University of Alberta

A Comparative Study of

Contemporary Canadian and Chinese Women Writers

by

Qigang Yan 

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

Department of Comparative Literature

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 1997

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of Author: Qigang Yan

Title of Thesis: A Comparative Study of Contemporary Canadian and Chinese Women Writers

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Year this Degree Granted: 1997

Yan Qigang

#603, 9730-106th Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1B7
Canada

January 16, 1997

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *A Comparative Study of Contemporary Canadian and Chinese Women Writers* submitted by Qigang Yan in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Prof. E.D. Blodgett

Prof. Karl S.Y. Kao

for Prof. Peng-hsiang Chen

Prof. Milan V. Dimić

Prof. Laifong Leung

Prof. Nasrin Rahimieh

To my Mother and my Wife

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of three parts. The first part introduces the frameworks of Western feminist theories and Chinese feminist criticism. While the former draws on a number of discursive strategies, in particular, Marxist and Deconstructionist, the latter, a more recent phenomenon, still requires clarification and definition.

The second and main part of the thesis is devoted to several contemporary Canadian and Chinese women writers, namely Margaret Atwood, Mavis Gallant, Joy Kogawa, Alice Munro, Wang Anyi, Zhang Jie, and Zhang Xinxin. I propose two steps of investigation. First, it examines how and why the writings of Canadian and Chinese women writers differ in themes, priorities, and attitudes. I wish to investigate in what sense and to what degree the different emphases of Western and Chinese feminist criticism reflect the differences in the themes, priorities, attitudes, and narrative strategies of Canadian and Chinese women's literary works. Secondly, it examines the fundamental common ground in their works, focusing on the common effort of Canadian and Chinese women writers in problematizing the

very nature of subjectivity.

The third part of the these focuses mainly on the results of my investigation and some further suggestions about the comparative studies of contemporary Canadian and Chinese women writers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the assistance, encouragement, and understanding of a number of people the present work could not have been completed.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Department of Comparative Literature of the University of Alberta for its financial support during my years of graduate study. I wish to express my appreciation to the following professors for their thoughtful advice and valuable suggestions: Professor Peng-hsiang Chen, Professor Milan V. Dimić, Professor Laifong Leung, and Professor Nasrin Rahimieh. I am especially grateful to my co-supervisors, Professor E.D. Blodgett and Professor Karl S.Y. Kao, for their years of careful instruction and critical acumen regarding this dissertation as well as my course work. For their most generous help I shall always remain thankful.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to my mother and wife for their constant support and patient understanding over many years.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

FEMINISMS AND FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM IN THE WEST AND CHINA

Canadians and Chinese, separated by their geographical distance and ideological difference, do not know enough about each other's literary works, particularly those written by women. Since the 1970s, Canada has witnessed a new flowering of fiction written by women. Many of these women's works describe the lives of women, and they are mainly concerned with exploration and survival, crossing boundaries, challenging limits, and glimpsing new prospects. They are characterized by the direct engagement with the cultural and social problems that women face. For Chinese women writers, the last decade is considered to be a new era. The Chinese literary scene of the post-Mao era saw the emergence of hundreds of stories with love themes, most of which problematize and challenge the traditional conception of love. More significantly, the emphases of Chinese feminist writing were more political in the sense

that women writers were expressing angry feelings of injustice rampant in their social and political life and were striving to raise women's "political" awareness of their oppression by men.

This thesis explores and investigates the different thematic concerns and narrative strategies of Canadian and Chinese women writers. More importantly, this thesis also demonstrates that although the female characters of the Canadian and Chinese women writers have different cultural backgrounds and face different social, political, and economic problems, they have much in common. They all express a strong feminist consciousness: they reject passivity, they refuse to accept victim positions that have been imposed upon them, and, above all, they are developing a strong and unquenchable desire to search for their own identity. To appreciate such literary values as embodied in Margaret Atwood (b. 1939), Mavis Gallant (b. 1922), Joy Kogawa (b. 1935), Alice Munro (b. 1931), Wang Anyi (b. 1954), Zhang Jie (b. 1937), and Zhang Xinxin (b. 1953), Western feminist literary theories and Third World feminist criticism will be used.

Western Feminist Criticism

Western feminist scholarship received its impetus from the women's movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, but it participates in the more general dethroning of authority initiated by Freud, Marx and Saussure leading to "a redefinition of ideas of human nature and reality which has problematized traditional concerns of literary criticism, including established canons and ways of reading" (Greene and Kahn 2). Feminist scholars focus on diverse social constructions of femaleness and maleness in order to understand the universal phenomenon of male dominance. Simone de Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman ... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature" summarizes the thesis of her *The Second Sex* (De Beauvoir 301). Taking this as a point of departure, recent feminist scholarship proceeds to "deconstruct" the social construction of gender and the cultural paradigms that endorse it. As Greene and Kahn put it, "[f]eminist scholarship both originates and

participates in the larger efforts of feminism to liberate women from the structures that have marginalized them, and as such it seeks not only to reinterpret, but to change the world" (2).

Western feminist criticism draws on a number of discursive strategies, in particular, Marxist and Deconstructionist. Marx himself had little to say about the oppression of women. The major benefit of Marxism for women who call themselves Marxist feminists is that it shows how to analyze a social system with a view to getting it changed. Two well-known statements by Marx have provided those feminists with a point of departure: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it," and "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." By contradicting widely accepted doctrines, Marx was attempting to put people's thought into reverse gear. First, philosophy has been merely airy contemplation; it is time that it become engaged with the real world. Translated into a feminist point of view, Marx's first

statement then reads: "We intend to change the world so totally that someday the texts of masculinist writers will be anthropological curiosities" (Dworkin 9). All activities therefore become instrumental to that end, including the study of literature, which is not to be undertaken simply for "its own sake" in a belletristic or aestheticist manner, but as a means to transforming readers who will then proceed to transform the world. Feminist criticism must be an oppositional practice based on resistance to the dominant hegemony. Secondly, it is believed that cultural life, social institutions, and legal systems were the creations of human and divine reason, but "Marx reverses this formulation and argues that all mental (ideological) systems are the products of social and economic existence" (Selden 23). Marxism identifies capitalism (and the modes of production on which it is based) as the material base of class system, which is the source of all oppression, and declares that the specific subjection of women will end with the general demise of oppression which is to follow the destruction of capitalism.

Marxist feminists claim that socialist feminism is

their bridge to freedom. They see it as a radical, disciplined, and all-encompassing solution to the problems of race, sex, sexuality, and class struggle (Wong 290). They argue that only by overthrowing the economic system of capitalism can they liberate women and everybody else who is also oppressed. For socialism as an economic system would reorganize production, redistribute wealth, and redefine state power so that the exploiters are expropriated and workers gain hegemony. In a socialist society, they believe, male supremacy would not function, because socialism connotes a higher form of human relations that cannot possibly exist under capitalism. Unfortunately, so far large-scale experiments in radical socialization have produced only unsuccessful results.

While socialist feminists have been deeply concerned with the social construction of femininity and sexual difference, they have been uneasy about integrating social and political determinations with an analysis of the psychological ordering of gender. Socialist feminist criticism tends to foreground the social and economic elements of the narrative and socialize what it can of its

psychological portions. It is assumed that women's anger and anguish should be amenable to repair through social change. Therefore, "[a] positive emphasis on the psychological level is regarded as a valorization of the anarchic and regressive, a way of returning women to their subordinate ideological place within the dominant culture, as unreasoning social beings" (Kaplan 152).

Other feminists disagree, however, that the narrow economic focus of much classical Marxist thought will permit female oppression to disappear as a result of economic revolution, because socialist feminism based on Marxist thought seems unable to explain the particular conditions of women as an oppressed social group and to make significant contributions to their transformation. Although the oppression of women is indeed a material reality, it is also a question of sexual ideology concerned with the ways men and women perceive themselves and the opposite sex in a male-dominated society, and perceptions and behavior which range from the brutally explicit to the deeply unconscious. Even Engels himself admitted that "while [I] and Marx always regarded the economic aspect of

society as the *ultimate* determinant of other aspects, [we] also recognized that art, philosophy, and other forms of consciousness are 'relatively autonomous' and possess an independent ability to alter men's existence" (Selden 24). French feminists, in their efforts to reject a "masculine" authority or truth, have developed a great interest in the Lacanian and Derridian types of post-structuralist theory.

Implicit in much of Anglo-American feminist criticism is the assumption that "the text, and language itself, are transparent media which reflect a pre-existent objective reality, rather than signifying systems which inscribe ideology and are actually constitutive of reality" (Greene and Kahn 25). French feminists, on the contrary, consider the feminine to be unrepresentable by conventional language, because such a language is a masculine construct that thrives on female absence. As Greene and Kahn put it:

> French feminist criticism, which participates in Derridian deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, has presented a radical challenge to humanist-empiricist assumptions. The most radical feminist literary criticism has been informed by structuralist and post-structuralist French thought. (26)

French feminist theories, based upon Derridian

deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, center on language as a means through which men have reinforced their claim to a unified identity and relegated women to the negative pole of binary oppositions that justify masculine supremacy: subject/object, culture/nature, law/chaos, man/woman. As Ann Rosalind Jones summarizes:

> Julia Kristeva posits the concept of the semiotic, a rhythmic free play that she relates to mother-infant communication, and looks for in modernist writers. Luce Irigaray emphasizes *différence*, a totality of women's characteristics defined positively against masculine norms, and imagines a specifically feminist language, a *parler femme*. Hélène Cixous celebrates women's sexual capabilities, including motherhood, and calls for an *écriture féminine* through which women will bring their bodily energies and previously unimagined unconscious into view. (80)

One major task of feminist criticism is to dismantle phallocentrism, which is the structuring of man as the central reference point of thought, and of the phallus as the symbol of sociocultural authority. And that task has been made possible by the deconstructive philosophy of Derrida, whose writing constitutes a powerful attack on the mystique of the center in conceptual systems. Three types of centering come under damaging scrutiny in Derridian

analysis: "phonocentrism" in linguistics, "logocentrism" in philosophy, and "phallocentrism" in psychoanalysis. According to Derrida, "the 'center,' as a concept in classical systems of thought, is merely a construct which is brought into existence by the privileging of some signifiers at the expense of others, and for reasons which turn out to be in the interest of those who do the privileging" (Ruthven 51). People desire a center because it guarantees "being as presence." Western thought has developed innumerable terms which operate as centering principles: being, essence, substance, truth, form, beginning, end, man, God, and so on. This desire for center is called "logocentrism" in Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976). A strategy to decentre logocentrism is to reverse the values placed on each component in the binary terms which constitute it. "Writing" would thus become privileged at the expense of "speech," "absence" at the expense of "presence," and so on, although the aim is not the establishing of a new "center" but a free play of terms. Somewhere along the line the pair "male-female" would get written as "female-male," thus deprivileging the order

condoned by an androcentric society which, in psychoanalytic terms, is "phallocentric" (Ruthven 53). Hélène Cixous is most directly aware of this line of thought in Derrida. In her "Sorties," she uses the Derridian methodology of reversing and displacing hierarchized oppositions. As one critic observes:

> French philosopher Jacques Derrida's general project of a subversive questioning of the Western philosophical tradition and its metaphysics has opened up new areas of study that no longer take for granted such basics as the definition of "Man" as a rational being, in control of everything. (Hutcheon *Canadian Postmodern* 18)

Lacan's theories have much influence on Kristeva's thinking. The starting-point of Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory is Lacan's distinction between the "imaginary" and the "symbolic." In the "imaginary," the child experiences unity with its mother, and the price to be paid for the acquisition of language in the "symbolic" is repression of desire for that lost unity with the mother, exile from the "imaginary." Kristeva elucidates her critique by introducing a distinction between the "semiotic" and the "symbolic," in which the former is related to Freud's

primary and the latter to his secondary processes. Kristeva's distinction between "semiotic" and "symbolic" corresponds to Lacan's between the "imaginary" and the "symbolic." The interaction between these two terms then constitutes the signifying process. The semiotic refers to the prelinguistic disposition of instinctual drives as they affect language and its practice. It precedes the symbolic, with which it is related in dialectical conflict. According to Kristeva, the symbolic is a domain of position and judgment. It comes into being later than the semiotic, at the time of the mirror stage. It is "language as nomination, sign, and syntax." And "it involves the thetic phase, the identification of the subject and its distinction from objects, and the establishment of a sign system" (Kristeva, *Desire in Language* 136, 19).

