginning to realize that for her it was late now and not much time remained to appease those longings that […] leave us as if imperfect in our own eyes, in a train of nostalgic regrets? (52-53)

Christine's pessimistic tone underlines the fact that it is too late for Eveline and other women of her generation to escape the imprisonment of traditional female roles. However, at least, Eveline questions these roles, by passing on her "passion for going away" (136-37) to her daughter and raising Christine's awareness about the value women's independence.

After learning from her grandmother that imagination "was my family gift" (9), the protagonist of *The Road Past Altamont* discovers that her mother shares Mémère's artistic power. While Mémère is able to create a valuable object out of nothing with her skilful hands, Eveline can generate meaning through storytelling. In "The Movers," her stories are inspiring sources, which incite Christine's curiosity to see the prairies. Later, these stories influence her to go abroad and transcend the traditional female roles that both her grandmother and her mother were not able to escape completely. With her stories about the family's travel experience, Eveline teaches Christine to have "a deep love and respect for words" (Lewis, *Literary Vision* 88). In the last section, her mother again recounts similar family stories, but this time, the adult Christine notices that Eveline has altered the events of the original tale: "that detail didn't appear in your first version. That detail is new." Christine responds to her mother's new version with the assertion that "the past at least should remain immutable," but Eveline explains that "it changes precisely as we ourselves change" (123). Christine understands that her mother has never fulfiled her artistic ambitions beyond telling stories in the private space of the home, but because of Eveline's lesson about the inventiveness of language, the maturing writer learns that, in the processes of writing and storytelling, time and memory modify our perception of what we have experienced in the past.

Courageous mothers who represent the generations of women who lived in the first half of the twentieth century also surround Laurence's protagonists during their formative years. In *A Bird in the House* (1970), Vanessa's mother Beth and

her Aunt Edna are oppressed by Grandfather Connor's patriarchal power. In fact, the image of trapped birds, which appears in the title and throughout the narrative, represents "female entrapment, not just in a sociological sense but in a psycho-spiritual one" (Buss 63). Beth, Edna, and other Manawaka women in Laurence's fiction live in a cage that is comparable to the environment that silences the protagonists' mothers in the novels by Lispector, Cunha, and Luft. Nevertheless, Laurence's female characters are "not defeated" because their "strength and imagination survive to inspire further generations" (Brydon 203). Beth and Edna are persistent enough to motivate the text's young protagonist to escape a similar patriarchal reality. Laurence also emphasises Beth's free mind as she confesses the ambitions she once had to pursue a post-secondary education. When Beth was young, she "got the highest marks in the province in [her] last year of high school," but Grandfather Connor "didn't believe in education for women, then" (*Bird* 187). Beth knows that maybe she "can't get out" of that constraining reality (172), but her social and psychological limitations do not preclude her from fighting for Vanessa's freedom. In the last chapter, Beth does not want her daughter "to stay here for ever" (187) and attempts to do anything—even asking grandfather Connor for money—to offer Vanessa an opportunity to go to university. At this moment, as Vanessa "is able finally to see the 'tigress' in her own mother" (Buss 63), Laurence forces us to recognise the fierce mother that Beth is. Complementing Beth's supporting maternal role, Edna becomes "a mother-surrogate in many ways" (Buss 56-57). There is no doubt that Edna is a woman ahead of her time: she has a love affair for many years, defies her father's

discouragement of this relationship, and even leaves the house for a one-day trip with her suitor—all significant transgressions. Moreover, her rebellious femininity is not her only impressive trait. Aware of Vanessa's writing experiments, Edna praises her niece for her dedication and, indirectly, teaches Vanessa to develop her artistic skills through hard work. Vanessa entrusts her secret exercise to Edna and accepts her advice because she identifies with her aunt's artistic potential, which she shows in her musical abilities. However, in "Jericho's Brick Battlement," Vanessa realises that, like Beth, Edna does not develop her musical skills because Grandfather Connor disapproves of her music and calls it "rubbish." When playing the piano, Edna "would wink at [Vanessa], maybe even laugh" but, subdued by Connor's power, "she would stop" (167).

Even though the protagonist of *The Diviners* does not know much about her biological mother, Louisa, except that she dies of infantile paralysis when Morag is a small child, she discovers a strong woman. Early in the text, Laurence represents Louisa as a maternal figure that is "absent to the point of redundancy" and "monumentally silent" (Cook 88). However, young Morag challenges Louisa's absence by reconstructing her mother's life through snapshots and other stories that she remembers "*composing* […] *in Christie and Prin's house*" (9). As a child, Morag fabricates what is "behind" one of the family pictures: her "mother, before she married, was a piano teacher in Manawaka. She is now trying to teach Morag how to play, and Morag really loves the lessons and is very good and quick at picking up how to do it" (11). When Morag recreates the memories of Louisa as a teacher and artist, Laurence defies the image of mothers as silent

and submissive women and, most importantly, suggests that mothers can pursue careers as teachers and artists.

A strong maternal character nurtures the protagonist of Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1988) and exposes the young girl to alternative constructions of femininity. The child Elaine is fascinated by visual representations in women's magazines, particularly those of the female body. In these magazines, women are efficient housewives constantly cleaning and properly dressed "with puffed sleeves and full skirts, and white aprons that tie very tightly around their waists" (153). Whereas other mothers embody the picture of femininity constructed in those magazines, Elaine's mother, Mrs. Risley, "is not like the other mothers" and "doesn't fit in with the idea of them" (173). She transgresses the appearance, behaviour, and space that the traditional discourse endorsed in those magazines imposes upon other women. Other mothers in the novel wear twin sets, glasses on a chain, hairpins, and drooping aprons and have sceptical smiles and vague faces, but Mrs. Risley "would turn up on their doorstops, wearing slacks, carrying a bouquet of weeds, incongruous" (173-74). Moreover, Elaine's mother does not behave like other women: she "hates shopping," does not sew (104), and is "not fond of housework generally" (166). When Elaine separates people into two groups, wild and tame—"Wild things are smarter than tame ones"— and includes her mother in the first group, together with her father and brother (144), she also emphasises that Mrs. Risley's behaviour is atypical for the women of the time. Finally, the child shows that her mother defies the conventional space that other mothers occupy: she "doesn't inhabit the house, the way other mothers do" (173).

Her wild mother would "rather be outside raking up leaves in the fall, shovelling snow in the winter, pulling weeds in the spring" (134). In contrast, the other girls' mothers "don't go skating on the neighborhood rink, or walk in the ravine by themselves" (173-74). They "have internalized and accepted their place in this society" (Peled 52). Nevertheless, Elaine's mother rebels against it and reconstructs an alternative female space in which she can enjoy active roles as housewife and mother.

The young protagonist of *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) is also raised by "a wildwoman" (61), but Munro shows that the journey to female independence is not easy for Del's mother, Addie. She is often subject to the prejudiced mindset of a small town that almost convinces her daughter to embrace traditional female roles. Munro expresses "a lingering sense that life continues to be restrictive for mothers" (Gault 440) and also daughters. Nonetheless, with her own unconventional example, Addie encourages the young Del to be critical of submissive ideas of femininity. Thirsty for knowledge and interested in expressing herself through writing, Addie subscribes to "a correspondence course called Great Thinkers of History, from the University of Western Ontario" and even writes "letters to the newspapers" (70) in order to promote "education and the rights of women" (76). She is also engaged in other social causes and defines herself "on the side of poor people everywhere, on the side of Negroes and Jews and Chinese and women" (9-10). Munro, thus, portrays a mother with public identity, for Addie develops her artistic potential and political commitment.

Canadian women writers represent their protagonists' female ancestors in a world very different from the one that Brazilian female writers paint in their works. The inspiring mothers portrayed in Canadian fiction not only have a voice, but also an unconventional femininity, and, in some cases, artistic aspirations and political responsibilities. The recurrence of rebellious, creative, and activist mothers in Canadian female fiction underscores the fact that Canadian women writers are embedded in a culture in which women envisioned and practiced empowering discourses of femininity before the 1960s. Just as the courageous mothers portrayed in these works inspire their artistic daughters to transgress traditional roles and reach their professional goals, in reality, many mothers, grandmothers, and foremothers prepared a favourable space for the female intellectuals and artists who emerged with Roy, Laurence, Atwood, and Munro.

The twentieth-century women writers were often aware of the presence of "many wise strong loving adoptive and symbolic mothers—teachers, professors, older writers, therapists, friends—who gave [them] the love and advice and advocacy and support" (Brandt, "My Breast" 59). For example, Laurence and Atwood openly acknowledge that their biological and adoptive mothers were influential in their lives and literary careers. Laurence was raised by strong women who had public identities, such as "her pianist mother, Verna, her two distinguished nursing aunts, Velma and Ruby, and her aunt Marg […], who was an intellectual" (Stovel 20). Laurence considers herself "a fortunate woman," since she was surrounded by "very strong women who endured a lot and overcame a lot" and yet "gave [her] in large measure such strength" (*Dance* 7).

Above all, they shaped Laurence's confidence to strive for a literary career, helping her "far more than they knew, to deal with [her] own life and to go on writing" (*Dance* 7). Atwood also recognises her mother's support. Both of her parents, actually, encouraged the young Atwood "to make use of [her] intelligence and abilities" instead of pressuring her "into getting married." According to Atwood, her "mother [was] rather exceptional in this respect," given that she was raising her daughter in the 1950s, "when marriage was seen as the only desirable goal" for women ("My Mother" 38). We cannot overlook the fact that the presence of these role models encouraged Laurence, Atwood, and other Canadian women artists to go beyond the typical female roles of the time and pursue their careers.

Thus, the active, working, and often imaginative mothers who existed prior to the second half of the twentieth century were influential figures in the lives of women writers who came into maturity in Canada after the 1950s. They later inherited a cultural environment in which their unconventional grandmothers and mothers had questioned restrictive maternal roles. Roy, Laurence, Atwood, Munro, and others also followed their female ancestors and expressed a similarly critical opinion about femininity in their fiction and theories. This group of Canadian women writers often reveal how the patriarchal discourse of motherhood threatened their mothers' unconventional roles and oppressed those who were not able to escape rigid perceptions of femininity. Although this phenomenon was not exclusive to Canada in the late twentieth century, Canadian women notably began "writing mother stories in large numbers […] in defiance of

the constraints of the Western narrative tradition with its long history of enforced maternal absence" (Brandt and Harms 16). Feminist writers in French (and also English) Canada did not ignore the fact that some of their female ancestors were not able to empower themselves through art and valuable maternal experience, but, in contrast to Lispector, Cunha, and Luft, the Canadian authors do not represent them as objects of "resentment, repression and narrative silence" (K. Gould 114). Instead, they chose to "pursue the voicing of women's previously silenced subjectivity" and, during the 1960s and 1970s, began to portray maternal figures who emerge as speaking subjects in their texts (K. Gould 115, 122).

In *The Road Past Altamont*, as Eveline emerges as a speaking and creative subject, she inspires in Christine the courage to leave her town and an established teaching position in order to pursue a literary career in France. Roy does show that Eveline's artistic potential was thwarted when she confesses her dreams of the "infinitely better person [she] might have been able to be… a musician, for instance" (135). Nevertheless, Eveline's limitations do not threaten or paralyse Christine's ambitions. Eveline motivates Christine, who becomes aware of her mother's artistic potential, whereas Joana, Renata, and Cunha's women artists are surrounded by mothers who are never able to speak or who are forced to be silent. Eveline believes that "nothing is lost" because Christine "will do everything [Eveline] wished to do in [her] place and better than [she] could" (135). Christine's departure for France creates a physical gap between mother and daughter, but they reconnect by exchanging a "strange dialogue […] across the ocean" (145). In one of her letters, Eveline reassures Christine of her choice,

saying that she was "right to go." Realising that Christine is "discovering, discovering," her mother encourages her to see all she "can while […] in France and take as much time as [she] need[s]" in this "exhilarating" experience (145). Her mother manages to "transform her passion into reality […] by obtaining for her offspring what she herself was never able to accomplish" (Lewis, *Literary Vision* 92). Therefore, Eveline's encouragement of Christine's independence has a positive impact on her ability to become a writer.

We cannot dissociate the creative development of Laurence's young women artists from their mothers in *A Bird in the House* and *The Diviners*. Like Eveline, Beth also encourages her daughter to follow her professional dreams and the aspirations that never became part of Beth's reality. This type of influence that mothers have on their artistic daughters is a pattern in contemporary fiction by women writers. After the female protagonists of these works gain awareness of their female ancestors' artistic potential, they pursue artistic careers in order "to extend, reveal, and elaborate [their] mother's often thwarted talents" (DuPlessis 93). In the case of Vanessa, this influence is successful because, by leaving Manawaka and obtaining an education, she fulfils Beth's dreams. While Beth supports Vanessa's intellectual development, her aunt introduces the protagonist to the liberating and inspiring aspects of art. With the help of Edna's music, Laurence's young heroine feels that the "notes would jitter and prance, strut defiantly, swagger from ceiling to floor and out the window, making [Vanessa's] feet want to follow them, away off somewhere, far away from home, where the swinging shoes winged continually and dawns beyond [their] dimension" (167).

Edna teaches her a valid lesson: "language, like music, can liberate" (Stovel 241). Even though Beth and Edna are not able to liberate themselves, they at least give Vanessa the tools to fully develop her potential in her quest for intellectual and artistic freedom.

In *The Diviners*, Morag's female ancestors also inspire her decision to become a powerful woman and writer. In her first literary experience, the child Morag composes a tale about the Gunns' life after they settle in the Canadian wilderness. Her text is "a long story about how Piper Gunn's woman, once the child was born at the Red River, went out into the forest and built a chariot for them all, for Piper Gunn and herself and their girlchild." She "cut down the trees" and "carved out the chariot" (99). Clearly, young Morag's writing experiments underline her ancestor's independence and strength. Her unconventional femininity impresses young Morag, who chooses this nineteenth-century figure "to answer her need for the ideal feminine" (Buss 69). Similarly, Traill's example also shapes Morag's choice of femininity and profession, but Morag is torn between celebrating Traill's competent life and career and blaming her for establishing a model that Morag and the women of her generation may never be able to live up to. Traill's super-powerful skills bother the fictional writer, who ironically calls this forerunner "Saint Catharine" (198) and considers her versatile and successful life "too good to be true" (410). Morag also mocks Moodie's advice in *Roughing It in the Bush* (65), although her writing was less optimistic than that of her sister. Laurence's heroine finally accepts that she is "not built like […] Saint C" and will "never be as hardworking or knowledgeable or all-round

terrific as" Traill was. She stops asking Traill for advice and bids her farewell (474). Morag "liberates herself from her ancestor's weight" (Hammill 212); nevertheless, beyond the critique of Traill and Moodie, Laurence does not dismiss these female trailblazers. In *Dance on Earth,* she explains that "there are so many women I would like to honour—to tell them, even though many of them are no longer alive, how much I owe them, how much *we* owe them, how much my own daughter and son are their inheritors" (8). In *A Bird in the House* and *The Diviners*, by representing courageous and artistic women who lived before the second half of the twentieth century, Laurence honours their valuable contribution and recognises that these women proposed empowering female roles for herself and other Canadian mothers and women artists.

In *Cat's Eye*, although Mrs. Risley does not have an interest in the arts, she influences Elaine to go beyond stereotyped discourses of femininity, a step any woman artist needs to take. Her mother positively affects Elaine's career in two ways. First, Mrs. Risley, along with her husband, supports her daughter's challenging professional decision. Both of her parents "were worried about how [she] would make a living" as a painter, but Mrs. Risley is the only person who reassures Elaine and says that her choice "was fine if it was what [she] really wanted to do" (300). Second, her mother's "wild" femininity becomes an exemplary model for Elaine's art later on. In a series of paintings called *Pressure Cooker*, a collage made with illustrations of pictures of mothers and housewives from women's magazines, Elaine represents her mother "in her slacks and boots and her man's jacket, making chokecherry jam over the outdoor fire" (167). One

of the art critics in the novel believes that *Pressure Cooker* "is about female slavery" and "a stereotyping of women in negative and trivial domestic roles" (167). In fact, Elaine exposes the problems of the ideal image of femininity endorsed in those magazines. As the ironic title of her work suggests, the portraits of mothers and housewives in the magazines pressure women into existing only in the home.[22] By capturing Mrs. Risley's wilderness and freedom in the same canvas, the painter also challenges, as her mother does in the past, the restrictions of the private space traditionally assigned to women. Therefore, Mrs. Risley's unconventional femininity inspires the subject matter of her daughter's art while contributing to the critical perception of motherhood that Elaine informs in her paintings.

In *Lives of Girls and Women,* convinced by her aunts and other people that Addie embodies an unacceptable role in the eyes of a small town, Del momentarily feels "the weight of [her] mother's eccentricities, of something absurd and embarrassing about her" (61). The young woman decides to hide her similarly free mind, and literary ambitions, "knowing what dangers there were" in her mother's transgression of expected gender roles (77). One of the dangers is being regarded as an eccentric woman in a conservative community. Because she is afraid of being excluded from the social norms, Del does not embrace Addie's unconventional femininity or acknowledge her mother as an exemplary woman early in her life. Nevertheless, after contrasting the flashbacks of Del's childhood

[22] Elaine says that the purpose of *Pressure Cooker* is not to question submissive female or maternal roles, but simply to depict her mother. However, like several of Atwood's other novels, *Cat's Eye* is ironic; there is a gap between Elaine's statement and the critique of motherhood that her art explicitly makes.

with her own mature perspective, which frames the narrative, I believe that Munro transforms the naïve child's initial embarrassment and fear into the mature woman artist's admiration of her mother. Del, in fact, knows that she is "not so different from [her] mother" (77). Sharing her "mother's appetite" for knowledge and her interest in books, Del "love[s] the volumes of the encyclopaedia, their weight (of mystery, of beautiful information) as they" fall in her lap (62). Whether or not she writes any literary pieces in the end, Del "survives to become […] a functioning" and "plausible" artist (Atwood, *Survival* 230-31). When Del accomplished her secret writing ambitions, Munro shows the influential role of courageous and artistic women who guide their daughters in the process of becoming artists. Nonetheless, for Munro, these young generations of women artists need to discover their own artistic style separately from their mothers. In a similar way that Morag respects but also needs to overcome Traill in *The Diviners*, Del expresses appreciation for her mother's contributions while struggling to be different from her. On the one hand, mother Addie perceives writing as a mirror to the world and a medium for expressing social problems. On the other hand, Del believes that her mother's "hope of accuracy […] is crazy, heartbreaking" (Munro, *Lives* 236) and questions Addie's romantic perception of language (Gault 453). In contrast with her mother, Del focuses on the playful aspect of language and chooses creative writing as her route. She does not reject the artistic legacy that Addie leaves her, but, instead, continues to develop their cultural lineage in a collaborative effort that accommodates their diverse opinions about literary representation.

My immersion in a Brazilian cultural tradition in which silenced female models are common may affect my positive perception of motherhood in Canadian culture. However, this intercultural comparison also forces us to recognise that feminist critics and women writers have promoted alternative maternal discourses and practices in Canada since the nineteenth century. Brazilian female writers often represent silenced and absent mothers to expose a repressive reality that marginalised women in the first half of twentieth century. Meanwhile, their Canadian counterparts tend to portray supporting mothers in their works to acknowledge how earlier generations of women validated their daughters' gender transgressions and artistic ambitions. Despite the risk of being silenced by patriarchal views, these courageous mothers prepared a liveable space for the female intellectuals and artists who became prominent when Roy, Laurence, Atwood, and Munro wrote their texts. Furthermore, when these writers portray a female ancestor who is able to speak and even create art, they question the modern women's conflict with the discourse of femininity they inherit from their female ancestors. Instead of reinforcing this dilemma, the Canadian authors propose a constructive relationship between these two groups of women. A mutual recognition between mother and child is possible when mothers play a liberating maternal role (Gary 32). Many Canadian women writers in the second half of the twentieth century "came to realize with great urgency that, without continuity from mother to daughter, women remain detached from their origins and fragmented in their being" (Forsyth 44). Similarly, the maturing female artist depicted in Canadian fiction also relates to her mother, not as an object to be

negated, but as a subject who contributes to her life in a meaningful way. Christine, Vanessa, Morag, Elaine, and Del identify with their ancestors because of their courage to defy patriarchal systems, as well as their artistic potential, even if their ambitions become, in the end, only unfulfiled dreams.

Atypical and Transitional Motherhood in Brazil and Canada

The discourses of femininity that controlled women and led them to accept passive female roles prior to the 1960s affected their daughters, granddaughters, nieces, and the generations of women pursuing independence and a career differently in Brazilian and Canadian cultures. Nevertheless, the women who nurture the novels' protagonists do not always correspond to the two distinct mother figures that I just examined. Different portraits of mothers reveal that both Canadian and Brazilian women writers have been aware of the changing nature of the discourse and practice of motherhood in their societies. According to Chodorov, "[a]lthough women […] have primary responsibility for children, many features of this responsibility change" because "[w]omen's mothering is not an unchanging transcultural universal" (32). Whether they expose old, repressive female roles or celebrate empowering ones, women writers in Brazil and Canada often depict motherhood as a discourse that is constantly being changed and redefined. Occasionally, Brazilian women writers acknowledge the existence of strong and artistic women who become unconventional female models, whereas their Canadian counterparts show how patriarchal values can also force the earlier generations of women into accepting submissive female roles. Moreover, both

Brazilian and Canadian women writers underline the transitional aspect of motherhood in their cultures when they portray early generations of women as matriarchs, mothers who are, paradoxically, victimised and empowered. These atypical maternal figures affect the creative and personal lives of young central characters in ways that defy the cultural expectations of each society.

In her 1989 novel, *Pele nua no espelho* (*Naked Skin on the Mirror*), Bins focuses on the life of Antônia, a Brazilian woman who abandons her hope of becoming a professional painter, but later on dedicates herself to creative writing. Antônia carries the memories of a mother "who learned the secrets of Hindi cuisine during a trip to the East" (*minha mãe [...] aprendeu os segredos da culinária hindu numa viagem ao Oriente*). However, the protagonist is not sure whether her mother's trips were "real or imaginary," because "she nourished herself with so many fantasies" (*reais our imaginárias [...] ela se alimentava de tantas fantasias*) (64). Antônia inherits her mother's ability to create fantasies (64) and becomes an imaginative woman interested in painting and literature. In Telles's 1989 novel, *As horas nuas* (*The Naked Hours*), Rosa, who was once a successful actor, has a positive relationship with her mother, who is a close friend during Rosa's childhood (16). Over time, their relationship goes beyond a strong emotional bond because, like Antônia, Rosa explains that her passion for drama was her "mother's heritage" (*herança de mamãe*) (18).[23] Both heroines feel inspired by their mothers' artistic potential and believe that their female ancestors left them a legacy.

[23] All translations from *Pele nua no espelho* and *As horas nuas* are mine.

According to Podnieks and O'Reilly, in "patriarchal culture […] we find few models, in literature and life, of maternal agency in empowered mothering" (18). However, these examples are crucial in order to challenge the typical image of the silent and submissive mother, which effaced the intellectual and creative potentials of many Brazilian mothers prior to the 1960s and continued to constrain their daughters' development in the second half of the twentieth century. The portraits of the exceptional mothers who nurture the women artists in the novels by Bins and Telles suggest that some women in the first group possibly experienced changes in their societies, which gradually reshaped their roles despite the oppressive context in Brazilian culture From this perspective, the visions of imaginative and exemplary women that Telles and Bins reinforce in their works may not be utopian perceptions of their societies. As I discussed in the first section of this chapter, very few Brazilian women found ways to overcome their limitations and establish themselves in artistic professions. For instance, Telles's mother was a source of inspiration and supported her daughter's professional choice. Her mother managed to work from the home as a *mulher-goiabada* (guava-sweet woman), a term that Telles coins to refer to the hardworking mothers who cooked and provided extra income for the household. Her mother also "stimulated [Telles] to write books," and told her that writing "is a job for men, but if you chose it, why not?" ("Mulher escritora" 60). When Telles and Bins represent in their novels similar hardworking and supporting mothers who pass on their thwarted ambitions to their daughters, the authors recognise that a few exceptional and yet unacknowledged women had a positive influence on the

lives of their daughters and other women who grew up at that time and became artists in the second half of the century. Nevertheless, these mothers affect the lives of the young female artists in a less intense way than Mémère, Eveline, the old Morag Gunn, Louisa, Edna, Beth, Mrs. Risley, and Addie lead Christine, Morag, Vanessa, Elaine, and Del to pursue their personal and professional ambitions. Still, the few strong mothers that Brazilian women writers portray in their works become examples for their daughters.

In Atwood's *Surfacing* (1973), the protagonist's mother also embodies a maternal role unexpected in her culture, in contrast with the empowering mother figures that prevail in many artist novels by Canadian female writers, including Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. The nameless protagonist of *Surfacing*, "a commercial artist" and "illustrator" of children's books (56), spends her summer at the family cabin where she constantly searches for her father, who has disappeared in the wilderness, but, gradually, this mission becomes an attempt to reconnect with her deceased mother. Believing that her mother may have left her "a note, a message, a will" (39), Atwood's heroine attempts to search for this message in her memories of the past and in her mother's personal journals. She also hopes that this process will allow her to understand and reconstruct her mother's life. Unfortunately, she remembers that in her childhood, her mother was absent and often vanished into the forest (56) while her mother's journals only reinforce her silence. All her mother wrote in them "was a record of the weather and the work done on that day: no reflections, no emotions" (24). As the narrator is not able to discover any clue, she initially resents her mother's silence: it "would be right for

my mother to have left" the young artist "a legacy" (159). Her frustration also suggests that Atwood is aware of the benefits of the mother-daughter relationship. As discussed earlier in this chapter, mothers were often oppressed and silenced in the first half of the twentieth century in Canada. This maternal silence is detrimental to both generations because, when mothers cannot become appropriate role models for their daughters, the latter are usually not able to understand or relate to the former. Thus, women's silence damages the relationship between mothers and daughters and "testifies to the force of patriarchal prohibition" (Grace 43). Similarly, the protagonist of Atwood's *Surfacing* cannot find a strong female ancestor that legitimises her ambitions and passes on an artistic legacy and feels as frustrated as the protagonists of the novels by Lispector, Luft, and Cunha.

Still, while Joana, Renata, and Cunha's heroines are not able to understand their mothers' silence or rescue them from their meaningless positions, the woman artist of *Surfacing* at least restores her mother's voice and revalues her relationship with her mother, which she does in two ways. First, she attempts to reunite with her mother. After the artist is left alone in the cabin, she has a vision of her mother "standing in front of the cabin" with "her hand stretched out" (196). During this moment, Atwood's protagonist can discover her own femininity. She also "begins to recognize and accept her own power through her moment of vision, her brief, starling visitation from her mother" (Rich 280). Second, she establishes an artistic connection with her mother. One of the drawings that the artist believes to belong to her mother portrays "a woman with a round stomach:

the baby was sitting up inside her gazing out" (169). Early on, when the protagonist claims that her "mother's gift was there for [her]" in the drawing, the novel suggests that her mother leaves her a legacy: the artistic power of visual representation that mother and daughter share. However, the artist finally remembers that this visual image is a picture that she drew of her pregnant mother (169). Even in this case, the young woman uses her artistic potential to connect to her mother. Atwood is aware that traditional ideas of femininity restricted the lives of the earlier generations of mothers in Canada. However, by suggesting that this mother plays meaningful roles in the protagonist's life, Atwood is more optimistic about the progressive changes in female roles and women's understanding of their female ancestors than are her Brazilian counterparts.

The protagonists of Queiroz's *Dora Doralina* (1975) and Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (1979) are raised by mothers who do not fit in the typical maternal figures portrayed in Brazilian and Canadian female artist fiction. Even though these matriarchs can manipulate others and occasionally transgress the constraining roles women are often expected to embrace, their power is, paradoxically, an instrument of the patriarchy that actually controls them. I emphasise their ambivalent nature because the discourse of motherhood that they stand for turns them into monsters, not inspiring models, in their daughters' eyes. Because the matriarchs depicted in these two novels use their authoritarian position to perpetuate traditional female roles in the lives of the subsequent generations of women, they repress their daughters' process of personal liberation and threaten their artistic aspirations. Moreover, the destructive relationship between

matriarchs and their daughters prevents the young central characters from realising that their mothers are subjugated to coercive discourses in their societies.

In *Dora Doralina*, the protagonist's mother is a widow who takes care of Dora while running the family farm business and the household. Her mother holds a position rarely occupied by women in the *sertão nordestino*, an area located in the interior of the Northeastern Brazil. In this region, as "the patriarchal family prevails […], women do not have any opportunities to develop" (Souza and Muraro 136). From an early age, Dora becomes aware that the dominant discourse of femininity prevents women from pursuing an education and, later on, a career. At an all girls elementary school, she observes "an epidemic of weddings" as "three female students dropped off school before graduating—their fiancés thought that they already knew enough; raising children does not require a school diploma" (*deu aquela epidemia de casamento, três alunas deixaram o colégio antes de receberem o diploma — os noivos achavam que elas já estavam sabidas o bastante e, mesmo, para criar menino não se exige anel de grau*) (48).[24] The protagonists of Cunha's *Mulher no espelho* and *As doze cores do vermelho* also grow up in the same region, but, while their mothers are completely silent, Dora's mother maintains her authority in Queiroz's novel. However, she does so only by playing a masculine role. As Dora's mother often tells her, "A widowed woman is the man of the house — Or rather: — a widowed mother is both mother and father" (*Mulher viúva é o homem da casa. — Ou então: — Mãe viúva é mãe e pai*). Senhora "would say this in a tone of complaint," but Dora "knew that [her mother] was showing off her power" (*Dizia muitas vezes com ar de queixa, mas*

[24] All translations from *Dora Doralina* are mine.

eu sabia que era mostrando poder) (42). In fact, Dora never calls this woman mother, identifying her as Senhora (Madam), which "does not denote qualities of mothering" but "rather […] denotes ownership and dominion" (Courteau 6). Such a name also underlines Senhora's prominence in the family.

Nevertheless, Senhora does not become a role model who helps Dora fight the conservative female roles reinforced in the *sertão nordestino*. She actually embodies the image of the matriarch, a traditional mother figure who represents the "*internalisation* of the oppressor's ideology." The matriarch is a "powerful and authoritative female figure that, in the history of women's oppression" was "responsible for the transmission of patriarchal values" (Coelho 13). Reinforcing those values, Senhora almost destroys the protagonist's professional ambitions. After Dora performs in a school play and becomes "interested in acting" (*influída por teatro*), she tells Senhora about her plan to study drama. Her reply makes Dora realise her mother's crushing force, for the young woman feels as though Senhora "weighed her down five inches under the ground" (*afundou [a] cinco palmos chão adentro*). Ironically, Senhora's discouragement leads Dora to defy her mother: "from that time on, I started collecting newspaper clips about theatre companies and photos of actors and actresses" (*foi daí por diante que comecei a colecionar anúncio de companhia e retrato de artista*) (132). Because this matriarch discourages the protagonist's career and even personal happiness—Senhora seduces her daughter's first husband, which leads to his tragic death—Dora obeys, for a long time, the norms that her traditional society and mother endorse. After her husband's death, the central character abandons Senhora and

pursues an acting career in a small theatre company. However, lacking a female model to legitimise her ambitions, Dora has her confidence shattered with every criticism that she receives from her second partner and her audience. She is also affected by a local newspaper that criticises "the evil influence of the modern customs on the families of the state of Ceará" (*a maléfica influência dos costumes modernos nas famílias cearenses*) and misjudges Dora as "a lady from a prestigious family" who "had exchanged her Catholic home for the lights of 'light theatre'" (*uma senhorita de tradicional estirpe [...] havia trocado o seu lar católico pelas luzes do teatro ligeiro*) (157). Her oppressive environment and her matriarchal mother preclude Dora from attaining professional success.

Lady Oracle portrays a powerful mother who, instead of supporting the protagonist, dominates her life. While Senhora has a distant relationship with Dora, Joan's mother has a "professionalised" relationship with her. Indeed, Joan "can never remember calling her anything but Mother, never one of those childish diminutives; [she] must have, but" her mother "must have discouraged it" (63). Instead of establishing an emotional bond with Joan, her mother exercises her control over her offspring. From the very moment of her birth, the protagonist feels controlled by her mother, who not only names her "after Joan Crawford," a famous actor, but also "wanted [Joan] to be like the screen characters she played—beautiful, ambitious, ruthless, destructive to men" (38). But, as an eight–year-old girl, Joan senses her mother's anger and frustration. Joan Crawford "was thin," but Joan "was not": "this is one of the many things for which my mother never quite forgave me" (39). Later on, as Joan gradually transforms herself into

an obese adolescent, her mother becomes an abusive parent and appears in one of Joan's dreams as a monster. When Joan is a child, her mother does her makeup in front of a triple mirror, but in this dream Joan "suddenly realize[s] that instead of three reflections," her mother has "three actual heads" rising from her "three separate necks." This image confirms what Joan has "always known": her "mother was a monster" (63).

The detrimental relationship that she has with her mother begins to undermine Joan's confidence and creativity. In her first artistic experience, the child Joan takes dancing lessons and prepares to perform the role of a butterfly in a recital. Ashamed of Joan's "obscene" and "grotesque" body (42), her mother convinces the dance instructor to change the piece so that Joan is not exposed. The child has to play the part of a mothball and feels betrayed. By thwarting Joan's butterfly wings, her mother metaphorically rejects Joan's first experience with the arts. Nevertheless, I believe that, instead of focusing on mothers as villains, Atwood exposes society's compulsion to shape the female body into a feminine ideal. Although Joan is angry at her mother and "crie[s] that night over her thwarted wings" (47), she realises, later on, that other people "would probably laugh at me" because it is "hard to feel undiluted sympathy for an overweight seven-year-old." But if Joan described the same situation happening to a "charming and skinny" girl, "they would find the whole thing pathetic and grossly unfair" (48). Atwood may be suggesting that this mother's perverse attitude echoes the view of society, which determines what female beauty is and pressures

women into either having or forcing their daughters to have beautiful and desirable bodies.

Queiroz and Atwood show how a patriarchal mentality in Brazil and Canada creates a negative cycle of misunderstandings that are detrimental to both mothers and the next generation of creative daughters. However, if we focus solely on the protagonists' perception, we overlook the fact that mothers are not always intentionally responsible for this damage. In both novels, mothers lack alternative strategies to challenge patriarchy. As a result, they become matriarchal and monstrous figures, partially transgressing patriarchy and gaining some control over their lives. Yet, these matriarchs are not able to support their daughters because their repressive contexts lead these mothers to perpetuate female ideals in order to maintain their power in the family.

Nevertheless, each writer deals with the mother-daughter conflict in different ways. Whereas Queiroz victimises the central character and emphasises her mother's tyranny, Atwood shows that women fail to understand their patriarchal mothers. When Dora decides never to meet Senhora again, the protagonist is not able to see that her mother's manipulation and discouragement are products of more than her pride, bitterness, and desire for authority. They are also a result of the social pressure that her mother feels to maintain the patriarchal order in her family. In *Lady Oracle*, Joan escapes her mother's abusive mother in the end, but Atwood shows that both generations suffer from their distance. While Joan is subject to physical and psychological pain that forces her into transforming herself into a female ideal, her mother becomes an alcoholic and

leads a lonely and unhappy life. Furthermore, in contrast to Dora, Joan begins to understand her mother's negative behaviour. During her self-imposed exile overseas, the aspiring writer has a vision of her mother "crying, soundlessly, horribly; mascara running from her eyes" (173). After this strange apparition, Joan receives the news of her mother's deadly accident and is "overcome by a wave of guilt" because she "left her [mother], walked out on her," despite knowing that her mother "was unhappy" (176). In this final moment of sympathy for her mother, Joan is able to see her mother's monstrosities as a strategy to mask her unhappiness and her victimisation. Perhaps, since Joan finally grasps the complexity of her mother's monstrosity, Atwood's woman artist meets a less pessimistic destiny than does Queiroz's protagonist. Lacking a female model that can validate her career as an actor and help her overcome the public misjudgement, Dora abandons the theatre. Joan, nevertheless, struggles with personal conflicts that almost destroy her literary career but decides, by the end of the narrative, to continue writing.

Mothers and Artistic Daughters: Continuity and Disruptions

Although mothers are characters often dismissed in women's studies, their experiences and behaviours in the private and public spheres affect the lives of their daughters in many ways. In this chapter, I have examined the influential role that mothers and the discourse of femininity they embody play in the personal and artistic development of upcoming generations of women. The relationships

between the protagonists of the novels I analysed and their mothers, grandmothers, and other female ancestors show the existence of a complex tension between the cultural systems that construct female roles and women's individual, often political, decisions to challenge those roles. This conflict between society and the modern women that the central characters portray in Brazilian and Canadian fiction begins with their mothers, who accept or challenge the traditional discourse of motherhood. They finally pass it down to their daughters who, in turn, struggle to reconcile the idea of femininity projected on their mothers and their own desire to be part of the cultural tradition in their countries. However, the mothers portrayed in either literary tradition deal with this conflict differently, since their ability to support their artistic daughters depends on the female roles that dominated Brazilian and Canadian societies in the first half of the twentieth century and earlier. To expose how patriarchy and its discourses of motherhood restricted their female ancestors at the time, Brazilian women writers emphasise a repressive reality that thwarts or completely silences the mothers of their central characters. Their submissive models lead the aspiring artists in the novels to either abandon or postpone their personal and professional challenges. To show how their role models fought for an empowering female role in their private lives and a proactive position outside the home prior to the 1960s, the Canadian authors portray their protagonists' female ancestors as active women and artistic mothers. Since these earlier generations of women develop more meaningful roles than do their Brazilian counterparts, the women artists

represented in Canadian female fiction hope, at an early age, to attain their personal liberation and turn their professional dreams into reality.