Significantly, Kristeva's semiotic involves the pre-Oedipal primary processes. The endless flow of pulsions is gathered together in the "chora," a term Kristeva borrowed from Plato's *Timaeus*. Kristeva appropriates and redefines this Platonic concept and concludes that the "chora" is neither a sign nor a position. This pre-verbal "chora" is

anterior to symbolic signification, denotation, syntax, the word, even the syllable. It functions in discourse as a supplementary register to that of the sign and meaning. It constitutes the heterogeneous, disruptive dimension of language. The advantage of Kristeva's thinking for women is that it places the semiotic and the symbolic not in an order of supercession (such that the first has to be abandoned before the second can be attained) but in an order of interaction. Interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic constitutes the subject in language, not as a fixity but as a subject-in-process. This implies that the "chora" can never be destroyed, no matter how much it is repressed.

Kristeva's important distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic has established the very foundation for many other polarities. Her work has often taken as its central concept a polarity between "closed" rational systems and "open" disruptive systems. The semiotic throws into confusion all tight divisions between masculine and feminine and proceeds to deconstruct all the scrupulous binary oppositions by which societies such as ours survive

(Eagleton 189). According to Kristeva, the "semiotic" may be associated with the female body, and the "symbolic" is linked with the Law of the Father which censors and represses in order that discourse may come into being. Woman is the silence of the "unconscious" which precedes discourse. "She is the 'Other,' which stands outside and threatens to disrupt the conscious (rational) order of speech" (Selden 144). What is ordered and rationally accepted is continually being threatened by the "heterogeneous" and the "irrational." On the other hand, since the pre-Oedipal phase is undifferentiated sexually, the semiotic is not unequivocally feminine. Although the semiotic is in Kristeva's words "connoted" as maternal and co-extensive with the pre-Oedipal, to take it for a specificity of women's writing would mean a gross misunderstanding of Kristeva's theory. Obviously, some dominant forms of avant-garde writing are "feminine" despite the fact that they have been produced by men. Kristeva relates the use of sound in poetry to primary sexual impulses. In his poetry, Mallarmé, "by subverting the laws of syntax, subverts the Law of the Father, thus

identifying with the mother through his recovery of the 'maternal' semiotic flux" (Selden 144). Avant-garde literature demonstrates how the primary processes invade the rational ordering of language and threaten to disrupt the unified subjectivity of the "speaker" and the reader.

The psychoanalytic theories about instinctive drives have especially attracted feminist critics who have attempted to articulate the subversive and apparently formless resistance of some women writers and critics to male-dominated literary values. Given that Freud's text clearly communicates a vision of woman as deficient man, feminist resistance to psychoanalysis is understandable. And yet both in France and in America, the usefulness of psychoanalytic inquiry to feminist inquiry has become more and more apparent. "Feminist psychoanalysis" basically evolves out of two currents of neo-Freudian theorizing: that of the object relations analysts in England and America and that of the Lacanians in France. Whereas American feminists locate the core of patriarchal power in inter-personal relations and would radically reconstruct the family, French feminists explore how patriarchal power

functions on the symbolic level and would deconstruct the sentence. In other words, French feminist theory investigates the ways that "the feminine" has been defined, represented, or repressed in the symbolic systems of language, metaphysics, psychoanalysis, and art.

Feminist criticism exposes the prejudices at work in our appreciation of cultural artifacts, and shows how the linguistic medium promotes and transmits the values woven through the fabric of our society. Whereas the egalitarian argument in feminist criticism demands equal representation in literature of women's and men's experience of life, post-structuralist feminism denounces representation itself as already a patriarchal paradigm.

Chinese Feminist Consciousness

Karen Offen insists that in order to understand fully the historical range and possibilities of feminism, "we must locate the origins and growth of these ideas within a variety of cultural traditions, rather than postulating a

hegemonic model for their development on the experience of any single national or sociolinguistic tradition--be it Anglo-American, or French ... or any other" (151). In other words, feminism must be inclusive rather than exclusive, progressive rather than static; it must be "revisioned" by expanding our investigative horizons.

Obviously, contemporary feminism rose mainly out of concerns of Western bourgeois women, and only in recent years have we heard voices of black women, lesbians, and women in the Third World expressing feminist views. Although feminist literary criticism has been thriving in Western countries in the last decades, it has not, in fact, rallied under its banner a significant number of supporters in many Third World countries. Such reality makes people, both in the West and China, wonder if there is, for example, a conscious feminist movement in China. One critic defines feminism as "the expression of a consciousness that nowadays penetrates into all spheres of life including male-dominated institutions, organizations, and parties.... Where women start raising questions instead of obeying, fighting instead of accepting" (Gerstlacher 237-38). If we

follow this definition of the term, feminism does without doubt exist in China. This assertion is enforced by Karen Offen's definition of feminists. According to her, feminists are people who recognize the validity of women's own interpretations of their lived experience and needs, exhibit consciousness of, discomfort at, or even anger over institutionalized injustice (or inequity) toward women as a group by men in a given society, and advocate the elimination of that injustice by problematizing and challenging the coercive power, force, or authority that supports male prerogative in that particular culture (152).

In China, "[a] history of the many struggles of the women's movement ... has revealed to women the magnitude of the problem, both the depth and tenacity of the economic and ideological foundations of women's oppression in society, and the sensitivity that surrounds such a struggle" (Croll 332). The ancient Chinese concept of *yin-yang* originally symbolized the interaction of dynamic principles in the universe. Eventually their associations changed. *Yin* became equated with passivity, darkness, degeneration, and femaleness, while *yang* was associated

with activity, creativity, light, and maleness. This philosophy, expanded by Confucius in the 5th century B.C., formed the very foundation for the intensely patriarchal culture of traditional China. In that culture, Chinese women were subject to the Three Obediences (to fathers, husbands, and sons) and to the Four Virtues (to be humble, silent, clean and adorned to please the husband, and hard-working).

Political and social movements provided the context for the development of women's movements in China. The late nineteenth century witnessed the beginning of the emancipation of Chinese women. Threatened by Western invasion, the ruling class wooed female resources to increase productivity and strengthen national defense. Under these circumstances, women were, for the first time in Chinese history, given equal educational opportunities and, with their increasing participation in political movements, women's status began to improve. Women played an important role in the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty and the birth of the Republic. Yet after the 1911 Revolution the ruling party refused to make provision for women's suffrage

and gender equality in the Constitution of the Republic. A women's suffrage movement and continued protests from women's groups failed to produce any significant change.

Women's movements in China regained momentum during the May Fourth Movement. Starting as a patriotic movement of Chinese intellectuals in reaction to domestic turmoil and the threat of Japanese militarism, "the May Fourth Movement was actually a combined intellectual and sociopolitical movement to achieve national independence, the emancipation of the individual, and a just society by the modernization of China" (Chow Tse-tsung 358-59). The May Fourth Movement of 1919 then grew into the New Cultural Movement, which was an attempt to reform China. The intellectuals problematized and challenged traditional culture, the root of many age-old problems, and turned to Western culture for new solutions. "'Women's problems' were also an important issue in the general humanitarian concern of these reformers" (Ku 180). They demanded equal rights for women and condemned old customs such as foot-binding, arranged marriage, concubinage and prostitution. Although the 1924 legislation promised to give equal rights to men

and women in law, marriage, education, economic opportunity and political participation, the institutionalization of equal rights for women did not produce any substantial improvement in women's status because traditional values were still predominant and resistant to changes in society. Chinese women came to realize that "actual life and struggle have taught us that real equality between men and women doesn't come of itself, and it can't be given by anybody" (Croll 332).

In twentieth-century China, we see two eras of concentrated feminist thinking: one was during the May Fourth period of the 1920s and 1930s, and the other is the post-Mao era after 1976. Women's liberation has been an obsession with Chinese intellectuals since the turn of the twentieth century. Obviously, the history of classical Chinese literature was dominated by men. The single event that changed the Chinese literary landscape was the May Fourth Movement, which in fact produced the first group of modern Chinese women writers. Although literary works by women were, at that time, still relatively few, these works were, for the first time in the history of Chinese

literature, considered rare items worthy of value and respect. In their *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Emerging from the Horizon of History) published in 1989, Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua suggest that modern Chinese literature has produced not only a good number of professional women writers but a female literature and a female literary tradition as well. They perceive the May Fourth generation as the forerunner of that tradition (Meng and Dai 14).

Of the May Fourth Chinese women writers, Ding Ling (1904-1986) is a leading figure in exploring women's dilemma. As Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker says, "with the appearance of 'Shafei nüshi de riji' (The Diary of Sophie), an unprecedented frank portrayal of the contradictory sexual feelings of a tubercular, high-strung young woman, Ding Ling was well on her way to becoming one of China's most celebrated--and in the eyes of some, notorious--women writers" (6). In the 1920s, Ding Ling's own life became an example of the new independence being won by women. As a young girl, she demonstrated for equal rights for women and successfully opposed an arranged marriage for herself. She studied and traveled alone. She took a lover and pursued

her own career. She lived the life of an independent woman. When she had a child, she felt that it hampered her independence and therefore handed the child over to her mother. Ding Ling, of course, also established herself as a major creative writer during these years. It was her writing that originally brought her to the attention of the public. Her early works were strong in social sense and revolutionary spirit, probing and unveiling social evils and moral hypocrisy masked behind Confucian traditions.

The early Ding Ling writings, such as "The Diary of Miss Sophie" (Shafei nüshi de riji)(1927), can still be illuminating to contemporary feminists. They prefigure contemporary women's writing in a number of ways: "the focus on female subjectivity; the criticism of patriarchal ideology and institutions; and, most significantly, the problematization of writing and discourse through gender experience" (Liu 39). Moreover, Ding Ling is distinguished for her gallery of heroines, and her style is reminiscent of the romantic, sensuous, and melancholic. Ding Ling's first protagonists were modern, Western-influenced youth, and her themes were mainly love and marriage. Her story

"The Diary of Miss Sophie" enjoyed lasting popularity among Chinese readers, for the story expresses an awareness of sexual inequality underlying patriarchal oppression and touches upon one of the most sensitive issues in the May Fourth Movement, that is, an individual's effort to assert personal freedom and happiness under the crippling weight of patriarchal society. But what Ding Ling, like other women writers during that period, contributes most to modern Chinese literature is that she records the active feminine response to the chaotic events of modern Chinese history, particularly those of the May Fourth period, which "dislocated all former ways and values, mixed up all classes, and destroyed all faith, all proper orientation" (Lavrin 16).

About half a century later, Zhang Jie's story "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" (Ai shi buneng wangjide) published in 1979 marked another turning point in Chinese literature following Mao's death, as is attested by the controversy it provoked. "Chinese readers, accustomed as they were to socialist realism, were stunned by the subjective voice of the female narrator and the story's forbidden subject" (Liu

39). Quite a few critics voiced either their disapproval or support of Zhang Jie's story. One reminds her that "[a]s literary workers, shouldn't we be alert to and eradicate the corruptive influence of petty bourgeois ideas and sentiments?" (Xiao 4). In contrary, Dai Qing enthusiastically welcomes Zhang's departure from the dominant literary orthodoxy (4).

In a way, contemporary Chinese women writers have taken up where writers like Ding Ling and her generation left off in the thirties. If we compare women's works of the May Fourth period and those of the post-Mao era, we may find certain common characteristics as follows:

(1) Female protagonists predominate.

(2) The problems they encounter involve sex, love, marriage, and the family.

(3) These problems of sex, love, marriage, and the family, are usually intended to reflect and comment upon large and important contemporary social issues, including not only the feminine issue of women's place in Chinese society but also other important political and economic

issues of the day. (Duke xi)

Although the similarities between these two periods may be merely coincidental, they do demonstrate that the two generations have much in common, chiefly among them an almost identical feminist consciousness. They both represent a reaction against the conventional order, reason, schematization, ritualization, and structuring of life. And they both have ushered in an emphasis on sincerity of love, mutual understanding, and women's awareness of their roles beyond those of mother and wife. In this sense, contemporary Chinese feminism seems to be a continuation of that of the May Fourth Movement.

However, the literary works of contemporary Chinese women writers are characterized by their more direct engagement with the social and political problems that women face. If the feminist consciousness of the May Fourth arose in response to the perceived collapse of traditional and hierarchical order, the contemporary Chinese women writers like Zhang Jie built theirs on a new order, that of a socialist variant of patriarchy in which Chinese women are subordinate within the family and manipulated to suit

state policies on economic development. If the feminist consciousness of the May Fourth is characterized by its radicalism and anarchism, the present one is more or less found in the Marxist-socialist mode. Therefore, contemporary Chinese feminism is not necessarily a direct continuation of that of the May Fourth.

Feminism has, in general, been associated with the development of women's movements in the West. In fact, feminists have considered feminism as a social movement. Part of the self-image of contemporary feminism in the West is the identity between feminism and a woman's movement. Obviously, the various meanings of the term "feminism" correspond to the stages of development of the women's movement in the West and, therefore, may not always be relevant in the context of contemporary China. It is in this sense that "feminism," when applied to the Chinese context, cannot be taken to stand for an aggressive, organized, political women's movement. Neither does it represent feminist separatism, which may be understood as a departure from all previous traditions imposed by men, and the attempt to recreate a new world from a female point of

view, in particular modes of thinking, forms of language and artistic expression, as well as patterns of social behavior.

Needless to say, women's problems should not be separated from their local social, economic, cultural, political, and psychological background. Anyone who looks for feminism in women's literature in China must keep in mind that the expectations of the Chinese public toward women's literature do not encourage feminist writing which openly and explicitly problematizes and challenges social, economic, or political dimensions of patriarchy. Furthermore, there is no emerging organized women's movement, which in the West has helped so much to promote female writers. The root of the problem lies in the persistence of feudal attitudes and the total control of the political life by the Communist Party, which does not allow an independent women's movement to exist. So, in the Chinese context, feminist statements are not put forward in an aggressive and forceful manner; instead of making appeals and offering solutions, they very often deal with possibilities and proposals.

Western feminisms and their Chinese counterpart are markedly different. While the former is embedded in liberal legal and political individualism, problematizing the very nature of subjectivity defined in Western culture, the latter is more concerned with the social injustice that women face in their daily life, concentrating on the "unhappy marriage" between feminist consciousness and socialist reality. Given the fact that Western feminisms and Chinese "feminisms" have different emphases, it is no wonder that Canadian and Chinese women writers have different concerns and priorities in their respective writings. While Canadian women writers are constantly obsessed with "character formation and the difficulty of maintaining ontological security" (Fogal 116), their Chinese counterparts believe that literature contributes to the transformation of society.

Consequently, contemporary Chinese feminism is not a simple duplication of its Western counterpart. Rada Ivekovic, a Yugoslav feminist, has used the term "neofeminist" to depict the struggle for feminist aims in a society where many of the political and economic issues

concerning women have been legally addressed by state socialism, but where many of the social, sexual, and psychological dimensions of women's emancipation remain essentially unexplored within formal social channels (Ivekovic 735). Although Chinese women writers admit that the legal and economic achievements of women are insufficient for full emancipation, many of them like Zhang Jie and Wang Anyi reject the term feminist as they know it from the Western European and American contexts in which it implies liberal legal and political individualism.

It is necessary to pinpoint the different emphases between Western feminisms and Chinese feminist criticism. Yet to exaggerate discrepancies in sweeping statements such as the following is equally misleading: "What is clear is that the problems that face Chinese women who are emerging from a feudal Confucian society have nothing to do with the problems of Western women who are trying to get out from under the thumbs of capitalism and monotheism" (Kristeva, "La Femme" 139-40). Insofar as "woman is traditionally use-value for man, exchange-value among men" (Irigaray 105), both Chinese women and their Western counterparts are

engaged in the common struggle to free their bodies from being the property and propriety of men. Similarly, feminist scholarship, whether Chinese or Western, works toward the same goal of exposing the collusion between ideology and cultural practices and deconstructing predominantly male cultural paradigms.

Thematic Emphasis, Narrative Strategies and Common Pursuit

Women's writing about women has become an important vehicle of feminist consciousness and enlightenment. It is certainly true that male writers on women's issues may adopt progressive attitude and achieve some positive social effect. Yet, the vital and major part of feminist writing is without doubt that written by women, who draw on their own experience for inspiration. Their works, committed and involved descriptions of female reality, are translated into women's demands for social change and therefore present continued challenge to male dominance in social,

political, and literary life.

Feminist literary works, Canadian or Chinese, take their textual life from an encoding of the dynamic of women's oppression and their resistance. Women's works very often narrate a similar progress from oppression, suffering, victimization, through various stages of awakening consciousness to active resistance and, finally, to some form of victory, transformation, or transcendence of despair. Very often, feminist novels privilege and endorse women's bonding and female friendships; problematize, marginalize, subvert, or reject heterosexual love and passion; and interrogate family and motherhood. Their characteristic modalities are Bildung and utopia. Their characteristic tone compounds rage at women's oppression and revolutionary optimism about the possibility for change. "Thanks to the works of feminist writers, we are facing a new situation: exit Man, enter Humankind, including Woman" (Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* 18).

How does feminist criticism affect literature? In order to understand the collusion between literature and ideology, feminist critics have realized that they need to

evolve a theory, which can help them change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized them for so long. Moreover, understanding the heritage of feminist writers both in Canada and China certainly requires theoretical investigation. In literary criticism, feminist scholarship does more than merely append women to the discipline as it exists, for the inclusion of women raises questions that reshape the discipline. In the same way that women's history has modified notions of historical evidence and periodization, the reading of women writers alters standards of literary excellence, redefines literary periods, and reshapes the canon.

Finally, feminist literary theories, Western and Chinese, may open up exciting avenues for analyzing the works this thesis has chosen to explore. In reading Kogawa's *Obasan*, for example, we can see how Kristeva's semiotic working in the way that "repressed consciousness"--the silences that Naomi's narrative and Emily's documents emit--irrupts and disturbs the narrative. The survey of the progress of Chinese feminist thinking may help us understand how feminist consciousness developed in the

works of contemporary Chinese women writers and what specific strategies those writers used in demythifying male-dominated discourse.

"In Canada the two major (but by no means only) new forms [postmodern and metafictional] to appear have been those that embody ethnicity and the female" (Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* 18). The direct engagement with the cultural and social problems that women face is characteristic of much of Canadian women's writing, in which women are very often presented as victims. For many Canadian women writers, what is most important for a woman who has realized her dilemma is, first of all, "to acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable" (Atwood, *Survival* 37). The first chapter of this thesis will examine Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), which best illustrate Atwood's views of women as victims and provide striking insights into women's victimization. Also discussed in this chapter are Gallant's *A Fairly Good Time* (1983) and Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), both of which attempt to

investigate the ways that "the feminine" has been defined, represented, or repressed in the symbolic system of language.

When we turn to the Chinese literary scene, we find that Chinese women writers seem to pay much attention to the problems that women face in their pursuit of career success and personal happiness. They are concerned, in particular, with the "unhappy marriage" between feminist consciousness and socialist reality. The second chapter will explore the works of Wang Anyi, Zhang Jie, and Zhang Xinxin, who express a strong feminist consciousness in their works. This chapter will also pay special attention to some of the narrative strategies these writers have employed in order to locate the core of patriarchal dominance.

Most noteworthy in both Canadian and Chinese women's works is the fact that their female protagonists are keenly intent on their persistent pursuit for identity. The third chapter will thus concentrate on the fundamental "universality" both Canadian and Chinese women writers share when they insist that women, be they white or

nonwhite, have the right to assert their own values, to assert their own identity.

Regarding the subject of comparative literature East-West, Heh-hsiang Yuan raised three questions: "(a) What do we compare? (b) How do we compare? (c) What possible results do we expect?" (1). There have already been numerous answers to those questions. Hopefully, this thesis, a comparative analysis of some contemporary Canadian and Chinese women writers, may provide another, concrete response to Yuan's challenge.

CHAPTER ONE

CANADIAN WOMEN WRITERS

Victims or Victors: A Thematic Analysis of Three Canadian Novels

> Woman is the Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, she who receives and submits. In song and story the young man is seen departing adventurously in search of a woman; he slays the dragon, he battles giants; she is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, she is chained to a rock, a captive, sound asleep; she waits. (de Beauvoir 271-72)

De Beauvoir's image of the fictional heroine, of her passivity and confinement, implies women's victimization presented by the majority of literary works written by men. In their narrative, women's role is to wait; their life is static. Excluded from active participation in culture, the fictional heroine withdraws into herself. Similarly, literary works produced by women themselves often suggest that women are victims. The emphasis of their narrative, however, is different: their female images are dynamic rather than static, positive rather than negative. Above

all, their heroines' role is not to wait, but to resist.

The situation of being a victim and trying to survive dramatizes Margaret Atwood's major thesis in her critical work *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, in which she suggests that Canada, metaphorically still a colony or an oppressed minority, is "a collective victim," and that "[t]he central symbol for Canada ... is undoubtedly Survival" (32). Atwood, furthermore, enumerates what she labels "basic victim positions," whereby a victim may choose any of the four possible options, one of which is to acknowledge being a victim but refuse "to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable" (*Survival* 37). This position may explain the situations in which Atwood's female protagonists find themselves: feeling oppressed, trying to identify the real cause of their oppression and fighting to repudiate the victim role. This position, Victim Position Three, fits the heroines of Atwood's works because "[t]his is a dynamic position, rather than a static one; from it you can move on to Position Four (to be a creative non-victim), but if you become locked into your anger and fail to change your situation, you might well

find yourself back in Position Two (regarding yourself as a fated victim and doing nothing about it)" (Atwood, *Survival* 38). This position defined by Atwood demonstrates the major difference between male and female writers in portraying female characters.

The Edible Woman

Atwood's works are usually concentrated on the tortuous and tormenting journey of the women in search of their self-consciousness. *The Edible Woman*, Atwood's first published novel, is about a young woman's reluctance to be "devoured" by her husband and children. In describing the thematic emphasis of the novel, Sherrill Grace points out that "[f]rom the title through the tightly images of food and eating to the symbolic cake lady, the narrative presents the social, physical, and emotional prevalence of consumption" (94). Manifested in this novel are the choices with which Marian, the female protagonist, is confronted: she must be either a victor or victim, either a consumer or the consumed; she must speak either in a first-person self-confirming voice, or in a third-person disembodied voice.

In this novel, "the struggle not to be victimized becomes a moral imperative; passive acquiescence does not absolve guilt or remove responsibility" (Grace 3).

The Edible Woman explores how Marian moves from unconscious captivity to self-conscious and hope of self-determination. Obviously, Atwood's heroine does not face a gloomy picture from the beginning. She begins her story complacently: "I know I was all right on Friday when I got up; if anything I was feeling more stolid than usual" (Atwood, *EW* 11). She has a decent job, a secure home with a tolerable roommate, and a satisfactory relationship with a lover who does not impose many demands on her. She seems to be moving toward the conventional ending of "happy-ever-after" which she equates with marriage.