Furthermore, the unexpected maternal types examined in the third section suggest that both Brazilian and Canadian women writers were aware of femininity and motherhood as fluctuating and changing constructions during the time feminists called upon women to reflect on their lives. While some Brazilian writers take into account the new possibilities of mothering through exceptional women who inspired confidence in their artistic daughters, their Canadians counterparts often reveal the existence of traditional female discourses that silenced mothers in the past. Still, despite the varieties of atypical and transitional maternal types in both literary traditions, the Brazilian authors generally produced a larger number of silent mothers and matriarchs at the period than did their Canadian counterparts. The protagonist's mothers in Luft's *A asa esquerda do anjo* (1981) can be added to the list of silent/absent mothers, and the group matriarchs could include the maternal characters portrayed in Carol Shields's *The Box Garden* (1977), Luft's *A sentinela* (1994), the mother who nurtures the second artist portrayed in Telles's *Pele nua no espelho*, and the grandmother depicted in Luft's *A asa esquerda do anjo*. The existence of several other negative maternal types in the female artist novels in Brazil reflects the difference between these two literary traditions.

Although I examined how constructions of femininity are controlled by cultural patterns and passed across generations of women, I believe that mothers have often found some intrinsic power and inspiration to participate in their

daughters' liberation from negative gender expectations. The discourse of motherhood, for instance, has been constantly redefined by women's political awareness and search for agency. This discourse "contains stories that need to be questioned, stories whose lack of questioning has harmful consequences in two areas: it hinders informed ethical evaluation of social policies affecting women, children, families, daycares, and schools; and it leads to alienation, frustration, co-optation, or unwitting diversion in many women's lives" (Hall 341-42). In the novels by Roy, Laurence, Atwood, and Munro, female roles are transformed throughout the twentieth century, reflecting the transitions from women's social and cultural repression to the establishment of strong female traditions. In several cases in Brazilian culture, these changes are never realised. Nevertheless, even when portraying mothers who comply with patriarchal maternal duties, and frustrated daughters who cannot escape similar roles, Lispector, Cunha, Luft, and Queiroz still criticise the detrimental effects of the traditional discourse of motherhood in their cultures. By simply exposing these negative perceptions of motherhood, the Brazilian authors allow their female readers to become aware of how femininity exists in their lives and those of their mothers. In the following chapter, I will show that, although the cultural legacies of motherhood and artistry continue to control women artists in the second half of the twentieth century, the protagonists of both Brazilian and Canadian novels will be mothers who redefine, even if momentarily, the traditional discourse and practice of motherhood that prevented their female ancestors from achieving meaningful self-expression in critical, intellectual, and creative ways.

Chapter 4. Procreators and Creators:

Combining Motherhood and Art beyond Binaries

> This is my quiet solitude—
> writing in my journal with a fountain
> pen (…)
> Who am I to suppose that I can escape
> from my child's cries, the ding
> of dirty dishes, the bark
> of a tiny persistent dog, and
> the grumbling of a husband
> who thinks the house is never
> clean enough.
> I have no room of my own
> or a minute to myself.
> Joanne Detore-Nakamura, "Escape Artist"

> In becoming a mother I felt myself viscerally linked to all humanity and all of human history. These are no small things. Caught in the powerful undertow that is generation, I felt the elemental currents and cross-currents of time, the layering of natural and human cycles; and those currents, as I regained voice, became my chief delight as a writer
> Robyn Sarah, "A Double Life"

Most of the Brazilian and Canadian female writers who write fiction about artists in the second half of the twentieth century produce an artistic mother. By portraying maternal and artistic characters in their works, these authors reveal how Brazilian and Canadian women generally perceived their roles as mothers and artists during this period, and how this group of women artists approached the opposing nature that has been used to define their procreative and creative positions. Brazilian and Canadian female writers are aware that the decision made by women to have children alters their personal lives and professional

expectations as much as their choice of career in the arts limits their professional success. The protagonists of both Brazilian and Canadian artist fiction juggle their female responsibilities in the private sphere and their professional desires to be accepted in public positions, reduce their financial and social dependency on their partners and families, and enter the cultural production of their countries.

Since the 1950s and 1960s, the increase in female employment (economic); the acceptance of women, especially mothers, in the public space and cultural traditions (cultural); the legal protection and governmental programs for working women and artists (structural); and the impact of women's movements (political) have laid the foundations for women to develop meaningful experiences as mothers and attain successful positions as artists. This chapter will show that economic changes affected positively the lives of women, especially mothers, in Brazil and Canada in the second half of the twentieth century, leading their women writers to produce a larger number of characters who are both mothers and artists. Although I am aware that Brazilian and Canadian women writers often portray this positive reality in their artist fiction, I argue that specific cultural, structural, and political developments alter women's maternal and professional experience in unique ways in each literary tradition, and by extension, in each society. I explain the influence of these factors on the lives of contemporaneous Brazilian and Canadian women by analysing the impact of the external environment on the female characters who become mothers and artists in the works of Luft, Cunha, Bins, Laurence, Shields, and Atwood. More specifically, I concentrate on the opinions that partners, families, and communities

voice about the central characters' maternal and artistic roles. These outside judgments shape the ways in which the fictional mother-artists perceive their maternal expectations and their artistic professions and, hence, affect their ability to integrate their identities as mothers and artists. These opinions represent the specific images of the mother and the particular reactions to the woman artist in each culture.

The external opinions about mothers and women artists and the central characters' perceptions of these two roles are not the same in the two literary traditions. Still, what I hope to show is that these differences are not clear-cut. Some of the Brazilian writers depict determined female characters who gradually manage to pursue careers and find alternative ways of mothering despite the conservative values that continue to dominate their culture, whereas Canadian women writers often deconstruct the general view that women have easily secured public positions as both mothers and artists in their supposedly liberal society. As the aforementioned references to the autobiographical and poetic confessions by Canadian writers Robyn Sarah and Joanne Detore-Nakamura illustrate, women can define the relationship between motherhood and art in various ways, even in the same culture. Sarah represents her artistic and maternal identities as integrating and complementary, but Detore-Nakamura believes that they oppose one another. In fact, even when it came to the turning point for women's liberation in the second half of the twentieth century, women artists in both South and North America were not able to find prescribed solutions to the conflicting nature between their private and private roles. Most of all, although Brazilian and

Canadian women writers may generally perceive this relationship in unique ways, they convey a similar message. This female quandary will continue to exist as long as women are not able to find powerful and proactive ways to mother while receiving space and support to fulfil their necessary and well-deserved roles in the public sphere.

The first section of this chapter shows how the economic changes of the second half of the twentieth century contributed to the increasing participation of women in the public and economic spheres in Canada and, for the first time, included a large number of women in these spaces in Brazil. Even though the authors of both traditions often depict the positive impact of this shifting reality in the lives of their female contemporaries, the protagonists perceive their maternal identities differently. These representations of maternal experience and practice are responses to the images of the mother that each society constructed from the 1960s to the 1990s. Section Two investigates the main characters' pursuit of a career in the arts. Their challenges and achievements in this profession also depend on the unique reception of women in the artistic communities of Brazil and Canada during this period. Section Three compares the effects of the discourses of motherhood and the image of the female artist on women's experience in each culture and explains how these traditions produce Brazilian "mother/artists" and Canadian "mother-artists" in the novels.

New Representations of Motherhood in Brazil and Canada: Discouraged and Empowered Mothers

When the adult women represented in the novels and short stories are pregnant and raise their children, their maternal experience and practice mirror the typical lives of middle-class intellectual and artistic mothers in the second half of the twentieth century in Brazil and Canada. During this time, while some assertive women in Brazilian culture began to voice their opinion against their mothers' silence, a group of Canadian women continued the fight that their female ancestors initiated years earlier. By portraying this group of women in both Brazil and Canada, the authors redefine the image of the mother as a speaking and active subject. Their version of the mother fulfils what Marianne Hirsch envisions in *The Mother/Daughter Plot*: mothers would "be able to speak for themselves, perhaps 'with voices'" (197). One of the key factors that modified women's roles and experiences and, hence, influenced the emergence of these speaking mothers in the female literature of the time was the changing economic reality in Brazil and Canada.

In the second half of the century, the expanding economies of Brazil and other Latin American countries inserted many women into the workforce. In the 1960s and 1970s, Latin America "witnessed considerable growth" in female employment and, "by the early 1980s, about a third of working-age women were in the labor force" (Tiano 274). Brazil, in particular, celebrated the "most substantial increases in women's economic activity" (Tiano 275).[25] As this

[25] At the time, the employment rates of women in Brazil rose "from 18 percent in 1960 to 33 percent in 1980" (Tiano 275).

economic development allowed Brazilian women to gradually redefine their burdensome reproductive roles, they experienced important changes in the private realm of their families. The "increase in employment [...] in this developing country generated [...] new opportunities for women," because "[t]his process of modernisation, along with new affectionate and sexual behaviours resulting from the access to birth control methods […], significantly influenced the private sphere" (Sarti, "Feminismo e contexto" 36). Indeed, women's traditional roles were no longer compatible with a reality in which, first, women often had access to formal employment and, second, their families needed their financial contributions. Consequently, fertility levels declined considerably during these decades in Brazil.[26] As analysed earlier, the economic situation prior to the 1960s provided Canadian mothers with employment opportunities that, in turn, affected their private lives. In the following decades, the script of the self-sacrificing housewife and mother continued to be replaced by that of a woman increasingly active outside the household. In comparison to the low female employment rate of 23.5% in the 1950s, the figure doubled over during the course of the next four decades and almost converged with that of men's employment rate (Basset n. pag.).[27] However, "the most important boost" in this increasing curve came "from the entry of mothers—with children living at home—into the labour force"

[26] While Brazilian women had an average of 6.2 children in 1950 and 6.3 in 1960, the fertility rates fell to 5.8 in 1970, 4.4 in 1980, 2.9 in 1991, and 2.39 in 2000 ("Censo Demográfico").
[27] From 1961 to1981, Canadian women's participation in the workforce "increased, on average, 1.1 percentage points each year" (Basset n.p). By 1981, approximately 41.9% of Canadian women were employed outside the home, and, by 2001, this rate accounts for 55.6% of the female population aged 15 years and over ("Employment Trends" n. pag.).

(Basset n.p). The inclusion of mothers in the work environment continuously altered Canadian women's reproductive behaviours.[28]

The economic scenario that pushed Brazilian society to consider for the first time female roles beyond the self-sacrificing maternal responsibilities allowed a larger number of Canadian women to change and develop their maternal and public identities in the second half of the twentieth century. As this group had fewer children and, therefore, gained more control over their reproductive roles than their mothers and grandmothers, they gradually transformed the image of the victimised and objectified mother into an active subject in Brazil, Canada, and other developed and developing nations. Of course, as I explain in Chapter Two, women and the economy have always had an ambivalent and dangerous relationship because, although economic inclusion allowed them to take charge of their bodies, the market also turned the female body into a commodity and maintained women's objectification. The women writers of both countries also responded to this context of positive transformations in women's lives and represented these new ways of mothering in their artist fiction. Their works portray the young middle-class mother of the period as a woman who expresses her own voice, exists beyond the domain of the household, and wants to attain financial independence.

In the female narratives published in Companhia das Letras, Record and Rocco, the most influential publishing houses in Brazil in the late twentieth century, only 25.9% of the women depicted in these works depend on a male

[28] These changes are reflected in the decrease of the total fertility rate from the 1950s and 1990s, which dropped from 3.455 in 1950s to 2.331 in 1970 ("Live Births" n. pag.) and finally reached 1.65 in 1981 and 1.52 in 1999 ("Report" 17).

figure (Dalcastagnè, "Imagens" 131). The novels by Luft, Bins, and Cunha, for instance, represent the women that have become aware of the possibility of being self-sufficient and having public identities. In Luft's *A sentinela*, Nora's stepsister is a successful doctor and mother. Even Nora's first lover encourages her to become independent of a male partner when he tells her that "[c]ompanionship, friendship, sex and emotions … all of this is great. But dependency... never" (*Companheirismo, camaradagem, sexo, emoção... tudo isso é ótimo. Mas dependência... nunca*) (92). In Bins's *Pele nua no espelho*, Antônia's friend, Emily, is introduced as an entrepreneur who recently opened an art gallery. Financial needs also drive these women to redefine their roles, as happens to the protagonist of Cunha's *As doze cores do vermelho*, who "needs to help the household's budget and works in the afternoon in a an office" (*precisa ajudar no orçamento doméstico e de tarde trabalha no escritório*) (21). Her school friends also pursue public careers. The "woman with green eyes" is a single mother and becomes a journalist and feminist activist; the "black woman" becomes a famous surgeon but does not have children. Brazilian writers emerging in the second half of the twentieth century "could not help but represent in fiction this woman who had just emerged from that context of change" (Cunha, "Becoming Whole" 229). The examples of these three novels show that the Brazilian authors often express enthusiasm about the changes in women's social and economic realities, but, as I discuss in the next section, this enthusiasm is actually not the focus of their works.

The Canadian authors also depicts the image of working women who are, in many cases, mothers, but the development of their careers reflects a different

cultural reality from the environment that surrounds the female protagonists of Brazilian literature. Many of the young women portrayed in the works by Laurence, Shields, and Atwood search for jobs when they are adolescents and young adults, a situation that was not common in the lives of young women of most social classes in Brazil during the same period. Furthermore, these fictional Canadian women begin to experiment with their artistic works earlier in adulthood than do the Brazilian women artists. For example, in Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, Elaine takes a preparatory course on drawing before she is eligible to enter university, and later uses a prestigious scholarship to finance her studies. In Laurence's *The Diviners*, Morag and her friend Ella exchange ideas about their writing experiences when attending college.

Although the fictional women artists depicted in Brazilian and Canadian literature experience a new economic reality that allows—and also forces—them to take charge of their reproduction and exist beyond their identities as mothers, the particular cultural, structural, and political developments of the time in Brazil and Canada reinforce different maternal roles and, therefore, influence the protagonists to perceive motherhood in unique ways in each country. While the image of the mother that the protagonists' families, friends, and communities construct in the novels represents the dominant discourse of motherhood that different external factors endorsed in each society from the 1960s to the 1990s, the central characters' responses to those images illustrate women's particular reactions toward these discourses in Brazil and Canada. Cunha, Luft, and Bins show that outside factors lead their fictional artists to perceive motherhood as

detrimental to their intellectual and personal fulfilments. During this time, the resistance to promoting a counter-discourse of femininity in the cultural enclaves of the family and the state often maintained Brazilian women in rigid maternal roles. In the works by Shields, Laurence, and Atwood, the protagonists still face limitations, but some external developments at least allow the mother-artists to overcome their restrictions and experience motherhood as more than simply a physical or social barrier. In Canada, both the legal protection of mothers in the workforce and the acceptance of working women provided women with the opportunities to develop new discourses of motherhood. As a result, the protagonists of the majority of the Brazilian novels are not able to enjoy their positions as mothers, whereas their Canadian counterparts generally reject patriarchal perceptions of motherhood in their maternal experiences and practices.

The protagonists of the Brazilian artist novels deliberately choose to become submissive housewives. The central character in *As doze cores do vermelho* obeys her family members who want her to accept a traditional marriage. For a long time in the novel, she does not rebel against their views because she lacks confidence and mourns the death of her boyfriend, who pursues an artistic career but commits suicide after being forced to join a military school (90). Vulnerable to this situation, Cunha's protagonist easily complies with the obligations imposed upon her by her family. She even believes in the voices that tell her that the "wife is the queen of the home" (*A mulher é a rainha do lar*) (15), a view that idealises but, paradoxically, minimises a woman's potential. In *O quarto fechado*, Renata initially refuses to play the role of a traditional middle-

class housewife because she does not understand how women such as her step-sister Clara and Mother could "spend so much time and energy on food, clothes, maids—the interests of those reconciled to a narrow-minded existence" (25). However, she feels lonely in her career and hence prefers to marry a narrow-minded man who lives in a rural area. Furthermore, the Brazilian women portrayed in these novels often opt to become self-sacrificing mothers. The protagonist of *Mulher no espelho*, for instance, tries to convince the sceptical narrator—her rebellious self and alter-ego—that she not only loves her violent and unfaithful husband but also enjoys her exclusive devotion to her sons. She lives in a "voluntary servitude" (16) and believes that "[o]nly those who experience love to the depths can understand they're paid back a thousand times over their sacrifice, the joy of suffering from so much love" (15). In *A sentinela*, the mother Nora also sacrifices too much for her son Henrique, because she attempts to provide him with the maternal love that her own mother was not able to give her. After Henrique is born, Nora becomes an overprotective parent, even though "[n]othing in him justified that excessive control, for he was growing up to become a healthy and […] normal little boy" (*Nada havia nele que justificasse aquele excessivo controle, pois ele crescia saudável e […] um menininho normal*) (114).

Emotional factors, such as low self-esteem, fear of loneliness, and rejection, lead the central characters of the aforementioned Brazilian novels to accept their states of oppression in this patriarchal system. What is surprising to the contemporary reader is that, although these individuals are unhappy in these

situations, they are reluctant to change their oppressive reality for most of the narrative, as is the case of Nora in Luft's *A sentinela* and the protagonists of Cunha's *As doze cores do vermelho* and *Mulher no espelho*; others remain paralysed until the end, which is what happens to Renata in Luft's *O quarto fechado*. The three female characters passively accept the traditional roles of housewife and mother in their lives. Their decisions reflect well the lack of political activism of a large group of Brazilian women who lived in the second half of the twentieth century. At the time, Brazilian women required a powerful feminist movement to challenge the conservative female roles that thwarted and silenced their female ancestors. As I discuss in Chapter Two, their European and North-American counterparts proposed counter-discourses of femininity and motherhood and envisioned active and empowering ways of being women and mothers. Nevertheless, although the feminist discourse in Brazil was "influenced by the experience of European and North-American [feminisms]" (Sarti, "Feminismo brasileiro" 36), their critique of patriarchal narratives of motherhood did not influence the women's movement and reality in Brazil because of both political restriction and cultural resistance.

Brazilian women could not identify with European and North-American feminisms, an idealised discourse that did not capture their own reality. In general, Latin American women "felt little resonance with feminist demands for [women's] benefits" and viewed feminists' "objectives as inconsistent with their reproductive roles" (Tiano 285-86). Whereas some women rejected European and North-American feminist theories in Brazil and other Latin American countries,

those who attempted to debate women's issues confronted a "host of barriers to political activities," such as the existence of "internalized images of politics as dangerous, useless, or simply inappropriate for women" (Tiano 88). In the particular context of Brazil, the political scenario restricted women's abilities to develop critical discourses and question the lingering image of the sacrificial mother. The military state suppressed intellectual production by means of violence, censorship, and strict policies between 1964 and the late 1980s. In the first years of this dictatorial government, "women's movements […] were silenced and destroyed" (Costa 13).