In the following two days, however, her security is threatened. Her job with Seymour Surveys takes on an ominous significance when she has to sign the pension plan, her "signature going into a file and the file going into a cabinet being shut away in a vault somewhere and locked" until the day when she turns sixty-five and must live in "a room with a plug-in electric heater" (Atwood, *EW* 21). And

on the same day, her sense of permanence is disturbed when Ainsley, her roommate, declares that she is going to produce a baby without the benefit of clergy and conceive it in Marian's apartment. Still worse, Peter, her lover who has carefully cultivated his "playboy" image and seems to be loath to make any legal commitments, suddenly becomes domestic and proposes.

Marian has two major fears. She is afraid of losing her freedom while choosing her own identity and life-style. Marriage, like the pension plan, might make her fit into a preformed role. At the end of Part One of the novel, she attempts to begin to fit by listing all the things she should do to tidy up her affairs in preparation for marriage. She knows that "I must get organized. I have a lot to do" (Atwood, *EW* 103). She is fully aware that she must not waste her time: "I can't let my whole afternoon dribble away, relaxing though it is to sit in this quiet room gazing up at the empty ceiling with my back against the cool wall, dangling my feet over the edge of the bed" (Atwood, *EW* 103). Her other fear is of total loss of identity. She feels that she is "dissolving, coming apart

layer by layer like a piece of cardboard in a gutter puddle" (Atwood, *EW* 218). And "[s]he was afraid of losing her shape, spreading out, not being able to contain herself any longer" (Atwood, *EW* 219). At an office party, surrounded by women co-workers, "[s]he felt them, their identities, almost their substance, pass over her head like a wave ... she was one of them, her body the same, identical, merged with that other flesh that choked the air in the flowered room with its sweet organic scent; she felt suffocated by this thick sargasso-sea of femininity" (Atwood, *EW* 167). Against this fear, the idea of marriage seems at times a safeguard: "She slid her engagement ring back onto her finger, seeing the hard circle for a moment as a protective talisman that would help keep her together" (Atwood, *EW* 218). But the complexity of her dilemma lies in the fact that the magic ring also locks her into one of the preformed identities she dreads.

What Marian really desires becomes clear to her only very gradually. She has persuaded herself to want marriage, and evades as long as possible the meaning of all the clues, the fearful images of victimization and entrapment.

The sensible, calm self, so carefully constructed to keep her safe, has almost betrayed her into the paralyzed, stereotyped identity she most fears. She is fully aware that Ainsley "had constructed her image and now she had to maintain it" (Atwood, *EW* 119), and Peter "exchanged the free-bachelor image for the mature-fiancé one and adjusted his responses and acquaintances accordingly" (Atwood, *EW* 120). Although she notices how frequently other people exist in narrow fabrications of self, she is slow to realize her collusion in her own identity-freeze. She persuades herself that the "nicely packaged" (Atwood, *EW* 146) Peter is what she should devote herself to, and that marriage can be as practical and well organized as she believes her own personality is--"Peter and I should be able to set up a very reasonable arrangement" (Atwood, *EW* 102). At this time, she undoubtedly believes that Peter is an "ideal choice" for her.

Unfortunately, however, the relationship between her and Peter turns out to be like the chase, symbolized by the image of the hunt. Instead of being his beloved, she becomes Peter's target and victim, captured and frozen

within his eyes, which have been characterized as the tools of the hunter capturing his prey: "He glanced quickly over at me, his eyes narrowed as though he was taking aims" (Atwood, *EW* 81). Later, when Peter takes pictures at his party, she is terrified. She equates the camera with a lethal weapon, herself in red dress "a perfect target" (Atwood *EW* 244). Evading several of his efforts to photograph her, she runs away: "She could not let him catch her this time. Once he pulled the trigger she would be stopped, fixed indissolubly in that gesture, that single stance, unable to move or change" (Atwood, *EW* 245). This party, Peter's conventional gesture of farewell to bachelorhood, precipitates, at last, her full realization that she cannot let herself be "stopped" in this way in her life, and that she is to be corseted, coiffed, dressed, hung with ornaments, made up and made over to please Peter, who, "a homicidal maniac with a lethal weapon in his hands" (Atwood, *EW* 246), is haunting her. At Peter's party, Marian is dressing and acting as she is supposed to, she is being "smiling and efficient" (*EW* 233) as a good hostess, and she is briefly amazed and pleased that she is performing her

role so well. But finally she has to ask: "Who was that tiny two-dimensional small figure in a red dress, posed like a paper woman in a mail-order catalogue, turning and smiling, fluttering in the white empty space," and she comes to realize: "This couldn't be it; there had to be something more" (Atwood, *EW* 243).

Marian's role as victim is first evoked through the symbolism of the "festive red dress" (Atwood, *EW* 219) which she wears to Peter's party. As Marian is descending to captivity and imprisonment, her nightmare intensifies. Marian becomes increasingly aware that as she loses her sense of choice and free will, she is dominated in turn by fate. In Chapters 8 and 9, she recognizes the impulse of this nightmare and the need for escape from a world of which she has lost control. She realizes that she is partly responsible for her dilemma. She has passively allowed herself to please Peter, who tells her that she looks marvelous with that red dress. She is aware of her discomfort with this invented image: "Now she wondered whether or not she did look absolutely marvelous" (Atwood, *EW* 228).

In *The Edible Woman*, "[m]arriage is presented as owning, as consuming, as entrapment" (Hutcheon, "From Poetic to Narrative Structures" 18-20). Marian is driven to revolt against what seems to be her fate. Fearing that she may be consumed by others' expectations, she decides that only a rejection of her proposed marriage to Peter can lead to her liberation from the prison of society and return her to freedom and a new life. Although the ending of the novel seems to be pessimistic, in as much as Marian is faced with the same decisions as before and has to search for a new job, new accommodations, and a new lover: she has, nevertheless, attained a new knowledge of herself. She has completed her journey into self-alienation and out again.

The Edible Woman explores and investigates the predicament of a woman who creates a fiction of self in an attempt to control her own reality, and who then has to deal with the ways in which her own fiction controls her. Atwood sets her exploration of this psychological quandary, however, in an environment whose social victimization of women is made clear. "The most obvious theme of *The Edible Woman* is that of consumption" (Grace 94). The dominant

image of the novel, appearing repeatedly in event, motif and metaphors, is an image of consumption, of woman as central commodity in a world where everything is commodity, and everybody is packaged for consumption. In the novel's consumer society, Atwood's heroine has successfully avoided being swallowed into the nonentity or the stereotyping of identity she has dreaded. The victory may be precarious, but it is real.

Surfacing

"*Surfacing* has been variously interpreted as a religious quest, a psychological journey, a search for national identity, and a narrative of emerging feminist power" (Berryman 51). Like her first novel *The Edible Woman*, Atwood's *Surfacing* also presents a crisis in the development of a female protagonist. But *Surfacing* introduces a young woman far more fearful, desperate, and alienated from her true self than *The Edible Woman*. In *Surfacing*, the author is examining among other things, "the great Canadian victim complex" (Gibson 20). The female protagonist, alienated and powerless, yet also determined

and strong-minded, makes a lasting impression on the reader of *Surfacing*, which rejects a particular tradition of the representation of women: their passivity.

Atwood's *Surfacing* grapples with the question of what it means to be human. To be human requires one's acceptance of one of the inescapable binary opposites: to be a victor or a victim. This dilemma shapes the novel's plot and determines its point of view. In this novel, Atwood's unnamed heroine-narrator is a divorced freelance artist, who escapes her city-bound imprisonment, or "normal life," and enters the wilderness, where self-transformation occurs within the legends of landscape. The reader watches her transform herself from a schizoid personality into a basic human creature by accepting the wilderness of nature. In this novel, the protagonist's external search for her father is paralleled by her internal search for her self. While the idea of rejecting the old self by fleeing "normal life" and of establishing a new one by returning to the primitive is attractive and promising, the actual process turns out not to be so simple. This journey, once started, turns out to be full of perils as well as promises. It is

painful because "[e]verything from history must be eliminated" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 190). The heroine undergoes sufferings because there is no warmth or comfort in the natural world where she seeks refuge, only a lack of hypocrisy.

Different from *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing* seems to take a more comprehensive view of the situation of its protagonist. *Surfacing* is "the multi-leveled quest for a contemporary Persephone for a particular type of freedom" (Grace 98). The novel surveys human foibles--questions of power, guilt, innocence, expiation for a variety of sins--rather than solely female ones. But not until the book's ending does the protagonist's understanding of her capacity for evil become complete. To renounce power, to remain a passive victim of others, she realizes, is an exercise in futility: if she wishes to survive in this world, she must "join in the war," or she would "be destroyed" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 203). She wishes that there were other choices but finds that there are not. What is morally essential, however, is for her to acknowledge her power, accept her imperfection, take responsibility for her actions, come to

terms with death, and "give up the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 206).

Through the perceptions of her narrator, Atwood records the pathology of a sexual relationship in which the male asserts his masculinity by inflicting physical and psychological pains:

> He's got this little set of rules. If I break one of them I get punished, except he keeps changing them so I'm never sure. He's crazy, there's something missing in him.... He likes to make me cry because he can't do it himself. (Atwood, *Surfacing* 131)

Throughout *Surfacing*, sex is linked with mechanization, humiliation, coercion and death, and the themes of violation (physical, psychological, and ideological) provide the focus for Atwood's particular challenge to the male-"universal."

Surfacing records escape and entrapment: Atwood's heroine escapes from city into nature, the wilderness; but she is trapped in sexual humiliation, and caught in the ambiguous mingling of desire and powerlessness. *Surfacing* describes the sexual battlefield. To love is dangerous

because it runs the risk of drowning from desire, and because "[f]or women, the activity of desiring frequently becomes the passivity of being desired" (Irvine 96). To be loved implies another kind of danger because its consequences may be to be dominated and to be rendered powerless. Atwood's female protagonist comes to realize that she cannot allow the desire to be loved to control her sexual life, and she sees the point of struggling toward distancing.

The last part and climax of *Surfacing*, where the heroine, alone on the island, yields to her madness and acts out her alienation by rebelling against her friends and stripping herself of all signs of civilization, is clearly of a positive kind. She has moved from passivity to action, has been brought face to face with her past, her suppressed problems, her self, and stands on the threshold of something new. Of course, what it will be remains uncertain, but at least hitherto unformulated questions have now been asked. Progress has been made. As one critic observes:

> [The last part of *Surfacing*] is a stage through

> which the heroine passes. In the end she re-enters her own time; she refuses to be a victim; she sees herself in the glass as a natural woman; she is able to laugh; she accepts the child she is carrying; she rediscovers trust; she is ready to begin again. (Stratford 122)

What makes *Surfacing* so unique is that the heroine seems wholly transformed and wholly determined to "surface" in all her full power into the world of culture. What has happened to her is that she has been so empowered by her fusion of spiritual or psychic and natural energies that she has brought about an implosion of her own world, a shifting of her selfhood from its stance on the margins of male society to a state of being in which her own female personality is central and independent, and patriarchy, if not obliterated, has been moved to the margin for her. Therefore, she has transformed herself from being a victim of male domination to a victor over patriarchy, turning patriarchal space inside out so that it can no longer threaten or limit her being. Although the reader does not experience the heroine's return to society, the impression that she makes on the reader is that she will no longer return to a peripheral or secondary status. And the reader

is quite sure that the unnamed narrator will really transcend the past to find new meanings in the present.

Although this novel is also about victimization and it also ends with ambiguity, an optimistic reading may find that the ending is hopeful rather than despairing. It is hopeful because the narrator comes to realize that she can refuse to participate in the destructive "mythologising" of her society: "This above all, to refuse to be a victim" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 206). It is hopeful because for the first time, she understands and shows compassion for the subjective dimensions of others. She comes to realize why her father, "islanding his life, protecting both us and himself, in the midst of war and in a poor country," must take efforts "to sustain his illusion of reason and benevolent order" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 204). She finds how her mother's "meticulous records" of the weather "allowed her to omit ... pain and isolation" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 204). Now, even her perception of her lover, Joe, is changed: "he isn't an American, I can see that now ... he is only half-formed, and for that reason I can trust him" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 207). The narrator now comes to

understand the nature of human limitation, the need to define "things by their absence; and love by its failures, power by its loss" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 204). Having finally surfaced, she recognizes that the world is still what it was, death is still a practical joke, and the "normal life" is still tempting. Thus "from now on I'll have to live in the usual way" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 204). By declaring: "To trust is to let go" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 207), Atwood's protagonist has abandoned her former sense of enclosure, thus gaining a liberated self and establishing a sound basis for her constructive action within this world. Hopefully, the rejection of the "normal" society, a male-defined world, may open a woman to a full possibility of establishing her identity, and it may also make her understand that "[n]aming your own condition, your own disease, is not necessarily the same as acquiescing in it. Diagnosis is the first step" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 42).

Obviously, *Surfacing* is more than a matter of survival; it is a question of salvation. The protagonist's parents have taught her that salvation requires the resurrection of death through the conception of life. Once

she has laid the ghost of her aborted baby, she can finally conceive anew: "I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 173). As the lost child surfaces, the mother achieves her long sought salvation.

Significantly, both *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* address themselves to victimization, to the victimization of women. They indicate that repudiation of victim roles comes only after the protagonists of the novels have identified the real cause of their oppression. More significantly, both novels are dynamic rather than static. Fear of enclosure is the reason for their ambiguous endings. Finally and perhaps most significantly, the journeys of both Atwood's female protagonists are intrinsically the same: the real cause of their oppression must be identified; energy must be transformed into constructive action; and efforts must be made to repudiate the victim role.

The Handmaid's Tale

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is, among other things, a strong political tract deploring antifeminist attitudes. It is the fulfilment of the earlier promise of Atwood's *Surfacing*. If the narrator in *Surfacing* can still choose her lover, the female protagonist in *The Handmaid's Tale* has only two choices, neither of which, however, is promising: "Give me children, or else I die" (Atwood, *HT* 57).

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is narrated by a woman called Offred who is living in the Republic of Gilead (a futuristic society that may be a possible evolution of the U.S.). Offred is a handmaid, someone who is used only for reproductive purposes by members of the male elite whose wives cannot bear children. The church-state regime of Gilead endorses such an unorthodox practice out of necessity to solve a fertility crisis among the population. In this novel, Atwood has taken both the socio-ecological excesses and the burgeoning conservatism of the religious right that may be found in the contemporary U.S. and extrapolated them to their most extreme point, drawing a

picture of how terribly monitored our future lives might be.

The reader is told that sometime in the mid-1980s the president of the U.S. was assassinated and the constitution suspended. During the turmoil of the decade that followed there developed an authoritarian regime based on a return to "traditional values" and fundamentalist Christianity. Rebellious Quakers and Baptists were hunted down and slaughtered by the military, known as the Angels of Light. The police were given the name of Guardians of the Faith, and the secret police were called the Eyes.

In Gilead, as a result of radiation and excessive use of toxic chemicals, fertility has dropped to such a degree that drastic measures have to be taken. Appropriate men, called Commanders, are chosen for stud duty, and a team of "handmaids," potentially fertile young women who are protected as a species, are installed to serve them. In this Gileadean society, handmaids are absolutely nothing but wombs, because "[w]e are containers, it's only the inside of our bodies that are important" (Atwood, *HT* 90). In one of the services, ironically called "ceremony" in the

novel, the heroine has to lie in the marital bed between the Commander's wife's thighs, being serviced by the Commander. For the handmaid and the Commander, or for all of the three present, there is no love or pleasure, because they are only doing their duty. Here, Offred's situation lucidly illustrates Simone de Beauvoir's assertion in *The Second Sex* about men defining woman not as an autonomous being but as simply what he decrees her to be relative to him: "For him she is sex--absolutely sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--she is the Other" (XVI).

The handmaid's world is like a nineteenth-century school, ruled by taboos. The handmaids all dress in red, and must walk in twos; the Wives wear blue and the Marthas (the domestic servants) wear green. All wear habits down to the ground, and long sleeves; the handmaids are also blinkered by nunlike coifs, lest they catch the eye of a man other than the one they belong to. Death is the penalty for transgression.

In Kristeva's words, "[a] woman has only two choices: either to experience herself in sex hyperabstractly (in an 'immediately universal' way, as Hegel would say) so as to make herself worthy of divine grace and assimilation to the symbolic order, or else to experience herself as different, Other, fallen (or in Hegel's terms again, '[i]mmediately particular')" ("Stabat Mater" 592). The handmaids in Gilead also have two choices, neither of which, however, is desirable. If she cannot bear children within a limited time, the dire alternative for the handmaid, who will be declared Unwoman, is banishment to the Colonies, where women clean up radioactive waste as slave laborers and are destined to die. If women's life can be described in terms of "bridebed, childbed, bed of death," the handmaids in that Gileadean society can only find themselves on the last two. The handmaid's life journey is summarized by Offred, who says: "We are for breeding purposes. We aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary.... There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us.... We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (Atwood, *HT* 128). All this reminds the

reader of Simone de De Beauvoir's words: "Women? Very simple ... she is a womb, an ovary" (De Beauvoir 3). Besides, sterility can only be the handmaid's fault, because "there is no such thing as a sterile man ... there are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood, *HT* 57). But the desire to be a mother takes on a totally different meaning in the Gileadean society. For the handmaids, to be able to bear children means to survive.

The state in Gilead sets a pattern of life based on frugality, conformity, censorship, corruption, fear and terror--in other words, the common terms of existence enforced by totalitarian states, in which men seem to have absolute power over the fate of women. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the past (our present) is regarded as "a society dying ... of too much choice" (24). Therefore, in such a society as Gilead, choice is prohibited. Then when choices become severely constrained, life seems to be a painfully prolonged prison term. People only feel buried. Ironically, in the Gileadean society, the victimization process does not involve Offred and other handmaids alone; it extends to

the oppressors as well. Everyone ruled by the Gilead regime suffers the deprivation of having no choice, except what the church-state decrees, and even the Commander is compelled to perform his sexual assignment with Offred as a matter of obligation: "This is no recreation, even for the Commander. This is serious business" (Atwood, *HT* 89).

The authoritarian society of the future might make the reader long for the world of our present; and to denounce Gilead seems to leave us no alternative but to endorse the old system--our present one. The restrictions of the Gileadean society make today's "rules" look like freedom: "I remember the rules ... don't open your door to a stranger.... Don't go to a laundromat, by yourself, at night" (Atwood, *HT* 24). As bad as our society might be, when compared to the repressions of a totalitarian regime like Gilead, it is free. Freedom, like everything else, is relative and conditional. Laundromats represent freedom, as Offred, in one of her nostalgic "attacks of the past," recalls the days when she were able to go to laundromats: "What I wore to them: shorts, jeans, jogging pants. What I put into them: my own clothes, my own soap, my own

money.... I think about having such control" (Atwood, *HT* 24). Laundromats are freedom, as are short dresses, high heels, and make-up, which are also prohibited in Gilead. Furthermore, Offred constantly yearns for her former marriage with Luke. She had been a happy wife and mother in "the time before," with a husband, a daughter, a secure job, money to spend, and, most importantly, a name of her own. Now, robbed of all of the above ("Offred" is not her name. Her Commander's name is Fred, thus she is an object "Of Fred"), she is only expected to conceive.

Overwhelming loneliness and boredom afflict her even more than oppression. "Nobody dies from lack of sex," Offred discovers, "[i]t's a lack of love we die from. There's nobody here I can love, all the people I could love are dead or elsewhere" (Atwood, *HT* 97). Now even her beautiful body, instead of being a source of pleasure as in the past, becomes the seed of hatred, an enemy:

> My nakedness is strange to me already. My body seems outdated. Did I really wear bathing suits, at the beach? I did, without thought, among men, without caring that my legs, my arms, my thighs and back were on display, could be seen. Shameful, immodest. I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or

> immodest but because I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely. (Atwood, *HT* 58-59)

The reason is obvious: in the past, she would think of her body as an instrument of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or even an implement for the accomplishment of her will. Although there were limits, her body was, nevertheless, lithe, single, solid, one of her, one that completely belonged to her, to her will, to her desires. Now she finds that her body is different. She turns into a cloud, congealed around a central object. In that Gileadean society, her body is not what it used to be. It is stiff, rather than lithe. It is empty, rather than solid. It is ugly, rather than beautiful. It brings her nothing but disgust and hatred.

In Atwood's Gilead, even the male leaders are not immune to longing for the illicit pleasure of the past, to "an appreciation for the old things" (Atwood, *HT* 147). Offred's Commander takes it upon himself to break the rules, summoning her to come to him alone in his private study. She goes to the assignment expecting, as the reader does, whips and chains, sexual perversion. Instead she only

finds herself in a marvelous comic situation. What the Commander wants is to play with her a game of Scrabble, which represents the pleasure of the past he longs for.

In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the past (our present) was terrible: "'You see what things used to be like?'" Aunt Laddie asks after the showing of a pornographic movie. It portrays "from the seventies or eighties ... women kneeling, sucking penises or guns, women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed" (Atwood, *HT* 112). Reading this, the reader might ask: is our freedom real or is it only a sham? And the very suggestion that Gilead stands for a possible evolution from our society, or the North America of the 1980s, must be taken as a crushing indictment of our own times.

But Atwood's "feminism" in *The Handmaid's Tale* is not simple. In this novel, the present (our possible future) is terrible in another way: "There is more than one kind of freedom.... Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy (our present time is referred to here), it was

freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from" (Atwood, *HT* 24). Although she questions how much freedom our society allows the female, Atwood still implies that our "freedom to" is preferable to the new order's "freedom from," which only means a condition of slavery and powerlessness. Atwood makes her idea clear when the narrator recalls women of our present time in films: "women on their own, making up their minds.... They seemed to be able to choose ... then" (Atwood, *HT* 24). Looking at the images of women in an old copy of *Vogue*, Offred sees in their "candid eyes" there was "no quailing, no clinging." She then heartily admires: "Pirates, these women" (Atwood, *HT* 147).

Many of the female protagonists in the works of Canadian women writers find themselves in the position as a victim but refuse "to accept the assumption that the role [as a victim] is inevitable" (Atwood, *Survival* 37). This position fully explains Offred's role as the protagonist-narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Offred's progress as a maturing consciousness is indexed by an evolving awareness of herself as a victimized woman, and then a gradual development toward initially risky but assertive schemes

that break the slavery syndrome. Her double-crossing the Commander and his Wife, her choice to hazard a sexual affair with Nick, and her association with the underground network, all point to the shift from being a helpless, passive victim to being a sly, subversive survivor. This impulse to survive transmits reassuring signs of hope and humanity in an otherwise chilling and depressing tale.