When feminism finally established itself, its political agenda was more conservative than the one proposed by North American and French feminists. One factor that hindered women's groups in Brazil was their need to find alliances with the Catholic Church, which shared a common cause with feminists—the Church also questioned the violence and censorship implemented by the military state. Because of the difficulty in having "to choose between political opposition against the dictatorship and the commitment to specific feminist issues articulated by the international women's movement, Brazilian feminism aligned itself with the progressive sectors of the Church […] in the defence of human rights" (Hollanda, "Parking" 8). Their relationship was, however, ambivalent. The Church provided political support against the state but inevitably restricted discussions about female liberation from the traditional ideas of the family and biological reproduction. Indeed, the feminist groups of the period were so busy fighting "against the military regime and censorship and for the democratisation

of the country, for granting amnesty [to protesters], and for better living conditions" (Duarte, "Feminismo" 214) that they were not able to address "the major women's issues of the 60s and 70s, such as sexual freedom, the constraints of nurturing motherhood, abortions, and divorce" (Hollanda, "Parking" 8). The conformist position of Brazilian feminists began to change in the late 1980s, when they became actively engaged in political and academic institutions.[29] Still, they did not directly challenge the traditional image of the mother. Few feminist scholars conducted research on the discourse of motherhood as late as the 1990s (Stevens 52).[30] Because Brazilian feminism oscillated between silence and conformism, the women who lived during this period lacked political support to question their confinement in traditional female roles and, as we will see later, their exclusion from the arts.

Women's complicity in the patriarchal system has played a fundamental role in the history of their oppression (Helena, "Personagem" 46). In Brazilian society, mothers have accepted and disseminated sexual discrimination in order to preserve their "comfortable position of 'housewife,' with guaranteed financial support, and [their image] of queen of the home" (Souza and Muraro 138). Nonetheless, I do not believe that the central characters' acceptance of conservative female roles in the novels by Luft and Cunha is simply a product of women's passivity and willingness to maintain their place as queens of the home.

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[29] Feminists groups only became politically active in the defence of women's rights in the late 1980s, when they joined a group of parliamentary members in the National Congress and founded the "lipstick lobby" to "implement changes to the Brazilian Constitution" (Duarte, "Feminismo" 216). During the same period, "a very organised group [emerging] among feminist scholars […] promoted the institutionalisation of women's studies" at universities (Duarte 216).

[30] Cristina Stevens's data show that only 13 out of over 500 articles published in major journals on gender studies in Brazil examined this topic—6 in *Revista de Estudos Feministas*, 2 in *Cadernos Pagu*, and 5 in *Fazendo Gênero*.

These fictional women's compliance also captures the feeling of a group women who, besides lacking an influential counter-discourse of feminism, felt discouraged by the cultural enclaves that dominated the institution of the family in the second half of the century. The "traditional pattern of values [maintained] in the family relationships, especially by means of its authoritarian and patriarchal nature" was in conflict with the new female roles that developed from the cultural and economic revolutions of the time in Brazil (Sarti, "Feminismo e contexto" 36). The resistance of this patriarchal mentality in the family structures of Brazil, as well as other Latin American countries, tethered women to the positions of full-time housewife and mother and, thus, imposed many obstacles on career women. The typical Latin American family defined "work outside the home" as "detrimental to the performance of [female] domestic role" (Tiano 283). Because such restrictive views continued to support the family traditions in Latin America until very recently, women still face "burdensome domestic and child care responsibilities that limit their time, energy, and physical mobility" (Tiano 288).

During the same period, while the family confined Brazilian women in restrictive domestic roles, the government of Brazil did not create a structure to support mothers' participation in their growing economic reality. Political interventions, such as the banning of abortion, were—and continue to be—ways of "maintaining control over the female body in order to preserve the ideology of sexual reproduction and the truth about women's natural role […] in the concept of the patriarchal family" (Schmidt, "Refutações" 778). The Brazilian government's control of female sexuality was destructive to women's

development, but it succeeded because of the processes of "reinforcement and updating of women's responsibilities for [the sake of] biological and social reproduction" (Meyer 98). Furthermore, the state successfully maintained this traditional discourse because it did not offer a legal structure to protect employed mothers in Brazil.[31] According to Souza and Muraro, developed countries had already "a structure to help" working mothers, which included "private and day cares and public ones (for lower social classes)" (140).[32] Without any legal support to continue working, Brazilian mothers probably felt even more vulnerable and, as a result, unable to solve their personal conflicts in the home, where they faced "the need to leave their children with babysitters […], often not trustworthy, the negligence of the household duties, the constant state of exhaustion, etc" (Souza and Muraro 140). The cultural enclaves endorsed by the state discouraged women from pursuing careers and, indirectly, led them to accept traditional female roles.

Just as the patriarchal family and the government of Brazil supported submissive maternal roles during this time, the central characters' husbands, families, and friends pressure the protagonists of the novels by Luft and Cunha into complying with similar discourses of motherhood. In Cunha's *As doze cores do vermelho*, these outside expectations materialise in the opinion of the same "voices" that silence the painter's mother. Even before the painter gets married,

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[31] The 1969 Constitution Act, for instance, placed women in the category of underage children and excluded them from heavy industrial jobs and night shifts. The same act refers to "paid vacation" for women after childbirth, but its definition is vague. It is only in the new Constitution Act of 1998 that the term "maternal leave" was elaborated to provide rights and security to employed mothers.

[32] Although Souza and Muraro oversimplify the conditions of working mothers in other countries, their situations probably looked advanced in contrast to the neglect of women's rights in the laws in Brazil during the time when the authors published their study.

these voices condemn any maternal experience that does not fit in with the normative image of the married, dependent, and sacrificial mother. They tell her stories of women who experiment with their sexuality outside of the traditional family: "A girl was pregnant and committed suicide. A young woman was pregnant and ran away from home and became a prostitute. A young woman was pregnant and had an abortion and died. A young woman was pregnant and was expelled from her house. Pregnant. Pregnancy. Problem" (*Uma menina estava grávida e se suicidou. Uma moça estava grávida e fugiu de casa e foi ser mulher da vida. Uma moça estava grávida e fez aborto e morreu. Uma moça estava grávida e foi posta para fora de casa. Grávida. Gravidez. Gravidade*) (36). Cunha even employs alliteration to emphasise the similarities between the words pregnancy (*gravidez*) and problem (*gravidade*). Moreover, the association between the two words shows that, according to the external views that the "voices" embody, women's assertiveness is dangerous and threatens the typical image of the mother. For that reason, their tragic fates are accepted and disseminated to maintain women's sexuality and reproduction within the constraints of the patriarchal family. After Cunha's central character is married, the voices continue to teach her that "the husband comes in the first place" (*em primeiro lugar [vem] o marido*) while "the wife must be submissive" (*a mulher deve ser submissa*) (15). Her husband also joins the voices and criticises any effort she makes to escape the roles of submissive housewife and sacrificial mother. For example, when the aspiring painter meets her friends after work, he judges her behaviour. Later on, she decides to join a fine arts program to find a

better job, but he claims that "the duty of every mother is to take care of her daughters as much as possible" (*o dever de toda mãe cuidar o mais tempo possível das filhas*) (23).

In *O quarto fechado*, although Renata's frustration is a result of her spontaneous decision to abandon her career and become a full-time, submissive housewife and mother, her husband's opinions also contribute to her acceptance of these traditional roles. After their marriage, "she felt betrayed" because Martim "had made her abandon her real life, had seduced her with his strength and his passion, had taken advantage of her loneliness, and now was binding her to a life that seemed purposeless, that held no attraction for her whatsoever" (31). In fact, he was demanding and "wanted an energetic and capable wife, a woman like Mother" (30). At the same time, a woman should only concentrate this energy on her duties as wife and mother, not on a profession. Martim also believes that a woman can find satisfaction by dedicating herself exclusively to the household because "nothing could be better for a healthy life than a house, a family, and something useful to do. That was success, and that was what his wife needed" (29).[33] He expects Renata to embody this image of the sacrificial mother, but when she fails to do so, he cannot understand her nostalgia for her former career as a pianist.

Although both women are partially responsible for their choices, they are also subject to the conservative female roles that their families, partners, and friends consider the norm. These external factors impose severe restrictions upon

[33] In their translation of this passage, Mcclendon and Craige have Martim question only Renata's attitude. However, in Luft's novel, Martim refers to women in general. He believes that this idea of success is "o que uma mulher precisava" (42), literally, "what a/any woman needed."

the central characters and influence their decisions to either sacrifice their maternal roles or view the act of mothering as negative. Because of these restrictive discourses of motherhood, the protagonists of Queiroz's *Dora, Doralina* and Lispector's *Perto do coração selvagem*, analysed in the previous chapter, decide not to become mothers. In the former, Dora never talks about having children. In the latter, Joana believes that "a child must be born in the womb of all women" (133), but she is afraid of the negative aspects of motherhood. Imagining how destructive and demanding being a mother could be, Joana rejects this experience: "after I have given him milk from these delicate and attractive breasts, my child will thrive on my strength and crush me with his life. He will distance himself from me and I shall become his useless old mother" (144).

Cunha's protagonists experience their maternal responsibilities as stagnating. The painter of *As doze cores do vermelho* feels "happiness and sadness with her two daughters" (*alegrias e tristezas com as duas filhas*) (17), but her ambivalent idea of motherhood paralyses her. She wants to liberate herself from this demanding life while being pulled by the obligation to nurture her daughters in traditional ways. In one conflicting situation with her daughters, her husband pretends to be busy and does not offer her any support. Her anger toward his attitude is amplified when she sees her paintings neglected in a corner of the apartment. She "takes her purse and approaches the door" (*pega a sua bolsa e vai até a porta*) in order to leave (27). However, she realises that she is "stuck to the ground" and "afraid" (*Presa no chão [...] você tem medo*) (27). In another

occasion, she remembers her "old dream" of a career in the arts, but she "feels confined in the walls of her walls" (*antigo sonho mas você presa nas paredes de suas paredes*) (39). Furthermore, the external pressure to conform to traditional maternal discourses of motherhood becomes destructive to Cunha's women artists. The painter in *As doze cores do vermelho* "chain smoke[s]" and "feels pain in her stomach" (*Você fuma um cigarro atrás do outro […]Você sente aquela dor no estômago*) (31). This health problem develops into an ulcer that almost costs her her life. The woman writer of *Mulher no espelho* also believes that her sacrificial position as mother can destroy her. She has "the feeling that" her children "are sucking my very blood" (15). In both cases, Cunha metaphorically suggests that this type of mothering can gradually extinguish a woman's life.

Luft's central characters realise that a sacrificial maternal role is not as satisfying as Nora initially thinks or as fulfilling as Renata is led to believe. In *A sentinela*, Nora has mixed feelings about motherhood during her pregnancy. In the beginning, she looks forward to "all the projects, the anxiety, the adventure to the mysterious being that would come out of her" (*todos os projetos, as ansiedades, a aventura daquele ser misterioso que sairia [dela]*) and feels as though she "were whole" (*estava plena*) (110). However, after her son's birth, motherhood becomes a "frightening" (*aterrorizante*) experience (114). In *O quarto fechado*, Renata not only doubts the existence of maternal instincts but also perceives motherhood as an unsatisfying and paralysing experience. She confesses to her doctor that she believes she "was born without the natural instincts other women have" (30). Because Renata realises that she is not able to fit into the world of mothers—a

world accepted as the only truth—it is not surprising that she clashes with the maternal role that Martim and their culture expect of her. During her "difficult pregnancy" with twins, "Renata nourished only one hope, that she could be free of it, that she could get rid of it" (31). Although she knows "that to do so was wrong and damnable," Luft's heroine feels "different from other women" since she is not "happily anticipating the birth." Instead, she is "afraid" (31). Even when she is expecting baby Rafael and "at once felt like a mother" (59), this response is only temporary. Again, Renata sees this exclusive role of mother as being unsatisfying and as a result, can "neither eat, sleep, nor play with her baby unless" she has moments of escape playing the piano (86). She knows, "Deep down […] not even Rafael could serve as a substitute for the vocation she had betrayed" (86). Moreover, the demands of a role that she does not enjoy paralyse Renata, who begins "to waste away, just like the invalid woman in the closed room in Mother's house" (32). Ella's physical paralysis and mental deterioration are metaphors for what Renata becomes in her position as a mother: a woman incapable of altering her confining environment and restoring her artistic ambitions.

That being said, not all Brazilian women writers have a pessimistic view of motherhood. Bins challenges the belief that the negative roles imposed upon women by traditional discourses of motherhood are the only ways of being a mother in her society. Her novels present women who are able to develop multiple ranges of maternal experiences and practices even in the conservative space that is Brazil at the time. In Bins's 1986 work, *Janela dos sonhos* (*Window of Dreams*), the aspiring painter Maria is a faithful wife and dedicated mother,

but, later on, neglects her children, betrays her husband, and even loses her sanity. Ironically, Bins challenges the submissive and pious nature of the Virgin Mary with whom Maria shares her name. Also, Bins does not use dualistic definitions of women as "Angel or villainess" because "deep inside" Maria is "not dual, but multiple and she does not know herself" (*Anjo ou megera [...] no fundo, não era dupla, era múltipla e se desconhecia*) (34-35). In *Pele nua no espelho*, the central character's best friend and double, Emily, also has a complex maternal experience. In her adolescence, she becomes pregnant by a poor young man who works for her parents. Opposing her pregnancy, her parents decide to give the baby away and send young Emily to a nunnery, but she escapes before this happens, marries the young man who helps her, and names her daughter Felicity. Emily does not have an affectionate relationship with her daughter and "rarely takes care of Felicity" (*raramente se ocupa de Felicity*) (75). In the same novel, Bins portrays women who enjoy nurturing children. Antônia, who is initially depicted as a childless woman, believes that she needs "to discover [herself] before bringing someone else into the world" (*me descobrir antes de colocar alguém no mundo*) (42). However, when she meets the child Felicity, they immediately develop a strong emotional bond and the girl even confuses Antônia with her biological mother. This intrigues Emily's husband, who tells Antônia that she should have a child because she has "an incredible way of dealing with children (and this is love)" (*um jeito incrível (e isto é amor) para lidar com crianças*) (77). When Antônia's life intermingles with that of Emily in the last chapter, "Merry-go-round" (*Carrossel*), Bins reverses their roles and creates a

fluid novel in which "fiction and reality get mixed, touch each other, distance themselves from each other, and merge" (*ficção e realidade se mesclam, se tocam, se distanciam e se fundem*) (165). This time, mother Antônia expresses her happiness and love toward Felicity whom she calls her "little daughter" (*filhinha*) and says that she "would like to hug her, kiss her" (*Gostaria de abraçá-la, beijá-la*) (163).

Cunha, Luft, and Bins identify different factors that continue to confine women in conservative roles and, as a result, create dissatisfied mothers. Cunha's focus on her protagonists' victimisation by their partners and families suggests that she blames society for imposing an oppressive discourse of femininity on women. Cunha does not ignore women's complicity in their positions of sacrificial housewives and mothers, but even in this case, her novels underline the fact that external opinions lead women to accept, internalise, and even embrace a destructive role. Cunha actually claims that men and women experience a "process of internalisation of the codes of a restrictive patriarchal culture" ("Mulher partida" 119). Luft also denounces the negative impact of these cultural codes on mothers when Renata and Nora do not gain any satisfaction from the demanding maternal roles that they are expected to fulfil. Nonetheless, the patriarchal discourse that their partners reinforce is not the only cause of mothers' frustrations in their societies. Indeed, for Luft, their individual flaws—Renata's selfishness and Nora's lack of confidence and self-denial—partially influence the choices that women generally make and contribute to their oppressive situations. Furthermore, Luft has an essentialist and fatalistic idea of motherhood. The

modern woman "manages her life and her profession," feels "less confined by old conventions," and may become "complete" and "fulfilled, but she is not always free" ("Masculino" 59). Luft believes that, regardless of how modern and feminist women have become, they cannot deny the physical constraints of their bodies when they become pregnant and nurture children, for "nature has imprinted long-lasting marks and played tricks on us: nobody can give birth for us" (160). Luft even questions the belief that mothers have recently gained independence because of the possibility of making choices: "'Having options' can mean freedom but also affliction" (157). Bins is more optimistic than either Cunha or Luft. In her view, the major obstacle that prevents women from enjoying motherhood is the existence of binary definitions of mothers as either good or bad. Instead of being limited by this binary, the mothers who inhabit her novels can be simultaneously selfish and selfless, loving and spiteful, saintly and immoral. Although their protagonists have different responses to the traditional discourses of motherhood, Cunha, Luft and Bins share a similar view: they question the idealised image of the mother in their culture and show that finding an empowering maternal role continues to be a challenge for Brazilian women.

The women artists represented in Canadian fiction do not comply with the traditional images of housewife and mother that their Brazilian counterparts passively accept after other meaningful relationships and active roles are taken away from them. Therefore, the difference between these two groups of women starts in the way they enter the private spaces designated to housewives and mothers. Whereas the young protagonists of Luft's and Cunha's novels need time

to fight against their discouraging female roles and, in some cases, never do so, the women portrayed in Shields's *The Box Garden*, Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, and Laurence's *The Diviners* from the beginning rebel against patriarchal discourses of femininity by having unusual relationships, leaving them if necessary, and becoming single mothers. In *The Box Garden*, Charleen constructs her private identity as a housewife and mother in unconventional ways and against what her mother and neighbours consider an ideal life for a young woman. While "all the other girls in the neighbourhood were going to secretarial school or studying to be hairdressers," Charleen "elop[es] with a student, [leaves] a note on her pillow and rid[es] off to Vancouver on the back of a motorcycle" (142). Charleen enters the household as an active woman and develops her artistic potential in this private space. The artist represented in *Cat's Eye* becomes independent from her family when she is studying at university. After finishing her degree and getting a job, Elaine also begins her private life as housewife and mother in an unorthodox way. She shares an apartment with her boyfriend John, and they decide to get married when surprised by an unplanned pregnancy. The protagonist of *The Diviners* initiates her female roles in the household in a more assertive way than do Charleen and Elaine. Morag deliberately forges a new self to marry the man she admires, her English professor, who appears to have an unconventional mind in the first years of their relationship. Brooke warns Morag about the constraints of being a mother, believing that she will "be awfully tied down with it" and that she is "still very young for that kind of limited life" (259). However, he is not able to understand that, for Morag, motherhood goes beyond any physical limitation.

With time, it becomes clear that Brooke does not want to have a child because of his fear of becoming his own cruel father. As a result, Morag leaves him after she realises that, besides refusing to have a baby with her, Brooke wants to manipulate her looks and maintain her in the position of a child. She has an affair with Jules, a Métis friend from Manawaka, becomes pregnant by him, and starts her journey as an independent woman and single mother.

The protagonists of the three Canadian artist novels thus enter the female private space by means of unconventional behaviours and decisions, but the three young women need to overcome some economic, psychological, and physical obstacles thrust on mothers before they can perceive the meaningful nature of motherhood. In the second half of the twentieth century, Latin American society often idealised motherhood at the cost of the devaluation of female employment and public roles and, as a result, kept women in the traditional sphere of the household. In contrast, the same generations of North American women generally faced different challenges. They struggled with both the burdensome expectation to succeed in their jobs and the pressure to be good housewives and mothers. According to O'Reilly, even nowadays, women "in the dominant Anglo-American culture often experience the demands of work […] in opposition to the private/reproductive sphere of the home/family." They "are categorized and regulated by what has been termed the 'either-or dichotomy'" and "must choose between work and motherhood" (Introduction 18). This dichotomy suggests that many Canadian women have been conditioned to choose between two equally valuable options, but they soon realise that, even though childbearing and

childrearing are as demanding as formal employment, they are devalued. In the past few decades, Canadian women would probably concur that the mother's role is "the most under-paid, under-acknowledged, and over-sentimentalized job in the world" (Swan 212) or that a mother is "not properly seen, valued," and "supported" (Jackson xiii). Lorna A. Turnbull, who has investigated Canada's legal system, claims that mothers "are still disadvantaged by systemic discrimination that cannot be corrected by making simple changes to the existing laws and that is partly attributable to the liberal ideology underlying our North American legal systems" (16). Liberalism, she explains, "ignores and consequently devalues the relations of dependence that characterize the bond between a child and its parent." As a result, "women become invisible […] in the current social structure" (16). Although liberal systems such as that of Canada have provided women with those two options, they have failed to recognise the value of mothers' challenges and responsibilities.