But this novel is not merely a picture of patriarchy, nor a series of comparisons and contrast between our present and our future. Margaret Atwood also explores how women may benefit from and therefore acquiesce in their own oppression. "As both a Canadian and a woman, [Margaret Atwood] protests any tendency toward easy passivity and naivety; she refuses to allow either Canadians or women to deny their complicity in the power structure that may subject them" (Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* 12). Women are the dominant victims in *Surfacing*, but men also become victims in *The Handmaid's Tale*, for they victimize themselves. The new world of *The Handmaid's Tale* is a woman's world, even though governed, seemingly, and policed by men. The real power in the household lies with the

regally blue-robed Wife, who was, in the old days, a celebrated TV personality, and is now festering with resentment at the world in which women are barred from any visible public role. She arranges and supervises the sex processes, in which the handmaid, desexed and dehumanized, is obliged to participate, while "[t]he Commander, too, is doing his duty" (Atwood, *HT* 89). It is also worth noticing that in such a seemingly male-dominated society as Gilead, all the male characters are weak. On the other hand, not all the females are sympathetic. In Gilead, women are also the victims of a right-wing feminism that endorses and supports patriarchy in return for certain privileges. The Aunts, a vicious elite of collaborators who conduct torture lessons, are among the church-state's staunchest supporters: these renegades turn into zealous converts, appropriating male values at the expense of their own values. Aunt Lydia, one of the female church-state's supporters, serves as the spokesperson of antifeminism. She urges the handmaids to renounce themselves and become non-persons: "'Modesty is invisibility,' said Aunt Lydia, 'Never forget it. To be seen--to be seen--is to be--her

voice trembled--penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable'" (Atwood, *HT* 28). In Gilead, there are quite a lot of women who are willing, ready and anxious to serve as Aunts, either because of a genuine belief in what they call "traditional values," or for the benefits they may thereby acquire. The novel clearly reminds the reader that, century after century, women have been complicitous in their own undoing.

For women writers like Margaret Atwood, writing can hardly be separated from social and cultural issues. What sparkles out of her novels is her political intent and feminist focus. Her novels are written out of a conviction of the value of women and the necessity for women to be critically conscious of their own roles in conventional social structures. Significantly, her "feminism" is a dynamic one.

In Margaret Atwood's description, "[t]he tone of *The Edible Woman* is lighthearted, but in the end it's more pessimistic than *Surfacing*. The difference between them is that *The Edible Woman* is a circle and *Surfacing* is a

spiral" (Sandler 14). In *Surfacing*, wilderness is not presented as an alternative to twentieth-century existence but rather as a place to be emerged from with strength renewed. After her nerve-wracking descent into the wilderness, the protagonist surfaces with a new affirmation of life. In that sense, the heroine of *Surfacing* accomplishes more than Marian in *The Edible Woman*, for, not only does she save her self, but she also creates a new life. In *Surfacing*, the heroine's liberation is real and complete. Her quest to wilderness and her journey to wholeness not only record her survival, but also lead her to salvation. She accepts her condition of subjection including her guilt as "natural" until her experiences in the wilderness enable her to see "the world with new eyes" (Blodgett, "On Surfacing" 83).

Obviously, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is double-edged. This novel may be read in terms of the catastrophic extreme of the imposition of a certain kind of female order: women are respected above all for their mothering function; women burn pornography; and women punish deviation from the norm. Like the sadistic Aunts in *The*

Handmaid's Tale, it is women who are oppressing other women, and it is women who are making other women non-persons. In the long history of human cruelty and pillage, women are actors as well as victims. If "[i]n the earlier phase of modern feminist writing on literature (Kale Millett, Germaine Greer, Mary Ellmann) the emphasis was often quite political in the sense that the writers were expressing angry feelings of injustice and were engaged in raising women's 'political' awareness of their oppression by men" (Selden 132), the reader of *The Handmaid's Tale* will see a different picture, in which women are not only ruled by men, but also oppressed by members of their own gender. If in Gilead the male dominance is visible everywhere, the invisible matriarchal power is also pervasive. If Gilead is designed by men, it is women who make it run, who keep it in line, just as Linda Hutcheon observes: "Gilead may be patriarchal in form, but in content much is matriarchal" (*Canadian Postmodern* 156). This novel suggests that women should, if only gradually and painfully, realize their own complicity in victimization and stop playing the game by others' rules.

Therefore, it is inappropriate to oversimplify Margaret Atwood's "feminism" in her *The Handmaid's Tale*, in which, the author, having realized that feminism today should be different from what it was yesterday and that women should not be simply characterized as a single group on the basis of a shared oppression, does not isolate herself by gender. In this way, her "feminism" in *The Handmaid's Tale* upholds and cherishes a man-woman axis; here, "feminism" functions inclusively rather than exclusively, poignantly rather than stridently, humanely rather than cynically, thus transcending the limitations of traditional feminism and providing such feminism with fresh enlightenment.

Narrative Strategies in *A Fairly Good Time* and *Obasan*

During the past two decades, feminist critics have approached writing by women with an "abiding commitment to discover what, if anything, makes women's writing different

from men's" and a tendency to feel that some significant differences do exist (Kolodny 78). French feminists claim that "men's" language is not simply inadequate because incomplete; rather, they argue that a patriarchal monopoly upon naming has left no voice whatever for women. Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Marguerite Duras, among others, ascribe a male gender to language and find the feminine at the level of the silent, the unconscious. In their view, discourse--linear, logical and theoretical--is masculine. When women speak, therefore, they cannot help but enter male-dominated discourse; speaking women are silent as women (Munich 239).

Similarly, in her discussion about the common tendencies among women writers which result from their exclusion from dominant discourse, King-Kok Cheung suggests that women's writing is "characterized by silence, both as a theme and as a method" (4). As a theme, according to Cheung, silence breaks many barriers to female expression, such as rejection by the literary establishment and imposed repression, while the art of silence covers various "strategies of reticence," including irony, hedging, coded

language, and muted plots, used by women writers to tell the forbidden and name the unspeakable (4). Obviously, the silencing of women is both a motif and method that run through both Gallant's *A Fairly Good Time* and Kogawa's *Obasan*, in which the authors articulate their protagonists' dilemma and plight by employing the "strategies of reticence."

Cheung further argues that many women writers distrust inherited language and decline to assert themselves as the voice of truth (4). The question whether language can represent feminine reality has divided American and French feminist theorists. As Margaret Homans describes it, there is an opposition between the view, on the one hand, that "experience is separable from language" and, on the other hand, that "language and experience are coextensive" (186). In an attempt to mediate between the two schools of thought, Homans argues that although "there is a specifically gender-based alienation from language that is characterized by the special ambiguity of women's simultaneous participation in and exclusion from a hegemonic group," several North American novelists, such as

Marilyn French, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Margaret Atwood, express this alienation by "representing their skepticism about representation" (205). Mavis Gallant and Joy Kogawa, as we will see, share similar skepticism in their works.

A Fairly Good Time

One of the most striking aspects of Gallant's novel is its emphasis on mother-daughter relationships, which are central to the development of the novel. Through the story of mother and daughter, characterized as "an uninterrupted dialogue of the deaf" (Gallant 45), the author suggests the misunderstanding and subsequent impossible communication between the mother and the daughter. The mother-daughter relationship in this novel is marked by emotional conflicts, and always it is the child who is vulnerable. In this novel, Shirley mourns her mother, her first husband Pete Higgins, and her second husband Philippe Perrigny. One critic defines this book as a "comedy of manners" (Besner 58), but Gallant uses this comic mode, I suggest, as a trope in the subtext of grief, one that counters the

sadness and loss in general.

A Fairly Good Time reveals gradually a past and present dominated by the image of the mother. Shirley, throughout the novel, is searching for facts, for enlightenment, for guidance, for assurance, for something to help her cross the desert in which she finds herself. She has written a distraught letter to her mother, and enclosed a sadly decomposed bluebell that she has picked. Her mother's cool and relentlessly unsympathetic response to this tear-stained letter opens the novel:

> Don't cry whilst writing letters. The person receiving the letter is apt to take it as a reproach. Undefined misery is no use to anyone. Be clear, or, better still, be silent. If you must tell the world about your personal affairs, give examples. Don't just sob in the pillows hoping someone will overhear. (Gallant 7)

Mrs. Norrington's letter includes an injunction to "[b]e clear, or, better still, be silent," and Shirley seems not to expect her mother to be capable of hearing her childish "cry" for attention, because "it would be contrary to her mother's character to hear it" (Blodgett, "The Letter" 185).

Throughout the novel, Shirley's musings are mental

conversations with her mother. She seems intent on clarifying misunderstandings and on constructing a satisfactory life story. But she has trouble. She repeatedly hears her mother's warnings and, when she writes to her mother, regresses to childhood, expecting the replies "to contain magical solutions" (Gallant 45), Shirley is always disappointed. She is unable to develop independent speech because her voice has been silenced by the mother. As a result, the daughter's voice becomes a "Silent Cry" (Gallant 22). In the opening letter, Mrs. Norrington responds to descriptions of her daughter's disintegrating marriage by announcing that "you can't 'understand' anyone without interfering with that person's privacy" (Gallant 7), and continues with a discussion of botany and her daughter's illegible handwriting. She refuses to hear her daughter's voice. As a consequence, Shirley remains "in the dark, screaming for a light or a drink of water--for attention from the bright staying-up world downstairs" (Gallant 249).

The genealogical "female line" (Gallant 40) between Shirley and her mother may exist, but a line of

communication is never successfully established. One morning after being abandoned by Philippe, Shirley experiences a hallucinatory vision of her parents, who also abandoned her through death and emotional neglect:

> A milder luminosity--of imagination this time--surrounded two middle-aged persons cycling steadily up an English hill.... The flower fragrance altered and resembled the scent of the aging lovers, of soap and of death.... Her parents, a lost pair, cycled off into the dark. They became smaller than a small living spider. What she required this morning was not a reminder of the past but a harmless substitute for it. (Gallant 9-10)

Regarding the actual letters changed between Shirley and her mother, Shirley thinks that they participated in "an uninterrupted dialogue of the deaf" (Gallant 45), and that her letters to her mother were screams for attention--just as her marriage was conducted in "a white silence" (Gallant 125). Shirley's bluebell letter is a request for confirmation of her values, and for comfort, because she was so insecure that she was troubled by a friend of her husband's calling him "poor Philippe" with regard to his marriage to Shirley: "'Poor Philippe.' ... Hervé said it, muttering to his wife. Something about your being married

to me. Poor Philippe, married to a wife who can't even pick bluebells!" (Gallant 249-50).

Significantly, just prior to hearing this comment, Shirley undergoes an epiphanic moment while picking bluebells, one of which she included in her letter to her mother as a sign, not as a request for identification. The bluebells represent life and love to Shirley. Their decay coincides with the final disintegration of her marriage: she kept them "in water three days alive and four days dead, and then you (Philippe) left me" (Gallant 250). Bluebells are also connected to Shirley's father: "She remembered how her elderly father had called her Belle, first because he disliked the name Shirley, then because Belle corresponded to a generation and a measure of female beauty" (Gallant 66). The flower is Shirley's real name, then, and evokes a sense of her real self; it also evokes scenes of beauty:

> Suddenly I saw a lake of blue. The blond girl clutched her golden heart and turned at the same moment. For a second only, the new, sweet fragrance that rose from the blue lake was a secret between us.... [T]his color was blue and the scent was real, and as I crouched down the better to see and touch I believed that you had

led me outside the city after all. (Gallant 249)

Neither Philippe nor his friends can understand Shirley's experience of pastoral-like bliss, and she cannot understand their values either. So she sends a bluebell to her mother inside a letter, hoping that "when she saw it she would know everything" (Gallant 249). But Shirley's emotional needs are neither met nor acknowledged by her mother, whose rationalistic epistemology makes no room for feelings.

Obviously, Gallant's narrative can assault our expectations of novel-reading, for the novel concerns "the writing of the unwritten" (Blodgett, "The Letter" 174), and "multiple readings [are] made possible by the ambiguity of coding" (Radner 423). In *A Fairly Good Time*, meaning must be extracted from the fragments of narrative, and the meaning of Shirley's relationship to her mother surfaces as a significant subtext. Shirley's imagined letter of explanation to Philippe is simultaneously an apostrophe to her now-deceased mother, and a gesture of self-disclosure and hoped-for understanding and love. Interspersed in the narrative are Shirley's unreliable memories, other people's

contradictory recollections, Mrs Norrington's letters, "The Silent Cry," and so on. "Yet none of these texts possesses or confers any interpretive authority" (Keefer 86). By undermining her own authority, the author seems to suggest that literature is of no more help than any other semiotic system.

Gallant's novel "focuses on a text that teaches one that Gallant must be *read* constantly, that is, decoded" (Blodgett, "Heresy and Other Arts" 8). The unsettling questions raised within this novel have overwhelmingly to do with language. Language, whether or not it is used to deceive, can convey only partial and subjective realities. It is seen as both problematic and potentially powerful in the development of alternatives to political, aesthetic, and intellectual traditions shaped by and for men. With Gallant's text we are not reading a book, but language itself. Languages used in Gallant's novel include Latin, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Spanish, as well as English, but incomprehensible accents and dialects are also heard. There is, as well, the language of Geneviève's novel, which Shirley depicts as a situation. Mrs.

Norrington's letter, written in response to Shirley's cry for help (though she disregards the cry entirely), is accidentally incorporated into the novel within the novel, fragments of the text written by Philippe's friend Geneviève (appropriately entitled *A Life Within Life*). Geneviève's novel is also a fictionalized cry, but it is a narcissistic parody of Shirley's; that her mother's letter of "good counsel" (Gallant 25) becomes part of this novel demonstrates its lack of value for grief-stricken Shirley. Gallant, it seems, is commenting on the rhetorical distortion that can prevent communication, self-expression, and consolation. Shirley realizes that "Geneviève's language was a situation in itself.... Language is Situation.... The Silent Cry" (Gallant 21-22), which suggests to the reader that if language is indeed situation, then Shirley's pitiable situation is rendered in a rhetoric of mourning, and her pursuit of happiness is a parallel performance to her narrative think-acts. Philippe becomes "part of a long story" (Gallant 137), one that is written to, for, and about him, but not only him. Shirley addresses Pete, her mother and Philippe in her elegiac

epistle, mostly imagined; her address to the absent is her silent cry, and, as a result, the past becomes "detached from her, and floated away like a balloon" (Gallant 251). Her ability to remember, to rewrite, and then to forget and to continue seeking happiness is the model of mourning that the reader is able to decipher, and learn, from the novel.

Obasan

Read as a women's text, Kogawa's *Obasan* yields fresh and forceful interpretations of mother-daughter relations. It presents Obasan's mother's absence as the problematic and the recovery of her lost identity as the means to the daughter's recovery of psychic health. In the process of "restoring the image of our mothers" and "embracing ... the maternal past" (Davidson xii), the novel deals with the daughter's effort to search for a lost mother as well as her attempt to find her own identity.

Obasan is "aunt" in Japanese, but it can also mean a "woman." The title of Kogawa's novel thus implicitly "acknowledges the connectedness of all women's lives--Naomi, her mother, her two aunts" (Fujita 41). Although

Obasan focuses on one family and on a specific period, it does have a universal quality that transcends personal and political tragedy. In her novel, Kogawa endows her characters with a timeless quality by calling them Obasan, Uncle, Father, Mother, and Grandma. Obasan, in particular, is compared not only with the old woman of many Japanese legends but with "every old woman in every hamlet in the world ... [who] stands as the true and rightful owner of the earth" (Kogawa 15-16).

Obasan begins with Naomi, a Japanese Canadian daughter, in search of a silenced, lost, and forgotten Japanese mother, and traces the daughter's reconstruction of this absent racial/maternal figure. As one critic notes:

> Kogawa's representation of the myth of separation from the mother perhaps approximates most closely to Jacques Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud via Saussure and structural linguistics.... In this version the crisis of separation from the mother's body coincides with entry into the symbolic order of language [which] presupposes the absence of the object it signifies.... Hence to enter into a world of relationships mediated by language is to enter into a world of endless yearning. (Magnusson 61-62)

"Situated on the crossroads of culture, Kogawa in *Obasan* shows a mixed attitude toward both language and

silence and reevaluates both in ways that undermines logocentrism" (Cheung 128). Particularly noticeable in Kogawa's novel *Obasan* is the inverse relation between spoken and written expression. The narrator in *Obasan* has trouble telling her life story. She is silent and silenced as well. Even as a child she had been without speech, as Aunt Emily reminds her: "You never spoke. You never smiled. You were so 'majime.' What a serious baby" (Kogawa 57). Yet her unspoken emotions break into print as poetry, autobiography, and novel. At the end of the novel, the poetic voice triumphs, celebrating the discovery/recovery of the "Young Mother of Nagasaki." Therefore, as Kristeva uses the term, we see the semiotic working in *Obasan* in the way that "repressed consciousness"--the silences that Naomi's narratives and Emily's documents emit--irrupts, disturbs, and disrupts the narrative (Kristeva, *Revolution* 68-71). Kristeva derives the semiotic from infants' pre-Oedipal fusion with their mothers, from the polymorphous bodily pleasures and rhythmic play of mother-infant communication, censored or harshly redirected by paternal (social) discourse. The semiotic sets the bodily rhythms of

poetry against the linear structures and codified representations of the symbolic. In Kogawa's novel, the semiotic is what the narrator appeals to in her reference to "speaking silence" in the epigraph, silence that bears eloquent testimony and speech that recreates the experience of such silence. The novel moves from muteness or aphasia (Obasan's character), to symbolic documentation (Emily's character), to a speaking voice (the narrator's poetic voice), thus reordering the other genres of writing and giving to the expression of racial memory the power of the semiotic.

Obasan navigates between the subject of the "I" and the language through which the subject is expressed and bases the thematics of recuperation of a lost mother in the thematics of recuperative powers of language itself. The subject of the novel can only be produced in the language of the novel. Naomi describes how, as a four-year-old, "Speech hides within me, watchful and afraid" (Kogawa 58), yet in moments of crisis her mother acts "[w]ithout a word and without alarm.... All the while she acts, there is calm efficiency in her face and she does not speak" (Kogawa 59).

Unfortunately, the umbilical cord between Naomi and her mother is soon severed not only by her mother's departure for Japan but by the sexual abuse Naomi suffers by Old Man Gower, a white neighbor, the racial implication of domination by the powerful majority being quite clear. She refuses to tell her mother of this abuse, thus causing a rift between them: "If I tell my mother about Mr. Gower, the alarm will send a tremor through our bodies and I will be torn from her. But the secret has already separated us. The secret is: I go to seek Old Man Gower in his hideaway" (Kogawa 64-65). Here the author attempts to link a particularly female condition of sexual silence to her more general concern with the condition of minority silence. The sense of Japanese propriety Naomi has been taught to uphold defies articulation of this abuse, so that the "mother tongue"--symbolized by her mother--fails her for the first time. Simultaneously, her confusion is compounded by her perverse attraction to the sex and race that abuses her, perhaps because that race controls, while denying through an injunction to silence, access to the very language that would allow her to utter her abuse. In either case,

uncommunicative silence leads to passivity and powerlessness, as Rough Lock Bill tells Naomi: "Can't read. Can't talk. What's the good of you eh?" (Kogawa 145). It appears that without the discursive power of language there can be no communication, no knowing, no identity, no self as a linguistically constituted subject, in a word, no agency. People must narrate themselves into history or be doomed to extinction.

If the mother-daughter relationship in Gallant's novel depends on letters, that relationship in Kogawa's story is constituted in silence, in the overflowing absence of the mother whose presence is acknowledged in the oppressive presence of silence as a central trope in the book. The first chapter opens on the scene of narrator/protagonist as mystified interrogator: "What is the matter, Uncle? ... why do we come here every year?" (Kogawa 3). After Uncle Isamu's death, Naomi returns to the house of her childhood, and through flashbacks and with the documents given to her by Aunt Emily finally goes on to decipher the riddle which has been embarrassing her. The central mystery of Naomi's family is: "Why did my mother not return? After all these

years, I find myself wondering, but with the dullness of expecting no response" (Kogawa 26).

The trope of silence, central to the text, develops in two forms of nonspeech: "There is a silence that cannot speak. There is a silence that will not speak" (Kogawa epigraph). The silence that cannot speak, we are informed later, refers to Obasan, Naomi's surrogate mother. But it is the maternal silence, the willed absence of speech, associated with Naomi's absent mother, against which the daughter must struggle most. The first silence arises from powerlessness, the second, more wilful, from denial. In the course of the novel the reader learns that the absent figure is the mother and that the silence of impotence and denial belong to her and those Japanese Canadians who for a generation kept the truth of the mother's death in the Nagasaki holocaust from her daughter: "'Please tell me about Mother,' I would say as a child to Obasan. I was consumed by the question. Devoured alive. But Obasan gave me no answers" (Kogawa 26). The subject/interrogator is herself "devoured" by the question of her lost mother. The surrogate mother's inability to rescue the child from the

"consuming" question prepares the reader for the discovery of the real mother's complicity in her daughter's mystifications.

This kind of meaningful silence, which Naomi believes to be typically Japanese, continues to haunt her into adulthood in the figure of Obasan. To Obasan, "[e]verything" has become "forgetfulness" (Kogawa 26). It is because the hidden memories are so painful and horrible that she refuses questions: "If it is not seen, it does not horrify. What is past recall is past pain. Questions from all these papers, questions referring to turbulence in the past, are an unnecessary upheaval..." (Kogawa 45). But Naomi knows "[t]he language of [Obasan's] grief is silence. She has learned it well, its idioms, its nuances. Over the years, silence within her small body has grown large and powerful" (Kogawa 14). Therefore, Obasan becomes the figure of resisting silence: "The greater my urgency to know, the thicker her silences have always been. No prodding will elicit clues" (Kogawa 45). She is also the figure of deliberately obfuscating silence, the silence whose obverse side of the protective shield is repression.

In King-Kok Cheung's view, "*Obasan* navigates between voice and voicelessness in both content and form. It invites the reader to listen at once to a voice for justice, embodied in Aunt Emily, and to an 'underground' language of love and forgiveness, exemplified by Obasan" (26). The narrator, however, seems not to privilege Aunt Emily as the affirmative answer to Obasan's negating silence. After all, through the decades of physical isolation, deprivation, and emotional hurt that the children experienced in the Canadian prairies, it is Obasan, rather than Emily, who has "mothered" them. Naomi offers instead a truncated memoir, that is, a microscopic worm's-eye view of her family's experience before, during, and after World War II. The reader is compelled to read between the lines, to make connections between dreams, fairy tales, and events, and between "fragments of memoirs." The text also incorporates excerpts from Emily's journals, which expose the linguistic and political abuses committed by the Canadian government that led to the internment of Japanese Canadians. However, Naomi does not adopt the sure voice of Emily and sees this aunt's belief

in documentation of fact as a limited and ineffectual mode: "Elsewhere, people like Aunt Emily clack away at their typewriters, spreading words like buckshot, aiming at the shadow in the sky.... But what good they do, I do not know.... They do not touch us where we are planted in Alberta" (Kogawa 189). Against Aunt Emily's energetic indignation, Naomi is "curiously numb" (Kogawa 34). Their interaction activates the dialogic quality of the fiction's sociopolitical materials. To Naomi, "[p]eople who talk about their victimization make me uncomfortable. It's as if they use their suffering as weapons or badges of some kind" (Kogawa 34). To Aunt Emily, however, "[a] lot of academic talk just immobilizes the oppressed and maintains oppressors in their positions of power" (Kogawa 35). If Naomi is the question to Obasan's silence, Emily is the fact to Naomi's imagination. The opposition between Obasan and Emily is that of silence and fact, but the narrative does not rest on such dualism. To heal herself, Naomi has to go beyond both modes of language, the language of recessive silence and of sociopolitical fact.