In the novels by Shields and Laurence, the protagonists face social and economic constraints that underrate their maternal roles, just as that the economic system devalued women who were mothers in the second half of the twentieth century. The protagonists are even more vulnerable to this depreciation, because they do not fit the traditional image of the mother. In *The Box Garden*, Charleen learns that the roles of housewife (her friend) and mother (herself) are undervalued by a generation that defines "people in terms of their professions" (20). As a single mother, she struggles with many financial problems after Watson abandons her and their son. In fact, the novel starts in a bank where Charleen

checks her account balance and withdraws "the monthly child support money" for her fifteen-year-old son Seth and a "tiny salary" that she earns from her job as a clerk assistant in the Botanical Journal (1). Her dismay in the opening section of the novel suggests that her income is just enough to cover the living expenses for herself and Seth. In *The Diviners*, Morag is looked down for being a divorced woman and single mother. When she is in labour in the hospital, a nurse tells her not to advertise her status; it is "not something to be proud of." The nurse even believes that Morag is "lucky they're letting [her] have the baby here" (356). Like Shields, Laurence makes us aware of mothers' financial difficulties because Morag realises how difficult it is to "look after and support a kid, on her own" (347). Before her baby is born, Morag lives and works in a boarding house, where she has "a room of her own" (345), a reference to Woolf's claim that women are able to pursue intellectual independence in a literary career if they "have five hundred a year" and "rooms of [their] own" (633). In the section ironically called "A Portrait of the Artist as a Pregnant Skivvy," Morag experiences economic oppression instead of intellectual autonomy. She works as a domestic servant for—and is often exploited by—her landlady. Laurence completes what Woolf overlooks: mothers, especially single mothers, encounter even more challenges to reach an economic situation that can give them access to independence in intellectual terms.

Furthermore, Atwood and Laurence expose the psychological and physical burdens that a mother cannot escape. Neither writer idealises the experience of motherhood; instead, both show how it alters women's lives, including their

professional goals. In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine describes her difficulties in raising her first child. During her first year as a mother, ambitious Elaine does not paint. She now feels "tired all the time, and fogged by hormones" (370) and confesses that she "lost confidence." Maybe, she thinks, this is "all [she] will ever be" (373). When she is able to work on her art again, Elaine believes that even the real woman concealed behind the perfect Virgin Mary probably experienced similar physical and psychological constraints. Elaine refuses to portray the ever-happy, glowing and beautiful mother of those religious images and paints the Catholic saint as a woman "carrying two brown paper bags full of groceries," while "[s]everal things have fallen from the bag: an egg, an onion, an apple." In Elaine's "realistic" version, mother Virgin Mary "looks tired" (376). In *The Diviners*, Morag gives birth to an energetic girl, Pique, who constantly wakes up in the middle of the night while the central character "weeps with chagrin and tiredness" (359). As Pique grows up, Morag finally realises that, as a mother, she "*fluctuate[s] like a pendulum*" because her "*life [is] bound up so centrally with*" that of her child (424). Laurence presents the "act of mothering […] as a tremendously difficult one, filled with responsibility" (Brandt and Harms 41). Like Atwood, Laurence does not conceal the fact that mothers are physically vulnerable and constrained because of their necessary emotional bond with their infants.

A woman's decision to practice an alternative maternal role, especially one that is informed by feminist ideas, "comes at a high cost" and "involve[s] high-risk social rebellion, usually leading to separation or divorce and loss of

financial security and social community for women and their children" (Brandt, "(Grand)mothering" 254-55). Still, although the three Canadian female characters pay a high price for their alternative roles as divorced and single mothers, they do not easily accept the financially secure and yet patriarchal positions that frustrate and paralyse their Brazilian counterparts. Charleen, Elaine, and Morag have the confidence to challenge the economic, cultural, physical, and psychological restrictions that contribute to the process of victimisation of mothers. Their strength to overcome these barriers is a product of the active discourse of motherhood that was made available to women in their culture in the second half of the twentieth century. During this time, Canada elaborated on an exemplary legal system to protect women from prejudice and, according to Barbara Roberts, played a "leadership role" in the development and promotion of women's rights (198). As an example, in 1981, the country ratified "a binding international treaty […] which requires the total elimination in Canada of all forms of discrimination against women, public and private, direct and systemic, by institutions or individuals" (Roberts 197-98). Meanwhile, Canada's legal system also extended support to working mothers in an attempt to create a less biased workspace for women.[34] For instance, in 1981—17 years before Brazilian women were granted maternal leave—the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that "if an employer discriminated against a woman on the basis of pregnancy then that discrimination would amount to discrimination on the basis of sex and would be impermissible" because it "would undermine the purposes of anti-discrimination legislation"

[34] Recently, the Supreme Court of Canada "has made broad pronouncements […] about the importance of the procreative work that women do, and the importance of considering that work in the context of gender equality" (Turnbull 92).

(Turnbull 16). This ruling has been considered "a positive affirmation of women's procreative role in [Canadian] society" (Turnbull 17). At the time when their legal systems were redefined to protect career mothers, Canadian and North American women also witnessed the execution of projects such as the mommy track, which helped create a "special, less pressured route for women who chose to combine career and family" and secured their "part-time employments, longer maternity leaves, and time off to care for ill children" (Arnup 153-54).

When society dictates motherhood as a woman's obligatory and exclusive function, it produces unsatisfied women who have negative attitudes toward their maternal experiences, as occurs in Brazilian culture. In Canada, however, because women have had legal support to pursue meaningful roles outside the home, they generally perceive motherhood beyond the implications of passivity, self-sacrifice, and confinement. The cultural acceptance of mothers in public spaces can also explain why Canadian female intellectuals and writers have adopted constructive metaphors to define the act of mothering. They have described motherhood as passionate (Cowan, Lam, and Stonehouse xvii), creative (Sarah 48; Swan 208), politically engaging (Brandt, "My Breasts" 56), empowering and empowered experiences (Podnieks and O'Reilly 17) that contribute not only to the nurturing of children and the maintenance of families, but also to women's self-development (Brandt, "(Grand)mothering" 255). For many Canadian writers and critics, mothers also have some responsibility in the creation of culture (Shields, "Thinking Back" 12; Smyth 14).

The women artists portrayed in Canadian fiction not only attempt to see beyond the constraints that motherhood creates for women, but also define their maternal roles as meaningful positions. Even the protagonist of *The Box Garden*, who does not become a single mother by choice, is neutral toward her maternal experience and courageously fights her obstacles. Although Charleen says little about her view of motherhood, she does not perceive it as a detrimental experience. Her silence suggests that Shields creates a strong mother who confronts difficult circumstances without victimising herself. Charleen believes that she "will never be brave" (1), but Shields actually reveals her central character's self-assurance when Charleen overcomes the end of her relationship with her husband and, despite this challenge, is able to raise a confident and artistic son. For a long time, she refuses to discuss the topic of marriage with her boyfriend Eugene, which also emphasises her independent mind. Moreover, as I will explain later on, Charleen copes with her personal conflicts through the creation of her poems. Her choice to fight her emotional problems through literary expression illustrates how a mother can pursue an artistic role in her culture.

In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine experiences the act of mothering as a productive role that does not prevent her from searching for jobs and fighting for her career. When her daughter is a baby, the painter initially freelances and works at home with "book cover assignments" that she finds "a major effort," but she soon takes a part-time shift in a new job. Gradually, she also focuses on her own art (373). Elaine's versatility shows that motherhood requires fierceness. Atwood does not undermine the value of a mother's work and yet emphasises her potential to be

active and independent. Furthermore, Atwood develops an atypical concept of motherhood in Elaine's art. In another portrait of the Virgin Mary, Elaine represents the Madonna with "the head of a lioness," which is, in her opinion, a "more accurate [image] about motherhood than old bloodless milk-and-water Virgins of art history" (375). After all, the painter explains, "If Christ is a lion, as he is in traditional iconography, why wouldn't the Virgin Mary be a lioness?" Her "Virgin Mary is fierce, alert to danger, wild" and "stares levelly out at the viewer with her yellow lion's eyes" (375). By painting a lioness mother who maintains her gaze at the same level of the viewer, Elaine challenges the objectification of the maternal body in society. This fierce Virgin Mary also becomes a symbol for Elaine's maternal experience and that of her wild mother, since both female characters fight for active positions outside the private space traditionally assigned to mothers. Elaine, therefore, embraces a strong concept of motherhood in both her life and her visual art.

From the beginning, the protagonist of *The Diviners* defines motherhood as a positive experience because she chooses to have a child in order to answer her "innate" desire to mother. While Morag believes in maternal instincts, Laurence does not separate femininity from motherhood. In fact, Laurence claimed that motherhood is "the core of [a woman's] being," thus reinforcing a dangerous essentialism (Givner 90). Nevertheless, if we focus on the essentialist implications echoed in Laurence's personal view and fiction, we ignore the fact that she defines the act of mothering beyond any simplistic role, because Morag has a significant impact on the public sphere. As I discussed in Chapter Three,

Laurence celebrates the existence of exemplary mothers like Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, who were committed to their society in the past. Laurence draws parallels between Morag and the strong maternal model that she admires in Traill. Morag's decision to be a single mother would probably clash with Traill's ideal of femininity, but both women challenge the conservative female roles of their times: Traill rejects women's intellectual passivity and Morag defies their financial and social dependence. Most importantly, like Traill, Laurence's protagonist discovers that the act of mothering involves the acceptance of social responsibilities, for she believes that she can construct a legacy for her descendants, especially her daughter. Morag even considers Pique the "*harbinger of my death, continuer of my life*" (341), which becomes true when Pique inherits her mother's powerful femininity and artistic potential. Hence, Morag's view of motherhood becomes intertwined with her artistic role in the sense that both mothers and artists leave their imprints on their societies. Laurence recuperates the mother's "agency and power" and explores "the powerful potentiality of mothering in the public sense, tracing motherhood on the symbolic level of the artist, prophet, and visionary" (Brandt, "(Grand)mothering" 254-55). The connection between Morag's motherhood and art will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

The protagonists of Brazilian artist novels are confined in cultural discourses of motherhood that lead them to perceive childbearing and childrearing as negative responsibilities and, as a result, destroy their opportunities to develop strong female roles in the private and public domains. As such, they represent the

group of Brazilian women who confronted similar frustrations in the second half of the twentieth century because their families, societies, and government still endorsed the patriarchal image of the mother. The artistic mothers depicted in *The Box Garden*, *Cat's Eye*, and *The Diviners* are not part of an ideal environment in which their maternal experience is fully supported; however, they define mothering as a meaningful act because each author emphasises one valuable aspect of motherhood. Shields represents it as a courageous experience when Charleen refuses to become victimised. Despite the end of her marriage and her lack of financial security, she takes care of her son and discovers her inner artistic self. Although Atwood reminds us of a mother's physical burdens, her ambitious female painter shows that a mother can and should overcome traditional maternal roles in order to accept an active concept of femininity. Finally, Laurence celebrates a mother's empowering role when Morag sees her daughter and younger generations as the recipients of her life. The image of motherhood that prevails in the novels by Shields, Atwood, and Laurence suggests that this group of Canadian mothers dared to be courageous and productive, while the generation of my mother still lacked the confidence, as well as the proper encouragement from their families and governments, to fight for an equal place in Brazilian society during the same period.

Mothers' Search for Artistic Recognition:
From Criminal/Egoistical to Confident Constructors of a Heritage

Brazilian and Canadian women novelists show that, when a society provides artists with societal, political, and legal support, it increases their opportunities to succeed in their careers and affects their convictions that they can do so. In contrast, the absence of these foundations in a culture creates a negative image of the woman artist, which discourages women from fully developing their artistic potentials and pursuing a profession in their cultural industries. The novels by Cunha, Luft, Shields, Atwood, and Laurence suggest that the reception of women artists in their particular culture influences women's experience in an artistic profession as compatible or incompatible with their maternal responsibilities. I argue that the opinions of their central characters' families, partners, friends and communities illustrate the typical receptions of the Brazilian and Canadian women artists from the 1960s to the 1990s, while the novels' protagonists embody the anxieties experienced by the women artists who emerged at the time in Brazil and Canada. In their search for critical acclaim or simply social acceptance, the women artists portrayed in Brazilian fiction feel that those external opinions undermine the value of their contributions. The protagonists of the Canadian novels confront the obstacles that male and female artists are likely to face; however, their political and cultural environments provide a more encouraging reception of women in artistic careers than that offered in Brazilian society.

In the second half of the twentieth century, if Brazilian women who wanted to develop an identity outside the home and contribute to the economic life of their country found obstacles on their way, those with artistic aspirations faced still another challenge: to feel accepted and recognised in their artistic communities. They struggled with a government that did not provide support to artists until 1986, when Act 7505 was implemented to collect taxes for the creation of the Fund of Cultural Promotion. In 1991, the approval of Act 8313, nonetheless, allowed the government to extinguish this fund, along with the Ministry of Culture. The implementation of Act 8313 in the subsequent years was criticised as "an attempt to exempt the state from any responsibility to finance culture—through the destruction of one of the most important public cultural institutions in the country and the drastic reduction of funding in the area" (Moisés par. 3). Later on, the government created the National Fund of Culture and restored its position to encourage and protect artistic production in Brazil. In addition to the scarce financial support provided to Brazilian artists in general, women also confronted a cultural tradition that did not approve or celebrate their contribution to the arts.

At the time, Brazilian women gradually found more space in artistic professions than did their female ancestors. For instance, women contributed to the creation of a strong literary tradition in Brazil. Fitz observes that, "Since the 1950s in Brazil […], the novel and the short story have been practiced by a number of outstanding women […] who deal with issues of gender, sexuality, and power in nontraditional ways" (*Brazilian Narrative* 185). Many female writers

from this period "attained greater critical recognition than did their counterparts in Spanish America"; nevertheless, we cannot overlook the fact that Brazilian female writers "are only now beginning to receive the critical attention they deserve" (Payne and Fitz 3-4). The artistic community was more reluctant to embrace women artists in Brazil than were their counterparts in North-America and Europe, and, as a result, Brazilian women writers clashed with a literary tradition that disregarded and devalued their efforts to be part of their culture. The criteria for selecting literary texts and including them in the literary canon of Brazil were based on supposedly objective "aesthetic standards" that were, in reality, "contaminated by a gendered discourse" and favoured a "masculine perception" (Schmidt, "Centro e margens" 133-34). The biased standards of evaluation of this criticism for a long time rendered women invisible in the history of Brazilian literature, as if no female writer ever existed before Queiroz and Cecília Meireles (Schmidt 131). For instance, literary critics continued to restrict the inclusion of women writers in major literary anthologies, such as Mário da Silva Brito's 1964 *Histórias do modernismo brasileiro* and Alfredo Bosi's 1965 *História concisa da literatura brasileira* (Schmidt 134).[35] The preference for male writers is also noticeable in the country's most prestigious literary association. Although the Brazilian Academy of Letters (ABL) was founded in 1897, it excluded women

[35] As an example, José Castello's 1999 *A literatura brasileira* provides a list of Brazilian writers who published their first work from the 1950s to the 1970s. Women account for less than 10% of a group of 32 writers of fiction who emerged in the 1950s. This number increases in the next two decades but continues to reflect the existence of gender inequalities; women represent 29% of a list of 31 poets and fiction writers who had their first publications in the 1960s and 1970s. Castello leaves out important women writers, such as Luft, Bins, and Cunha, but it is not possible to say whether his selection fairly includes the female writers who were celebrated during this period or follows the masculine view that Schmidt claims Brazilian anthologies often reinforced in the second half of the century.

among its honorary members until 1977, when it accepted its first female member, Rachel Queiroz. Over 280 past and current writers have been selected and granted membership in the ABL, but only 2.5% of them are women. Furthermore, the publishing market was reluctant to welcome the works by women writers even at the turn of the twentieth century. In a 2007 analysis of "all the novels published by the major Brazilian publishing houses in the field (Companhia das Letras, Record and Rocco) in the prior 15 years […] women writers did not reach 30% of all writers edited" (Dalcastagnè 128). Clearly, the canonisation of male writers in anthologies and the selection of few women by literary institutions and publishing houses reflect well the discouraging reality that aspiring and professional women writers faced in the second half of the twentieth century in Brazil.

In Cunha's and Luft's novels, the central characters do not encounter in their families and society the necessary support for their careers. Their families and societies respond to these mothers' artistic ambitions with harsh opinions that constrain and devalue their profession just as, during the period when the novels were published, the Brazilian government, as well as the artistic communities, market, and critics in the country discriminated against women artists. Both Cunha and Luft denounce the existence of a similarly exclusionary environment when their protagonists' friends, families, and partners use negative images of the woman artist in order to degrade the female characters' artistic positions and work. In *As doze cores do vemelho*, when the nameless painter has her first child and attempts to work on her art again, her husband tells her that "instead of taking

care of your daughter, you're wasting time with these paintings that nobody can understand" (*em vez de ficar com sua filha está perdendo tempo com estas pinturas que ninguém entende*) (19). In his first critique of the painter's work, Cunha initially protests against the devaluation of the role of artists in general: pursuing a position that does not have much value for society is often considered a waste of time. But, later on, the novel shows that the painter is actually subject to discrimination against *women* artists. Her husband feels uncomfortable with the career that provides her the opportunity to break away from the self-sacrificing maternal role that she is pressured into fulfilling. His gender bias becomes clear after an important art critic invites her to exhibit her works. Instead of supporting the painter, her husband humiliates her: "you must not have an exhibition in the gallery on the beach so that you do not run the risk of ridiculing yourself and, after all, nobody will buy those eccentric paintings" (*você não deve fazer a exposição na galeria da praia para não se arriscar ao ridículo e além do mais ninguém vai comprar aqueles quadros estapafúrdios*) (77). For Cunha, many people in her society do more than simply humiliate women artists; they also disseminate the images of women artists as outlaws and prostitutes in order to devalue their cultural significance.

Women's artistic identities are threatening to the values and laws that maintain the patriarchal family and the exclusionary domain of the arts in Brazil. Hence, women artists are often considered outlaws because their artistic potential can allow them to deviate from the accepted images of the submissive wife and pious mother. After the central character in *As doze cores do vermelho* finally

establishes herself as a painter, she never ceases to be a caring mother. However, whenever she needs to leave the traditional space assigned to mothers and go to art exhibitions, her husband tells their children that she "only thinks about travelling and abandoning her children" (*só pensa em viajar e deixar as crianças abandonadas*) (41). In his opinion, because of her choice to work as an artist, which he defines as "criminal egotism" (*um egoísmo criminoso*), the painter "is destroying the family and […] their daughters will be irreparably harmed permanently" (*está destruindo a família e [...] as filhas se prejudicarão irremediadamente*) (53). This is not the case. Both daughters actually develop psychological problems before the central character becomes successful. Her younger daughter becomes an infantilised and passive woman who plays with Disney stuffed animals and refuses to learn about her sexuality, whereas the older daughter rebels against submissive female roles, quickly matures to be a strong and creative woman, joins a rock band, and initiates her sexual experience. However, she experiments with drugs at a young age. Their extreme negative behaviours are responses to the only two options offered to their mother and other women in Brazilian society, but the painter is blamed for her daughters' situations because of her "criminal" decision to invest in a career.

Moreover, Cunha reveals that mothers who become artists are perceived as prostitutes. In *As doze cores do vermelho*, one of the central character's former high school friends, the "blonde woman," discovers that her husband is having an affair with the painter and tells her that "some women […] want to steal the husband of honest housewives and make a career acting like prostitutes" (*certas*

mulheres [...] querem tomar o marido das esposas honestas e fazem carreira agindo como as prostitutas) (89). By identifying the painter with the group of women who "sell themselves and, instead of money, receive trips and gold medals" (*se vendem e em vez de dinheiro recebem viagens e medalhas de ouro*) (89), her friend accepts the judgemental view of women artists. It is true that the protagonist's artistic freedom gives her confidence to strive for social and sexual liberation, which she could not enjoy in the past. Nevertheless, although she crosses some ethical borders and commits adultery with her friend's husband, the painter is rewarded with valuable prizes because of the quality of her art, not her body. After the nameless central character in *Mulher no espelho* signs a contract with a prominent publishing house, she confronts a similar image of the woman artist. Her success as a writer coincides with her separation from a disloyal husband. Her family and friends never judge his extra-marital affairs, but, when Cunha's heroine leaves her husband and discovers the sexual pleasure that was denied to her, her family is outraged. Her sons, for instance, hate the fact that "their friends say their mother has turned into a whore" (117). She has also "*lost her reputation and gets talked about all over town, for leading a scandalous, dissolute, not to say ridiculous life*" (118). Even her alter-ego accuses her of being a "*lewd, licentious woman*" (101). In both novels, these exaggerated references to sexual perversion downgrade the value of the central characters' art, as well as their careers. However, Cunha associates the woman artist with the image of the prostitute to show that women artists transgress the boundaries of the patriarchal family and its definitions of mothers as passive and often asexual individuals.

Indeed, Cunha's heroines undergo a deep process of awakening of their minds, as well as their bodies, to develop not only their careers on the professional side but also their self-confidence and sexuality on the personal level.

In *O quarto fechado*, Renata's conservative society also supports the view that a woman artist has a detrimental role. From the beginning, Renata's artistic potential is perceived as a negative and yet menacing power. When Martim meets her for the first time on stage, he is impressed because she "unleashed on the piano energy that he had never imagined," and which led him to feel "moved to tears" (28). After they are introduced to each other, he "could not forget the energy she had hidden within her, the power" (28). Martim's attraction to Renata's energy, nonetheless, does not imply that he admires it. He actually "wanted to make her soul his" and "would possess even her art" (29). His need to dominate her music suggests that Martim supports the view that a woman's artistic potential is a threatening force that needs to be controlled. Renata thinks that her decision to get married would only "postpone" her career: "Later, who knows, she might play again" (30), but she never performs in public after her marriage. While in the past Renata's career is considered dangerous, once she is married and has children, her attempts to dedicate herself to her music are dismissed as destructive.

The former pianist "ached to be with her music," which she identifies as "her real life" (30). She begins to shut herself in the living room to play the piano, but this behaviour deviates from the self-sacrificing role of housewife and mother and, as a result, elicits criticism. Martim, for instance, believes that her secret

performances in the house can be harmful to their relationship. He begins to question "her crazy habit of locking herself in the living room and playing alone, with a passion that she never expressed with him: wasn't she then getting away from him little by little?" (29). Such a negative association undermines the value of Renata's former artistic identity, but even the pianist shares this view. She feels guilty for not pleasing her husband, saying that "the yearning for her career, her boredom with a domestic life, and her lack of aptitude for it, all interfered in her relationship with Martim" (20). In Martim's patriarchal opinion, Renata's position as a musician can distract her from being a "good" mother and, as a result, damage their children. After she has baby Rafael and realises that her maternal fulfilment cannot replace her ambitions, Renata needs to play the piano, "not just casually […] to distract herself, but passionately to expose the depths of her soul" (86). During one of these moments, her sister-in-law leaves baby Rafael unattended, and he falls down the staircase and dies. After this tragic accident, Martim and Renata are "separated by an unasked yet logical question: Renata, what were you doing when our son…" (87). He indirectly blames Renata and her music for the accident, selling her piano and leaving her right after Rafael's funeral.

By portraying women whose partners, friends, and children consider their investments in artistic careers illegal, perverse, and destructive, Cunha and Luft underline the fact that their culture misjudges and misrepresents mothers who are artists. Indeed, in a society in which women's personal ambition and artistic production matter less than their sacrifices in conservative domestic roles,

references to mother-artists as outlaws, prostitutes, and dangerous women are not surprising. Nevertheless, the protagonists delay a rebellion against the negative images that undermine the value of their artistic experience and production, just as they comply with destructive maternal roles for a long time. Although they lack commitment to question the negative responses to their artistic positions, their attitude once again must be understood within their historical conditions. I believe that their passivity expresses the frustration of a group of women artists who suffered from intellectual and political oppression in the second half of the twentieth century.

The intellectual censorship, effective from 1964 until the late 1980s, limited the influence of feminist theories on women's art and, as a result, prevented women artists from engaging themselves, their readers, and viewers in political debates about the female condition. At the time, the repression of feminist movements not only led Brazilian women to accept conservative discourses of motherhood, as I explain earlier, but also restricted their political motivation and ability to challenge the devaluation of female art in their exclusionary artistic communities. Some women writers "opposed the dictatorial regime, showing courage in their political positions" (Duarte, "Feminismo" 216), but the fact that they reacted against the government does not mean that they explicitly discussed women's issues and considered themselves feminists. Many women artists simply rejected the feminists' political engagement. With the exception of Telles and Cunha, the female writers I analyse in this study are still careful about defining their works as feminist. Even nowadays, "the majority of

female artists" in Brazil "negate *a priori* any identification with women's movements, especially with feminism" (Marco and Schmidt par. 7). During this period of censorship, those who identified with a feminist agenda postponed their careers. For instance, because of the political climate of the 1960s, Cunha did not find "the courage to say what I felt about the ideologically coercive model imposed on women." She was only able to react against these models in the 1970s, when "the political situation was just beginning to thaw after years of military government censorship" ("Becoming Whole" 231). The combination of an attitude that Schmidt calls "antifeminism" ("Refutações" 773) and the political suppression of feminist thought delayed, if not inhibited, the development of engaged female art that could criticise the artistic exclusions of women in Brazil.

While the female characters' delayed critique of the negative images of the woman artist in Cunha's novels reflects how feminism took a long time to be accepted by her generation of women artists, women's lack of strength to focus again on their artistic careers in Luft's fiction represents the typical rejection of feminist thought among Brazilian women in the twentieth century. The protagonist of *As doze cores do vermelho* initially avoids the public debates that "the woman with green eyes" organises to discuss abortion and divorce, but the painter finally becomes active in the defence of her career and the lives of other women who live in the margins of society. She rebels against the voices that define the woman artist as a criminal and a prostitute and promises her feminist friend that she "will never want to hear the voices that close her free path" (*Ela afirmará a amiga dos olhos verdes que não irá mais querer ouvir as vozes que*

fecham seu livre caminhar) (67). In an interview, "She will have the courage to tell the media that she respects the prostitutes" (*Ela terá coragem de dizer à imprensa que respeita as prostitutas*) (83). She also uses her art to reflect on their marginalisation, because "many of her paintings show the neglected prostitutes' wounds" (*muitos de seus quadros mostram as feridas das meretrizes deamerecidas*) (83). According to the narrator, the painter "will capture on her canvas the cold of the streets walked by their high heels, […] the loneliness of their tight skirts […] and [their] desires" (*Ela trará a tela o frio das ruas caminhadas pelos altos saltos [...] solidão das saias justas [...] e os desejos*) (39). Furthermore, when expressing her concerns about what sex workers experience and how they feel, she indirectly questions the devaluation of the woman artist whose career is associated with prostitution in the novel. Although Cunha's painter at least rejects the social depreciation of her work, enjoys her profession, and even becomes engaged with the social problems in her society, the pianist in *O quarto fechado* does not have "the strength to make further changes in her life" (32) and becomes "a spent, broken woman" (87). In her state of paralysis, Renata is unable to restore her public career as a musician: "she never played the piano again" (87). Cunha and Luft show that the combination of the construction of biased images of the woman artist by their central characters' society and their delay or failure to challenge such restrictive views has negative effects on the lives of women artists, dividing their minds between two incompatible roles and finally destroying them.

When Cunha's painter finally finds the courage to fight for her creative work and defend the rights of other women, her mind is divided in such a way that she is no longer able to overcome the conflict between her maternal responsibilities and her artistic identity. After she establishes a career, she is constantly pulled by a self-sacrificing maternal function that exists in the two-bedroom apartment where she lives for a long time with her husband and daughters, a spatial reference to *o lado de cá* (this side). On the one hand, she often returns to this confining space and role because she feels guilty about her lack of aptitude to understand and help her two daughters. On the other hand, she is attracted by the large apartment that she purchases after becoming successful and that she defines as *o lado de lá* (the other side). In opposition to the confinements imposed on women in the former, the latter stands for the public sphere and an unconventional private space—the room of one's own—in which women artists like the painter can develop their professions and gain financial, intellectual and sexual independence. Cunha underlines the possibility of women attaining freedom in *o lado de lá* when she defines it as "the horizon without limit and size […] The other side without borders" (*o horizonte sem laços e o desmedido […] O lado de lá sem fronteiras*) (53). The painter questions the ambivalent reality that divides her life and precludes her from co-existing in these two spaces or combining these two roles, for "she will know that deep inside she does not belong to any side" (*Ela conhecerá a fundo que não pertence a nenhum lado*) (101). Still, she cannot overcome their binary oppositions and, as a result,

feels that "the two sides will enclose her" (*sobre ela os dois lados fecharão*) (101).

Although the central characters in Cunha's novels do find a way out of the contradiction between the roles that women play in the public and private spheres, the author warns us about its dangers in the lives of women artists in her culture. *As doze cores do vermelho* foreshadows the destructive effects of this dilemma on the painter's life when each of her daughters struggles with an unfortunate situation. Indeed, each daughter represents one side of women's conflict in the twentieth century: passivity and rebellion, or, using Cunha's spatial metaphors, this side and the other side. Her younger daughter decides to stay on this side. Still, "confined between the walls of the two-bedroom apartment" (*confinada nas paredes do apartamento de dois quartos*) (59), she becomes an exaggerated version of her mother's former self. Her older daughter chooses the other side by pursuing a musical career and living with her mother in the large apartment. Nevertheless, by making destructive choices, she also represents an extreme version of her mother's artistic self. The daughters' polarised female roles lead the younger girl to hospitalisation in an asylum due to a mental breakdown and the older one to jail, after she is arrested for drug dealing. When their mother hears about their self-destruction, she again feels pulled by *o lado de cá*, in which she becomes aware of her failure to mother and protect her daughters from their excesses. At the same time, however, the freedom offered in *o lado de lá* attracts her to free herself from her responsibilities. Feeling divided and confused, she speeds in her car, has a traffic accident, and dies. The fictional writer in Cunha's

Mulher no espelho also meets a destructive end when she is not able to reconcile her maternal roles with a literary career. In the last section of the novel, one of her sons cannot understand her self-fulfilment in this alternative position and searches for her in her new apartment. He surprises her with her lover, kills him, and runs away. Some days later the son is found dead, supposedly killed by his own mother because her alter-ego tells the central character: "*You murdered your son*" (*Você matou seu filho*) (174).[36] Whereas the painter's failure to mother her daughters creates a situation in which she annihilates her artistic self, Cunha's writer symbolically destroys her maternal side by killing her son. In both novels, the woman artist suffers from her divided self and cannot reconcile motherhood and art.

The protagonist of Luft's *O quarto fechado* also continues to feel split into two incompatible selves and, as a result, faces a difficult reality by the end of the text. Similarly to what happens in *As doze cores do vermelho*, the tragic event that ends the life of one of Renata's twins foreshadows her fate. Her son Camilo is fascinated by Renata's music. As a child, he listens to her private performances in the living room and, later on, begins to listen to "records, to classical music, the same music that Renata used to listen to in private." His musical taste infuriates Martim, who fears that "his son might want to be an artist too" (68). Subject to his father's rigid opinion, Camilo is forced to play the traditional role of a strong and virile man who can run the farm. When he becomes an adolescent and can no

[36] This passage is taken from the Portuguese original version, in which both the protagonist and her alter-ego say that she kills her son. However, in the English translation, Ellison and Lindstrom do not translate this statement even though it appears twice in the Portuguese version. In their English translation, the protagonist's alter-ego explains that her son fought with the police officers "to keep from being arrested […]. They shot him" (131).

longer take his father's pressure, Camilo decides to ride the wildest horse on the farm, falls, and is kicked by the furious animal until he dies. Although his suicidal ride may stand for an act of surrendering to traditional gender roles, it also represents Camilo's protest against the patriarchal perceptions of masculinity and femininity imposed upon him and his mother. Furthermore, Camilo's tragic accident mirrors Renata's state of paralysis and symbolic death, because both characters suffer from the destructive consequences of one's conflict between the rigidity of social expectations and the freedom and power of artistic expression. His death reminds Renata of her own split mind as a mother-artist. At Camilo's funeral, she feels "the anguish that had punished her doubly" (105). First, she fails as a mother and feels responsible for not helping her son deal with his conflicts. She finally asks her deceased son: "What have I done to you, my son?" (8). Second, she loses her passion for music, since "the urge, the compulsion that moved her, that made her moan like a soul in torment, had also died within her" (105). In short, both her maternal and artistic sides, both her love for her husband and the desire for the piano, have been destroyed: "It was all over" and "Renata's heart was empty" (105).

Nevertheless, it should be noted again that Luft does not fully blame men for Renata's failure to reconcile maternal responsibilities with a career. In fact, whereas Cunha does not take into account the male characters' perspectives in her novels—men either turn her fictional artists into passive or overtly sexualised beings—Luft's male characters, especially Camilo and Martim, can also be victims of the masculine roles that they are forced into internalising in Brazilian

society. Martim contributes to Renata's anxieties when he pressures her into sacrificing her passion for music. At the same time, he wants to make her happy, feels "sorry for her," and expresses his compassion: "She is suffering, very much, and I can't help her" (30). Luft actually does not believe that "men have always wanted to have on their side useless adornments or apathetic slaves" ("Masculino" 158). Instead of simply blaming Martin for the tragic course that Renata's life takes, Luft does not remove Renata's responsibility. Her idea of what an artist should be also prevents her from combining work and private life. Renata knows, "Art had made her self-centered," but "[d]idn't she have to be like this, giving all her passion to her art, to be a good pianist? " (26). In a society that undermines the value of women's art and does not allow women the possibility of combining motherhood and a career, perhaps her selfish positions and prioritisation of work are the only options left to women who want to become successful professionals. However, such an option is problematic when women use their careers to merely escape this patriarchal reality, without trying to confront and change it.

The end of the novel shows that Renata finally questions this choice of a selfish artistic identity. She asks, "Who can say that music was not a deception as well?"(105). At this moment, the pianist expresses her regret for perceiving her artistic role as such an egoistical position. Renata's final realisation shows that Luft challenges not only the traditional views of motherhood that demand that women sacrifice their professional ambitions, but also the Romantic image of art that requires the artist to reject her personal relationships, her children, and her society. The protagonist of Luft's *A Sentinela* learns a similar lesson. Nora almost

believes that she "had failed" (*tinha falhado*) (126). With the help of her son, who tells her, "You must change urgently mother" (*Você precisa mudar, urgente, mãe*) (128), she finally rejects her sacrificial role as a mother and opens a small tapestry company called Penelope, where she applies her creative skills and hires other female weavers. Nora finally understands that she must redefine her over-protective maternal role and allow her son, also an artist, to follow his own route. Their relationship gains a constructive and cooperative dimension, and, in the final pages of the novel, he plays the saxophone while his mother-artist, Penelope/Nora, sings. This version of the artist as an individual integrated in the market, engaged with her community, and bridging a constructive relationship with her family is a more successful position than the isolated artistic identity and the neglecting mother that Renata embraces in her life. Because Nora is able to realise the importance of balancing profession and community, as well as career and family, she meets a more hopeful fate than Renata does in *O quarto fechado*.

Cunha and Luft emphasise that any extreme solution to the woman artist's conflict is problematic. While a woman artist who completely rejects her maternal responsibilities can damage herself, a woman who lacks the motivation to pursue her career or, at least, develop an active role in the home becomes stagnated in a meaningless position that gradually destroys her life. Because their central characters live in a culture that leads them toward those extreme options, they are not likely to obtain either personal or professional satisfaction. Nonetheless, although I believe that their anxieties capture the feeling of women artists who in reality regarded the search for an artistic position as a challenging path to follow, I

do not ignore the fact that the resolutions of the aforementioned novels are exaggerated, if not ironic. The tragic lives the majority of the protagonists live suggest that the group of women whom they represent was doomed to a similar fate in the second half of the twentieth century, but the authors proved, by their own successful literary careers, that this destiny was not always the case at that time. Cunha, Luft, and Bins, like Lispector, Queiroz, and Telles, could actually find the space to publish their works in the past. They have generally received critical acclaim in Brazil since then.

The women artists portrayed in Canadian fiction confront some obstacles to succeeding in their careers, but they are not subject to the gender discrimination that devalues the image of the woman artist in Brazilian society and artistic environment. Their conflicts capture the reality of a group of women artists who had access to a more inclusive cultural community than did their Brazilian counterparts. However, I do not ignore the fact that critics and artists have often questioned the myth of women's prominent status in Canadian culture between the 1960s and the 1990s. Laurence asserts that "in those years," women's literature "was generally regarded by critics and reviewers in [Canada] with at best an amused tolerance, at worst a dismissive shrug" (*Dance* 5). Gerson analyses the representation of women in anthologies of English Canadian literature and claims that the criteria of selecting who becomes part of Canadian literary canon involved "an unacknowledged component based on education, occupation, academic connections, and therefore, by extension, gender" ("Anthologies" 57). Her data show that, on average, women account for 20.5 % of

the selection of writers in anthologies published between 1940 and 1969; this figure increases to 22.4 % among those published between 1970 and 1984 (72-73). At the time, the process of canonisation of writers in Canada was still subject to gender inequality. Nevertheless, this obstacle did not preclude Canadian women from pursuing artistic careers, especially in literature, and gaining critical recognition.

The inclusiveness of the literary communities in French and English Canada and the high numbers of women who defined themselves as writers during that period suggest that Canadian women writers often reached prominent status in their culture. The belief in their reputation is not an over-optimistic and generalised view. Even prior to the 1960s, prestigious literary societies accepted women and recognised their work. For instance, the Canadian Society of Authors "announced that they would make 'no distinct sex'," and the Royal Society of Canada elected Gabrielle Roy as its first female member in 1947 (Gerson, *Canadian Women* 84)—three decades before the ABL granted membership to Queiroz. Moreover, the increase in the participation of Canadian women in literary associations, from the 1960s to the 1990s supports my view that a large number of Canadian women had enough confidence to fight for their literary careers, whereas their Brazilian counterparts often postponed the development of their profession and lacked the motivation to challenge their prejudiced culture. In the SÉC (*Société d'écrivains canadiens*), women represent 25% of its members in the 1960s and 52% in 1978, even though this last figure is inconsistent with the 26% female representation in the UNÉQ (*Union des écrivaines et des écrivains*

québécois) and suggests that "the actual proportion of women authors" of the time was lower (Gerson and Luneau 95). Women writers also make up approximately 31% of the CAA (Canadian Authors Association) English-speaking membership from the 1920s to the 1980s (Gerson and Luneau 95).

Because their cultural communities generally responded positively to female participation, Canadian women felt increasingly more confident about pursuing artistic careers and identifying their profession as such than did the group of women artists during the same period in Brazil. One of the reasons that justifies the acceptance and reputation of Canadian women artists in the second half of the twentieth century was their female ancestors' struggles. As I discuss in Chapter Three, whereas the few female models in public positions in the past were not able to validate the entrance of the next generations of women in the arts in Brazil, the women who fought for civil rights and engaged in the production of the arts prior to the 1960s laid the foundation for the construction of a female cultural tradition in Canada. Their examples contributed to the definition of the image of women artists that today exists in the Canadian imaginary, but the existence of this model was not the only factor that made possible the emergence of a larger number of women artists in subsequent generations. To be encouraged to become artists and feel integrated in their artistic environment, Canadian women also needed concrete support from their societies. Their Brazilian counterparts faced a system that did not protect their cultural expression and, instead, repressed their intellectual production. In contrast, Canadian women artists encountered a government structure that generally supported male and

female artists and a political space that particularly encouraged and valued female creativity.

While artists probably began to fight for the implementation of a favourable cultural condition as early as 1936, when a group of artists in Toronto formed a trade union to "protect their trade or profession" (Vivash 22), since the 1950s the Canadian government has offered programs to assist aspiring and professional male and female artists, especially writers. According to Frank Davey, through interventions like the Massey Report of 1951 and the subsequent creation of the Canada Council of the Arts in 1957, the state helped to create "[n]ewer resources for writers" (106). From the 1960s onwards, Canadian writers' economic situation improved as a result of several "government inquiries—into culture, copyright, the arts, publishing, and what became known as the 'cultural industries'" (Davey 106). In the particular case of writers, they had access to programs initiated by the Canada Council, such as "its Writer-in-Residence Program […]; its funding of public readings; and its grants to Canadian periodicals and book publishers" (Davey 107). The state support, in combination with the increase of funds available to finance literary grants in the upcoming years (Davey 107), contributed to the prominence of Canadian writers in this developing cultural industry. By the 1970s, "Canada had as many literary and journalistic prizes as did each of Britain, Austria, and Switzerland" (Davey 106). Indeed, over the course of the twentieth century, these support programs not only had a positive effect on Canadian writers' critical acclaim, but also improved their economic realities:

> This development arose through increased sales of their work, and also through a growing infrastructure of support including grants, congenial post-secondary teaching posts, employment in the broadcasting and film agencies, and sales or donations of their papers to archives. These opportunities have been supported by a network of social and government commitments—at both federal and provincial levels. (Davey 113)

Those initiatives also provided many female writers, often mothers, with the opportunity to dedicate themselves to their careers while becoming part of this cultural industry. Financial need has, for a long time, justified "a middle class woman's recourse to literary labour to support herself or her children" (Gerson, *Canadian Women* 68). In fact, "over the past several centuries, writing has 'afforded' women one of their few economically viable opportunities to work" (68). By investing in a cultural industry that generates economic possibilities to artists, especially writers, the Canadian government has indirectly contributed to challenging the traditional perception of women as marginalised artists or individuals excluded from the production of literature. Moreover, I believe that this financial support has also affected women's prominence in Canadian literature. As Steenman-Marcusse claims, the idea of the marginality of the Canadian female tradition "is a changing concept." Contemporary women writers in Canada have been generally "far from destitute and they are not dependent on men" as their predecessors were (49). Thus, this developing cultural industry has

led women writers to attain not only financial but also social independence in Canada.

The structural support that Canadian women artists have received since the 1960s creates favourable conditions for women's participation in the arts. *The Box Garden*, *The Diviners* and *Cat's Eye* do not idealise the lives of women artists because Shields, Laurence, and Atwood acknowledge their characters' individual limitations in their search for professional fulfilment. Nevertheless, whereas Luft and Cunha denounce the devaluation of women artists in an environment that fails to appreciate their work and defines them as criminals, prostitutes, and destroyers of the family, the aforementioned Canadian writers capture well the inclusive and supporting factors of their culture. Families, partners, and friends accept the protagonists' pursuit of artistic careers, recognise the value of their profession, and/or disseminate meaningful images for the woman artist.

In *The Box Garden*, Charleen's position as a poet does not provide her with the necessary financial autonomy. She is not able to sustain the household with the "small, minuscule really, cheque" that she receives occasionally "from some magazine or other which has agreed to publish one of my poems" (1). Charleen is also sceptical about her status as a poet, since she has not published a book in three years. She considers poetry "part of [her] past now," and the "only other alternative would be to join that corps of half-poets, those woozy would-bes who bubble away in private obscurities" (21). In the beginning, Charleen appears to be a frustrated and insecure woman artist, an image that contrasts with the strong generation of women that Shields becomes part of when she moves to

Canada. However, as the novel gradually reveals glimpses of Charleen's past, Shields represents a supporting community that values the woman artist's work. Charleen feels accepted and encouraged by her society during her creative development and, later on, after she becomes a writer. When she develops interest in writing, her husband is devoted to her education—even if his devotion "was less than altruist" (151)—and encourages Charleen to become a poet (150). Although her literary career does not solve the economic problems that she faces after Watson abandons her, it allows this mother to gain a respectful status in the eyes of her society. One of her friends, Doug Savage, "thinks of [her] pre-eminently as a poet, a kindly classification, since" Charleen is "more clerk than poet" (21). At social events, Doug "introduces [her] by saying, this is Charleen Forrest, you know, the poet" (20-21).

In *The Diviners*, Morag's major obstacles to establishing her literary career are related to the challenging nature of the writing process. Before her marriage collapses, she decides to invest in her literary potential, and her husband offers to revise her stories. Brooke's comments on the implausible endings of her texts discourage her (260). She even concurs with him and regards her texts as "trivial and superficial" (261). When Morag is writing her first novel, *Spear of Innocence*, Brooke tells her that a "novel is a complex structure" (263). He reads her complete novel and questions its main character's ability to communicate (288), but, suspicious of his negative comments, Morag decides to submit the manuscript of *Spear of Innocence* to a publishing house. Brooke undermines Morag's literary ambition for the same reasons that he does not accept her desire

to be a mother. He needs to patronise her biological and artistic potentials in order to assert his power in their relationship, which makes his behaviour similar to that of the male characters represented in the Brazilian artist novels by Luft and Cunha. Nonetheless, even though Brooke's critiques are "condescending" (Stovel 260), his literary opinions draw Morag's attention to two significant aspects of artistic production. First, writing requires effort. She learns this lesson when her novels are rejected, when she has to do major revisions, and when her published works receive harsh literary criticism. In fact, even after Morag becomes successful, she confesses that she "always thought [writing] would get easier, but it doesn't" (248). Second, writers also need a large amount of time to improve the quality of their work and reach literary maturity. However, once she becomes a single mother, Morag realises that her maternal responsibilities compete for time with her writing. For instance, after her daughter is born, Morag "can only type when Pique is wake" (359). To avoid waking her baby, Morag writes her manuscripts by hand, but this routine reduces her working time. When they are residing in England, Morag has little help to nurture her young child and feels frustrated in her attempts to write her new novel, *Jonah*, and provide enough attention to Pique. On one occasion, Pique gets the flu, and Morag realises that "there is no way that [she] can even try to begin to get inside the novel" (427). She doubts if she will be able to "get this novel written, in between or as well as everything else" (428). Morag's "anxiety-ridden balancing act […] sounds all too familiar to contemporary women" (Brandt and Harms 36) and shows that Laurence does not romanticise the lives of women who write and mother. If the

literary process demands availability and effort from writers in general, writing can be a challenging career for women whose time and energy are constantly consumed by the act of mothering.

Although Laurence represents the typical anxieties faced by mother-artists, she does not deny that her cultural environment supports women who pursue a career in the arts. For example, in the same section in which Morag is concerned about her financial situation, a publisher's representative informs her about the acceptance of *Spear of Innocence* in the United States and England and encourages Morag to write short stories and articles for local newspapers. He values her artistic skills and believes that Morag "should be writing," instead of working as a domestic servant (350). Later in her life, she feels lucky and does not "*know what difficulty means*" because "*there are some royalties dribbling in from past books, although not much, and*" even if she "*were really broke,* [she] *could go to the publishers and ask for a small advance on the next book"* (426). Morag receives not only encouragement and financial assistance from her publishers, but also recognition from her readers. When she visits her dying stepfather in her hometown, a young nurse tells her that she is "glad [Morag is] from Manawaka" and that "[t]hey've got [her] books in the library" (459). Moreover, her reviewers acknowledge her contribution to the Canadian literary tradition. They consider her an established writer, even though her celebrity shocks Morag, who still thinks "of herself as a beginning writer" (490). Morag attains even more economic stability and literary prestige than does the poet Charleen. More so than Shields,

Laurence shows that in Canada a woman's artistic identity can be accepted and respected by her audience, her literary critics, and the publishing industry.

The protagonist of *Cat's Eye* is concerned about women's ability to participate in the cultural tradition of Canada. When Elaine is pursuing her final arts degree at university, many female students are discouraged from following an artistic career. In her Art and Archaeology class, "[n]one of the girl students wants to be an artist; instead they want to be teachers of art in high schools, or, in one case, a curator in a gallery" (301). Elaine is actually subject to discrimination in prestigious art institutions. She accepts the offer of a group of women artists to organise her exhibition because she knows "how hard it is to get a retrospective anywhere, if you're female" (91). Elaine feels "cheesed off because the Art Gallery of Ontario wouldn't do it. Their bias," the painter explains, "is toward dead, foreign men" (16). Her dissatisfaction expresses Atwood's concern about the existence of gender discrimination in the prominent art institutions of the country.[37]

However, Elaine contradicts herself in the novel. Although she is aware of exclusionary standards in the artistic communities, the painter underlines the fact that her society evaluates artists according to their professional and economic success, not their gender. Young Elaine is pessimistic about the financial restrictions that artists typically face, but, to avoid these problems, she complements her Fine Arts degree with Advertising Art courses. In these classes,

[37] In this passage, Elaine shows that prestigious art institutions in Canada discriminate not only against women but also against Canadian artists in general. As I explain earlier in the Introduction and as Atwood discusses in *Survival*, the Canadian audience and art critics suffered for a long time from a sense of cultural inferiority in the twentieth century. As a result, they depreciated the quality of their national art and favoured the artistic traditions of Europe and the United States.

students “have serious ambitions” and “want paying jobs when they graduate” and so does she (356). Later on, she also applies for jobs in the area and accepts a position in “the art department of a publishing company, where” she designs “book covers” (358). Even after Elaine becomes successful, she explains that the “word artist embarrasses” her. An “artist is a tawdry, lazy sort of thing to be”; thus she prefers to identify herself as a “painter, because it’s more like a valid job.” If painters “make a lot of money,” they are not “looked at strangely” (16). *Cat’s Eye* does not overlook the economic devaluation of artists in her society and elsewhere, but Atwood suggests that an artist who is committed to working hard may enter the cultural industry of Canada. This observation illustrates another major difference in the reception of women artists in Brazilian and Canadian cultures. In the novels by Luft and Cunha, gender prejudices undermine women’s potential to succeed in artistic careers. Nevertheless, Elaine’s society recognises hard-working artists’ potential independently of their gender. In Canada, the pressure to increase their economic value creates more obstacles to women artists than does gender discrimination.

Like Shields and Laurence, Atwood represents a woman artist who is socially accepted in her decision to become an artist and gains support during her professional development. As I discuss in Chapter Three, when Elaine chooses her career, her family members, especially her mother, accept her choice. Her partners also respect Elaine’s position. Her first husband, the visual artist John, for instance, never pressures Elaine into abandoning her professional ambitions and staying in the position of a traditional housewife. He actually hopes that they both

reproduce the Romantic image of artist as an individual who "can't live like other people, tied down to demanding families and expensive material possessions" (366). Elaine, however, does not share his view because, first, she privileges her financial stability and, second, she refuses to reject her maternal potential when she faces an unplanned pregnancy. Furthermore, feminist movements encourage Elaine's artistic production. Before she becomes a renowned painter, she joins a group of women who organise an art exhibition that, in fact, launches Elaine's career, but her relationship with feminism is complex. In her retrospective exhibition, she refuses to identify with the feminist artists who organise it, "as if they are a species of which" Elaine is "not a member" (94). In an interview with a newspaper, before the opening of the retrospective, she also rejects the feminist agenda. When the reporter mentions that a "lot of people call you a feminist painter," she replies that she hates "party lines" and "ghettos" (97). At the same time, Elaine acknowledges that "these women are on my side" and is grateful that "they planned this whole thing for me" (92-93). Although Elaine does not explicitly embrace their philosophy, feminists support her artistic development just as, in reality, women's movements often helped Atwood and other women artists in Canada.

While the developing cultural industry attracted and assisted female as well as male artists in Canada in the second half of the twentieth century, feminist movements generally promoted women's artistic expression. Marie Carrière explains that feminist activities flourished in Canada, especially during the 1970s and 1980s (4). It is hard to say whether the feminist writing of this period "had a

direct impact on the new poetics of English Canada" (Carrière 26-27). Yet women's groups formed strong bonds with Canadian women artists, especially writers, who took from feminist theories the political framework to share their concerns about women's rights and, most of all, to conceptualise a distinct female literary expression. The female writers of the period constructed "their own literary movement with what they indeed called '*écriture au feminine*,'" in French Canada at the same time that their English-speaking counterparts engaged in "literary collaborations and writers' and critics' conferences" and intended "to forge a distinct, radically new, theoretical, and feminist aesthetics" (Carrière 3). Moreover, feminist movements led a number of women writers "to focus on the question of female Canadian identity" (Steenman-Marcusse 3).

From the 1960s to the 1990s, Canadian women artists and feminists had more space to become politically engaged and, thus, combine female art and activism, than did their counterparts in Brazil. Indeed, the unique developments of feminist movements and their specific influence on female art in Brazil and Canada affected women artists' motivation to criticise and change their realities in different ways in each culture. As I explained earlier, Brazilian women writers' lack of a similar political engagement often discouraged them from examining their identities and questioning the devaluation of their literary contributions. Representing their situation, Luft's and Cunha's central characters do not believe that they are capable of challenging the society that undervalues their work. In some cases, the protagonists of Brazilian novels internalise these outside, biased judgements. In contrast, Laurence, Shields, and Atwood show that, in a culture

that generally accepted women in the arts, recognised the value of their contribution, and offered them the opportunity of understanding their femininity, women artists were able to perceive their art and their artistic identity in valuable ways. Charleen, Morag, and Elaine identify in their artistic experience the potential to understand themselves. In some cases, they are committed to their communities, using their works to improve the lives of others and shape their cultural heritages.

Charleen's role as a writer has a transformative value in *The Box Garden*. At the end of her marriage, her son "Seth and my poetry" become "the means by which I saved my life" (152). During this period, the "usefulness of poetry was revealed to" her, and Charleen discovers that her "loneliness could, by my secret gift of alchemy, be shaped into a less frightening form" (152). This revelation indeed empowers Charleen to overcome her fears. She realises that she "was going to survive," and her "survival was hooked into [her] quirky, accidental ability to put words into agreeable arrangements" (152). In the time between this revelation and the present events, Charleen does not write, but begins exchanging letters about the human condition with Brother Adam, a mysterious man who is, in fact, her runaway husband. He sends her a box containing a patch of grass, which Charleen cultivates. The small garden becomes a symbol of her artistic gift because Brother Adam reminds Charleen of her literary potential. After finding hope in many aspects of her personal life—her ex-husband Watson cares about her in his own way, her boyfriend has deep affection for her, her mother is recovered, and her son is safe after being kidnapped—Charleen feels again

enthusiastic about writing. She has, indeed, transformed herself into a writer again. As her airplane is landing in a rainy Vancouver, she begins to play with words: *"A light rain, a light rain, the beginning of a poem, a light rain"* (213).

Because her culture recognises the value of her work, Morag is able to develop her artistic potential and perceive her career as a prestigious and empowering role in *The Diviners*. For Morag, the purpose of writing goes beyond the creation of literature; it is also an act of divining. Diviners, such as Morag's neighbour Royland, use their mysterious abilities and find water in the depths of the earth. Initially, Morag is not sure about what she is "divining for" (118), but later understands that, just like diviners, she and other artists (Ella, C.P.T., Pique, Christie, Jules, and Dan) write fictional and private words, tell stories, compose songs, and paint their realities in order to search for meaning in the depths of their inner selves. Through their artistic experience, most of these artists find redemption, forgiveness, and strength to overcome their personal conflicts. Morag, for instance, uses her storytelling skills to rescue and reinvent her remote memories and other events of her past in the retrospective sections, which are called *Snapshot* and *Memorybank Movie*. In Morag's last novel, supposedly entitled *The Diviners* (Stovel 259, 262), she writes "down the remaining private and fictional words" (Laurence, *Diviners* 525). Her semi-autobiographical novel answers the question of what writer Morag is divining for: her own self.

Writing allows Morag to better understand her life, yet Laurence's artists do not represent the image of the selfish and introspective creator that Luft embraces in *O quarto fechado*. Artists may not be "generally conceived of as

political, but Laurence believes she is" (Stovel 20), and so are Morag and the other artists depicted in *The Diviners*. Instead of isolating themselves from their communities, they accept their ethical responsibilities and use their works as powerful media to reflect on those who live in the margins of society. Morag, for instance, pays respect to her socially outcast adoptive father when she incorporates his bedtime stories into her novel *Shadow of Eden* (487). She also shows interest in the fictional and historical elements of Jules's tales about his Métis ancestors (488). Similarly, Morag's daughter becomes an artist who is committed to her society, especially her heritage. In her songs, Pique expresses her concerns about the challenges and sorrows of being Métis. In fact, she embraces her ethical responsibilities in a more active way than her mother does because, by the end of the novel, Pique also decides to assist her uncle take care of troubled youths in a Métis community.

Besides reflecting on the social problems of her reality, Morag believes that her art contributes to her cultural legacy. This contribution is perhaps the most powerful role that Laurence assigns to her heroine in *The Diviners*. In her last imaginary conversation with Traill, Morag says that she "stand[s] somewhere in between" the old pioneers and the new ones. Throughout her life, she "worked damn hard," and, even though she has not "done all [she] would've like to do," Morag believes that she has built "some kind of a garden" (474). Like Shields, Laurence draws our attention to the metaphorical relation between gardening and writing, reminding us of the constructive nature of both acts. In *The Box Garden*, Charleen cultivates her garden for herself just as she uses poetry to understand

only her private life. For Morag, however, this garden "is needed, not only by [her]" (474). Indeed, her writing reaches others—readers, critics, and younger artists—and becomes part of her literary tradition. Morag carries a "gift, or portion of grace" (524), and, because she has completed her artistic cycle and finished her last novel, this gift is "finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else" (524). Morag accepts her artistic responsibility to shape her society, as well as her cultural heritage. From this perspective, the active role that Morag has as a mother is not in conflict with this constructive image of the woman artist that she embraces. As a mother, the protagonist is involved in the development of a better society for her child. As a writer, she is engaged in the construction of her cultural heritage in order to pass it on to her daughter, who, according to Stovel, embodies the upcoming generations of artists who receive Morag's torch (262-63). When Morag sees both the act of mothering and the production of culture as processes of creation and continuity, Laurence combines motherhood and art in the lives of women artists.

For Atwood, women artists can also understand and question their own selves and social reality. In *Cat's Eye*, young Elaine carries a cat's eye marble, which looks "out through bone and cloth with its impartial gaze" (172). This reflective device becomes a symbol for the alternative vision that she develops in her childhood. Elaine believes that, when she holds her "valuable" toy, she "can see the way it sees" (157). Later on, she adopts this unconventional way of seeing the world in her work when she begins to "paint things that aren't there" (366). Her imaginative vision also allows her to capture the indeterminacy of her identity

in her art. For example, in her painting *Cat's Eye*, which Elaine calls a "self-portrait, of some sorts," she depicts her head, and, behind it, "a pier glass is hanging, convex and encircled by an ornate frame." The glass reflects "a section of the back of [her] head […] but the hair is different, younger" (446). Indeed, this painting reveals the complex being that Elaine perceives in her own identity throughout the novel: she is a subject in transition, between past and present, between an imaginative girl and an established, middle-aged woman artist.

Atwood represents an empowering woman artist not only because Elaine can see "more than anyone else looking" (355), but also because she is engaged, like Morag, in the problems of her society. In her position of "woman and Canadian," Atwood "protests any tendency toward easy passivity and naivety" and "refuses to allow either Canadians or women to deny their complicity in the power structures that may subject them" (Hutcheon, *Canadian* 12).[38] Even though her fictional painter refuses to identify with political groups, her "life and art do engage and dramatize a number of salient feminist concepts—albeit at times covertly, ironically, or with radical extensions" (McCombs 14-15). In fact, a feminist critique of the female body permeates Elaine's paintings of mothers. Her pictures of her wild mother, the unconventional images of the Virgin Mary, and the monstrous and deformed representations of her neighbour intrigue a feminist critic in the novel, who claims that these works portray "the woman as

[38] In her public discussions, such as her lecture presented in the 2008 Mel Hurtig Lecture and 2010 keynote speech delivered at the Parkland Institute, Atwood refuses to call herself an activist, but she challenges the belief that iconic artists are supposed "to stand on the pedestal and keep their mouths shut" ("Silence" n. pag.). The range of topics that Atwood has addressed in her public discussions—from climate change to the political situation of Canada—shows that, instead of placing herself on a pedestal, she has accepted the responsibility to be actively involved in her society.

anticheesecake" (380). Elaine's paintings also challenge the visual representations of mothers as cheesecake, a metaphor for the beautiful and perfect female bodies that become objects of pleasure. As the fictional critic observes, it is "good to see the aging female body treated with compassion, for a change'" (380). Not coincidentally, Elaine creates these atypical portraits of the female body when she joins the group of feminists who help launch her career. They influence the critical view that Elaine employs in her art just as, at the time, Canadian feminism provided the political framework for women artists to question the conservative ideas of femininity that persist in their society.

The woman artist in *Cat's Eye* is an imaginative seer and a committed member of her society, as well as an individual who contributes to the creation of her culture. However, Elaine initially feels uncomfortable about her responsibilities to prepare a cultural heritage that will be inherited by the next generations of artists. Before Elaine's retrospective art exhibition, her "feelings are mixed" because she does not "like admitting [she's] old enough and established enough to have such a thing." She also defines a retrospective as a closing stage of an artistic career: "first the retrospective, then the morgue" (16). Whereas Elaine is anxious about the approach of this stage, the young women who organise her exhibition emerge as the new generation of artists. Elaine questions their "post" status because it gives her the impression that she and her contemporaries are "all just a footnote to something earlier that was real enough to have a name of its own" (92). Her reaction suggests that Elaine relates to these younger women artists in disruptive and continuous ways. She fears that they

consider her work as part of the past and, therefore, no longer valuable. At the same time, Elaine is aware that they pay homage to her art and recognise her influential role in the construction of the past artistic tradition of Canada, which, she hopes, this new generation of artists may develop but never replace. Although she is not sure whether she should rejoice about or reject the impact of her work on these young women, Elaine finally accepts her influential position in her culture. During her exhibition, they respect the painter, and their encouraging opinions become "so much like what a family would say, a mother or an aunt" that Elaine is "thrown off guard." When "Charna reaches over to [her], gives [her] a metallic hug," Elaine realises that maybe their "warmth is genuine" and she "should be ashamed of" her "dour, cynical thoughts. Maybe," she continues, Charna "really does like" Elaine (449). She expresses empathy toward these young female painters whose admiration sounds "sincere" and whose works "will come after" her art (450-51). Elaine embraces her part in the construction of her cultural tradition in a less celebratory way than does Morag. Still, Atwood underlines the notion that women artists can attain a meaningful position in her culture and gain the power to influence subsequent generations of artists.

The supporting responses that Charleen, Morag, and Elaine receive from their families, friends, audience and, in some cases, from women's groups lead the three artists to perceive the empowering nature of their art, become aware of their female identities and social reality, and guarantee their positions in the developing cultural industry of Canada. Nevertheless, we cannot define the three main characters as successful in their careers if we measure their success

according to their economic security and, most of all, if we disregard the fact that the possibility of crossing the borders of the private space of motherhood was one of women's greatest achievements in the last century. It is true that Morag and Elaine are more financially secure than Charleen, but Shields's protagonist attains a meaningful role, first of all, because of the social respect that she gains in her identity as poet. Furthermore, the self-reflective function that Charleen discovers in her writing experience is as valid as this identity. Laurence also defines a woman artist's success beyond the economic potential of a career. Writing allows Morag to develop the empowering abilities to divine her own life and care about those who have been forgotten in the margins of society. But, more than a diviner and an engaged individual, Laurence's protagonist plays an influential role in shaping her cultural heritage and passing it on to younger generations of artists. Elaine may focus on her financial security, which helps her succeed in the cultural industry, but Atwood is not simply concerned about the artist's dependence on an economic logic. *Cat's Eye* also creates a powerful image of the woman artist when Elaine identifies in her art the potential to see imaginatively and examine the social conflicts of her reality.

Brazilian Mother/Artists and Canadian Mother-Artists

One cannot evaluate the professional and personal frustrations that the Brazilian female characters experience by examining their complicity, passivity, and lack of political engagement as the only sources of their unfortunate endings. At the same time, the Canadian women artists' confidence and commitment to

changing their lives are not simply personal factors that motivate them to fulfil themselves in their positions as mothers and artists. In both cases, a woman's perception of her being in her private and public spheres depends on the outside images that her family, friends, and communities project on her. Thus, even though the central characters of both literary traditions belong to the same social class and embody the same group of women artists of the time, I can only explain the "failure" of women artists in the Brazilian novels and their "self-fulfilment" in Canadian fiction by examining how their particular social, political, and cultural environments have defined women's roles as mothers and received their careers as artists. The constructions of motherhood and artistic identity can support a woman's attempts to balance these two positions, exist simultaneously as mother and artist, and become a true "mother-artist," as the experience of Canadian women artists shows. However, in cultures in which patriarchy persists despite the social and economic transformations of the second half of the twentieth century, those outside views can actually destroy a woman's abilities to integrate her maternal responsibilities with her artistic profession. In this case, as most Brazilian artist novels illustrate, she will only become a split being, a "mother/artist."

In the novels by Brazilian women writers, mother/artists feel trapped and can only escape this dilemma by making extreme decisions. Their dissatisfaction with traditional maternal roles permanently damages their families and children, on the one hand, while their lack of aptitude to reach their professional goals destroys their potential to contribute to their society and culture, on the other.

Nevertheless, even though Cunha, Luft, and Bins express their concerns about the negative power of cultural enclaves on women's victimisation, I do not deny that they revalue the experience of their fictional mother/artists. Their protagonists break away from their mothers' silent and objectified status and become, even if temporarily, artistic and/or political beings who question their constraining conditions as daughters, housewives, lovers, and mothers. Like the protagonists of the novels, the modern female figure who emerges in Brazil at the time manages to become an artist or attain other public positions. Despite her social, cultural, and political restrictions, she becomes an exemplary model and motivates the upcoming generations of women to fight for agency in their homes and attain successful careers.

Robyn Sarah argues that Canadian female writers nowadays "take for granted the presence of women's writers in the public eye—women who both write and have families." These young women "benefit from a well-established creative writing culture" and "can easily avail themselves of mentorship from established writers" (42). They supposedly have access to "[g]enerous publishing advances, grants and book awards, contests with generous purses, international book fairs and authors' festivals, a dizzying array of literary journals, the advent of websites." However, Sarah "can't help wondering what the publicity machine is not telling me about how it is now for young writer-mothers […]: has it really become so easy?" (42).

Perhaps my analysis of the aforementioned Canadian novels is as dangerously optimistic as the opinion of those who oversimplify the difficulties faced by the

1960s-1990s groups of mother-artists. I am also aware that, just as the Brazilian authors may exaggerate in their representations of the obstacles imposed upon women artists in their cultures, Laurence, Shields, and Atwood may idealise an environment that has offered women the necessary resources to become successful mother-artists. Nevertheless, the three writers represent an image that is consistent with what middle-class Canadian women artists often perceived in their artistic communities in the second half of the century, without idealising the experiences of those generations. Indeed, the works by Laurence, Shields, and Atwood show both sides of women artists' experiences. Their protagonists confront economic instability and the need to make extra physical and mental efforts to mother their children and create their art. At the same time, their examples suggest that women can mother while expressing their voices and visions in a profession in the arts. Laurence, Shields, and Atwood show that motherhood does not prevent women from succeeding in their artistic careers, just as a profession does not become an obstacle to mothers' self-fulfilment. By being able to transform both the act of mothering and women's artistic work into meaningful roles, the Canadian authors and their protagonists shatter the binary oppositions that have separated women's private and public spaces.

Conclusion. Weaving Women's Valuable Traditions and Empowering Positions:

Future Challenges

The feminist theories and female literature produced in the second half of the twentieth century proposed two different models to define the relationship between a woman's artistic identity and femininity. Like Woolf, Beauvoir, and Rich, the majority of Brazilian women writers emphasised the destructive force of femininity, whereas a large number of Canadian female writers envisioned, as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva did, the existence of alternative ways of being woman and mother. Is the relationship between these two opposing theoretical models and the two unique literary traditions merely a coincidence? Although I cannot assert that the first group of feminists directly influenced Brazilian women writers and that the optimistic view expressed by the second group inspired Canadian female literature, the women writers of each tradition identified with or, at least, illustrated one of these theoretical models. The discourse of femininity imposed on the fictional artists and their female ancestors in the works by Lispector, Queiroz, Telles, Luft, Bins, and Cunha are examples of the cultural obstacles that Woolf, Beauvoir, and Rich describe in their works. In both cases, writers and theorists equate the ideas of femininity and motherhood to external discourses that overwhelm and control the female body. The feeling of frustration that the protagonists of the Brazilian novels share with the group of women who became artists at the time represents the pessimistic tone that possibly led the three feminists to minimise femininity and assert that, if a woman wants to

develop meaningful roles such as that of the artist, she must reject or transcend some female experiences, especially motherhood.

What unites Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous with Roy, Laurence, Atwood, and Munro is the belief that the female experience is not merely an obstacle to women's financial, intellectual, and artistic fulfilments but also a source of empowerment. In Canadian art fiction, the encouraging discourse of motherhood that the protagonists' predecessors develop in the past and the positive view of femininity that their culture generally promotes when the central characters become mother-artists are two examples of the meaningful female experiences that Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous believe to be possible in their theories. The confidence expressed by the protagonists of the Canadian works similarly echoes the perseverance that might have influenced the three French-speaking feminists to define alternative ways of existing as woman, daughter, mother, and female artist. However, Canadian women writers are generally less idealistic than their feminist counterparts. Roy, Laurence, Atwood, and Munro more explicitly represent the restrictions that women experienced in the second half of the twentieth century. Still, as the Canadian authors emphasise femininity and procreation as transformative, meaningful, and engaging experiences, their protagonists are able to reconcile and even blend their public and private roles. This view differs considerably from that of Brazilian women writers, whose need to battle a restrictive narrative of motherhood often prevents them from producing female characters who can become mothers and artists in balanced ways.

I have explored the female artist fiction produced during and after the second wave of feminism in Brazil and Canada—one, my home country and, the other, a cultural environment that I consider a model of gender equality in many ways and where I have made my second home—in order to show how women from different cultural backgrounds have approached the conflict that has for centuries puzzled those who wanted to become mothers and pursue a profession. What do Brazilian and Canadian women writers propose as an answer to this conflict? By contrast, the literary and theoretical models that I have examined throughout this study share one message that should not be ignored. Although they show that a woman's ability varies according to her cultural, financial, and political circumstances, she should not make extreme choices when attempting to combine private and public positions—more specifically, motherhood and career. When I focus on this possible balance between the two roles, I do not suggest that a woman artist should become a mother or propose that she should embrace traditional maternal experiences. Instead, I only support the view that the Brazilian and Canadian authors underline in their works: a woman must think beyond the restrictive views of femininity and the negative images of the woman artist that society has assigned to her. As the example of Brazilian characters could show, a woman's rejection of her professional projects to an exclusive dedication to motherhood and a woman's prioritisation of her career at the cost of her personal life are both destructive decisions. In contrast, their Canadian counterparts teach us a significant lesson. Alternative discourses of femininity and the pursuit of a career in the arts are not only achievable but also compatible.

Moreover, we should not ignore the fact that, despite women's challenges, the personal and literary experiences shared by the majority of the authors support the claim that a woman can become a "mother-artist." With the exception of Roy, who did not have children, all the Brazilian and Canadian writers whose fiction I have examined are both mothers and writers, thus reinforcing the belief that a woman is able to challenge the binary oppositions that have defined the image of the woman artist. Indeed, women should try to find parallels and similarities in both life and work, instead of perceiving femininity and art as simply two contradicting positions. As Joyce Carol Oates argues, a "woman who writes is a writer by her own definition; but she is a woman writer by others' definitions," so "her sexual identity is not thereby dissolved or transcended" (9). Such a claim applies to women artists in general, not only those who become mothers. As women, they cannot produce art without being informed or conditioned by at least some aspects of their female condition. If what Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous contend is possible, then women can even use the particular aspects of their female bodies, existence, and roles to create a subversive mode of expression that may reconfigure the image that society has forced them to accept. When Brazilian and Canadian writers deal with the subject matter of female creativity in their texts, their writing becomes a type of *écriture féminine*, blending art and femininity, work and life. This fusion is a starting point for subverting patriarchal thought.

While the Brazilian authors emphasise in their novels that not many women were able to combine personal and professional identities in the past,

perhaps some of them have been surprised by many developments in the lives of their successors in beginning of the twenty first century. First of all, Brazilian women have become less complicit with patriarchal discourses of femininity than were their predecessors. Second, their culture has provided a more protective system to support women who work and female workers who want to have children. As a result of both changes, a larger number of women have gained space in the economic system in Brazil. A recent study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) shows that 55.8% of the female population of Brazil participated in the labour-force while 30% were self-employed in 2008 ("Country Statistical" n. pag.). Also, they have become increasingly involved in politics and now hold 16% of upper house and senate positions in the Parliament ("Women in Parliament" n. pag.). Indeed, many Brazilian women have been exposed to a different reality, and a mother, Dilma Rousseff, currently occupies Brazil's highest office. Yet, many of the meaningful roles that this group of Brazilian women have recently created for my generation were fought for, accepted, and institutionalised much earlier in Canadian society. For the last decade, Canadian women have continued to find the resources needed to hold prominent positions in several spheres of their culture. According to OECD data, 70.1% of Canadian women took part in the work force in 2008. The American magazines *Newsweek* and *The Daily Beast* have analysed data in one hundred and sixty countries to determine which countries offer women the best quality of life and the fairest legal rights. Canada places third on the list, behind Iceland and Sweden ("The Best" n. pag.). Surprisingly, however, female

representation in politics still reveals the existence of gender inequalities in the country. Women comprise only 35.9% of upper house and senate positions in the Canadian Parliament ("Women in Parliament" n. pag.).

As Brazilian and Canadian women writers have witnessed other transformations in the last decade which continue to positively affect their economic participation and political involvement in their cultures, they have become more optimistic than they were during the time they produced their novels and short fiction. Cunha, for instance, has observed "an emerging tendency that may perhaps come to set the tone on the issue of [female] identity in the not so distant future." Brazilian women, she asserts, now "manage to reconcile traditional patriarchal codes with new values" and "live lives of self-integration. It is as if the divided woman of recent decades were merging the parts of herself and creating a new identity without mutilation or guilt" ("Becoming" 233). We cannot deny that in Canada and elsewhere "the tide has definitely turned and both married women and women with children can now write in voices 'other' than 'their own'" (Steenman-Marcusse 42-43).

Nevertheless, we should not idealise the new, unified self that female critics and writers believe women artists have finally developed in Brazil and Canada. Multiple experiences, voices, and perspectives constantly fragment women's being, as well as men's. Artists especially express in their works this complex subjectivity because they blend imagination and reality. As Luft explains, artists are "recipients of fire and coal and have visions" and "try to exorcise themselves with drawings, gestures, music, or words—so that they can

return whole to the solicitations of their practical life." How can they, Luft asks, "weave imaginary and everyday life? Those who are able to experience their creativity in the best way and still share it with others can be saved." Yet, their artistic creativity, which Luft calls a seed, "will multiply" ("Masculino" 161). Therefore, in modern societies such as Brazil and Canada, a woman artist may not be able to forge a whole and unified self, but this impossibility is not merely a product of gender differences. It is also a result of the manifold and complex characteristic of artists' lives and identities. When filtering the reality of women and their female existence through their imaginative vision, the Canadian and Brazilian authors Roy, Laurence, Atwood, Munro, Lispector, Queiroz, Cunha, Bins, Telles, and Luft are engaged in articulating the everyday experiences that a group of women lived in their cultural realities from the 1960s to the 1990s. At the same time, the women writers in both literary traditions produce in their novels and short fiction a plurality of meanings and perceptions that cannot be merely simplified by two cultural patterns.

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