The daughter's new knowledge of her mother's death

enables her to imagine her mother's final sufferings and in imagination empowers her to possess her mother once again: "Young mother at Nagasaki, am I not also there?" (Kogawa 242). The adult Naomi, realizing the damage done by her mother's silence, describes the child/Naomi as suffering "a double wound. The child is forever unable to speak. The child forever fears to tell" (Kogawa 243). She is now fully aware of the destructive force of imposed silence: "Gentle Mother, we were lost together in our silences. Our wordlessness was our mutual destruction" (Kogawa 243). But as an adult, endowed with knowledge long kept secret from her and with enabling speech, the narrator/Naomi is able to "know" her mother's presence: "I am thinking that for a child there is no presence without flesh. But perhaps it is because I am no longer a child I can know your presence though you are not here" (Kogawa 243). Naomi's knowledge of her mother's presence is obtained through imagination, which is liberated through telling. The novel dramatizes the emergence of the daughter's imagination/speech, the "voice" from "that amniotic deep" (Kogawa epigraph), to reconcile contrary truths too painful and disjunctive to be

borne otherwise, and so to find her own "lifelong song" (Kogawa 246). What we hear finally is Naomi's own voice, regained at last through knowledge, flowing from the breaking of silence, and leading to an internal reconciliation with the absent mother. In rescuing/writing her maternal and racial past, the narrator/protagonist has rescued/written herself.

It is her grandmother's letter from Japan that allows Naomi to come to terms with her past, her sense of abandonment and separation. The letter describes Nasion, the beautiful Japanese woman rushing through the living hell of Nagasaki during the radiation, trying to protect her cousin's little daughter--a child who, we learn, happens to bear a striking resemblance to Naomi. Harking back to the allegorical methods of communal portrait, it is quite likely that Naomi recognizes herself both in the child and in the mother simultaneously. More importantly, it becomes clear that in spite of Mother's unspeakable suffering, she is still able to care for her cousin's child and to think of her own children. Not allowing Naomi and Stephen to know about her illness and her death, she wants

to spare them her own agony, putting considerations of their welfare before her own need for them, even in the most harrowing moments of her anguish.

The power of the mother's posthumous message is enormous. Before receiving this message Naomi sees herself rootless, wounded, amputated. Looking at her mother's faded photograph, she also sees her image as lifeless, distant, indifferent:

> The tree is a dead tree in the middle of the prairies. I sit on its roots still as a stone. In my dreams a small child sits with a wound.... A double wound. The child is forever unable to speak. I apply the thick bandage but nothing can soak up the seepage. I beg that the woundedness may be healed and that the limbs may learn to dance. But you stay in the black and white photograph, smiling your yasashi smile. (Kogawa 243)

Obsessed by her "double wound" Naomi withdraws into the hurt silence of woundedness. Benumbed, paralyzed by the past, she is unable to rejoice, to join in the celebratory dance of life. Naomi's later discovery that her mother was alive in Japan after the war, along with the fact that her mother had never attempted to communicate with her, reinforces her sense of abandonment to the point where the

mystery of the mother's fate becomes a persistent obsession. The letters from Japan enable her to relate to her mother as an adult in a loving but also critical way, and thus she can affirm her allegiance to the "tender heart" while moving beyond the "silence" this ideal imposes on her in its traditional form. As she imagines the mother as an adult, irreparably separated from her in a loving but mistaken silence, Naomi also experiences herself as an adult, freed from fixation on the ideal mother of childhood. The account of her mother's fate provided by the letters allows Naomi to interpret her failure to communicate as a loving silence rather than the silence of rejection. At the same time as Naomi gains a new sense of relation to her mother, however, she also places the mother's silence in a critical perspective and thus distinguishes her own consciousness from her mother's traditional values.

Although the letters convey a shocking, devastating message, they also bring about a healing change in Naomi: "The letters tonight are skeletons. Bones only. But the earth still stirs with dormant blooms. Love flows through

the roots of the trees by our graves" (Kogawa 243). "The climax of the novel recapitulates the destructive as well as the enabling aspects of silence" (Cheung 151). Having realized that the "living waters" nurture the roots of the trees at the graves, Naomi is finally able to see that the flow of love has power to overcome death: now she is getting ready to join the dance of life by completing the funerary dance she had been preoccupied with in the previous dreams. Consequently, the numbness of "woundedness" is over: the formerly "dead tree" has come alive, and so has the black and white photograph from her childhood. Addressing her mother with the fervor of a religious hymn, Naomi celebrates the power of regenerative love in her cosmos:

> You stand on a street corner in Vancouver in a straight silky dress and a light black coat.... Your leg is a tree trunk and I am branch, vine, butterfly. I am joined to your limbs by the right of birth; child of your flesh, leaf of your bough. (Kogawa 242-43)

Experiencing the flow of love over the roots leads Naomi to another affirmation: the organic unity or oneness of life. It is the affirmation of the oneness between the roots, the

trunk, the bough, and the branches that enables the formerly dead tree to regenerate. Such unity has overcome the stonelike silence of paralysis and woundedness, ready to respond to the "new world" in the formerly dead landscape.

"[S]kepticism about language and interrogation of consensus align Kogawa with many a woman writer" (Cheung 139). *Obasan* records the author's awareness of the difficulty of utterance, her skepticism about official records, her engagement with historiographic metafiction, and her ability to render the voiceless audible. In this novel Kogawa confronts the outrages committed against her people during World War II without raising her voice. "Instead, she resorts to elliptical devices such as juvenile perspective, fragmented memoirs and reveries, Western fairy tales and Japanese fables--devices that at once accentuate fictionality and proffer a 'truth' that runs deeper than the official records of war years spiced into the novel" (Cheung 129).

In both Gallant's *A Fairly Good Time* and Kogawa's

Obasan, the image of the mother dominates the narrative development. The structure of Gallant's novel is circular: the daughter reads the same letter from the mother at the beginning and at the end. This suggests "an enclosure, both desired and threatening, that revolves around the mother" (Irvine 248). The circularity of the novel implies suffocation, repetitions that paralyze rather than release. Compared with Gallant, Kogawa seems to present a richer and more complex frontier for narratological exploration. The epigraph of *Obasan* introduces the major figures and configurations in the novel: the figure of despair ("There is no reply"), the figure of death ("the sealed vault with its cold icon"), and the figure of hope ("unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech") (Kogawa epigraph). The first-person narrator/daughter, Naomi, gives voice to the silence. In the tracing of that silence, in the unriddling of mystery of the mother's absent discourse, a discourse of absence, the narrator/protagonist is "telling" and transforming silence to speech, absence to presence. The untold story of Japanese Canadian despair is made hopeful in the telling.

Although both *A Fairly Good Time* and *Obasan* imply that "[t]he loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy" (Rich 237), the endings of the two novels reveal their major difference in dealing with mother-daughter relationships. Obviously, *A Fairly Good Time* is dominated by a tone of sadness: the tone of mourning is pervasive throughout the novel because the daughter ultimately fails to reach her mother. As one critic suggests: "[Shirley's] problem is what to do with [language], as well as what to do with the texts of her mother, Philippe and the Maurels" (Blodgett, "The Letter" 178). In *Obasan*, the daughter's attempt to establish an association with her mother has also to be achieved through language. The novel records the daughter's plight: as a child she does not know and cannot tell, as a girl she questions but receives no answer, and as an adult she desists because she dreads knowing. Her problem is twofold: "There is a silence that cannot speak," and "[t]here is a silence that will not speak" (Kogawa epigraph). Fortunately, the daughter in Kogawa's story discovers the empowered voice for the breaking of silence in the very

"amniotic deep" of prefigurative, literal mother-child communication, so that her culminating epiphany of "water and stone dancing" brings together, and holds in harmoniously negotiated tension, the "stone" of silence and the "stream" of language that have run through the novel (Kogawa 247). By binding the "stone" of silence and the "stream" of language, the daughter has finally succeeded in embracing her mother: "Young Mother at Nagasaki, am I not also there?" (Kogawa 242). The last voice is certainly optimistic: initial separation ends by bringing the daughter ever closer to the mother.

Both Gallant and Kogawa reveal the strengths and limits of discursive power. They both implicitly or explicitly question the notion of a transparent language. Trinh T. Minh-ha says of effective storytelling in general:

> Truth ... is not attained here through logocentric certainties.... The boundaries of lie and truth are ... multiplied, reversed, and displaced without rendering meaningless either the notion of lie or that of truth. Directly questioned, the story is also indirectly unquestionable in its truthfulness. (13-14)

The observation applies equally to the works of Gallant and Kogawa, who recoil at "logocentric certainties."

"Certainly, words can liberate, but they can also distort and wound; and while silence may obliterate, it can also minister, soothe, and communicate" (Cheung 128). Both Gallant's and Kogawa's protagonists struggle against oppressive silencing. If Gallant's protagonist fails because of her situation in language, Kogawa's *Obasan* manifests how the ostensible "silence" to which women are relegated is capable of turning into a voice.

CHAPTER TWO

CHINESE WOMEN WRITERS

Love and Politics: Thematic Development in Contemporary Chinese Women's Writing

One of the major achievements of feminist criticism was the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic coherence, as well as artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal dimensions that dominate our cultures, be they Canadian or Chinese. Obviously, Chinese women writers had their own literary history.

As Chow Tse-tsung remarks, the May Fourth Movement in China was essentially "an intellectual revolution in the broad sense, intellectual because it was based on the assumption that intellectual changes were a prerequisite for such a task of modernization, and because it precipitated a mainly intellectual awakening and transformation, and because it was led by intellectuals"

(359). Significantly, the May Fourth period produced the first group of modern women writers. Rallied under the slogan of anti-feudalism, democracy, and liberation of the self, they fought with men in their common struggle against the dark force of feudalism. From the very outset, those women writers were concerned with issues special to women, such as freedom in love and marriage.

Among Chinese women writers of the 1920s, it was Ding Ling who first "expressed an awareness of the sexual inequality underlying patriarchal dominance" (Li Ziyun 300). She was keenly aware that women's problems were not totally identical to those of men. Her stories from the late 1920s and the early 1930s, such as "The Diary of Miss Sophie," *Wei Hu* (1930), and *Shanghai 1930* (1931), reflected her point of view. All the female protagonists in the three stories are found in similar spirits of liberation. After leaving their well-to-do families, they come to cities for better education and mingle freely with young men. Unfortunately, they find themselves in the same dilemma: whoever Ding Ling's heroines fall in love with, a socialist or libertine, their freedom in love gets them nowhere

nonetheless. The love of a libertine is certainly unreliable. Falling in love with a revolutionary, however, is equally disappointing. For, when there is any conflict between revolution and love, women are always the first who are required to sacrifice themselves for the revolutionary cause. The female heroines in both *Wei Hu* and *Shanghai 1930* are deserted for political reasons. Having suffered enough, Ding Ling's female protagonists come to realize that love alone is not their whole life. In this sense, Ding Ling might be said to be the first Chinese woman writer who expresses women's awakening consciousness. Two other points, however, should be mentioned with regard to Ding Ling's works. First, her works deal with the subject of sexual love, which other women writers of the May Fourth period were reluctant to approach. Secondly, her works imply that the New Democratic Movement in China was still dominated by men, and consequently, women remained at the mercy of their male partners both during and after the revolution.

Later developments justified Ding Ling's observation and concern. The 1930s witnessed women's consciousness and

their writing being stifled. Even Ding Ling herself gave up writing about issues concerning women exclusively. From the 1930s to 1978, over a span of almost fifty years, writing about women almost vanished from the literary scene, and only very few low moans of the female voice were heard. They were Xiao Hong (1911-1942) from the 1930s, Zhang Ailing (1920-1995) from the 1940s, and Zong Pu (b. 1928) from the 1950s.

As one critic points out, in most of Xiao Hong's works, "the theme of feminism is highly visible" (Goldblatt 120). In her *The Field of Life and Death* (Shengsi chang) (1934) and *Tales of Hulan River* (Hulan he zhuan) (1940), Xiao Hong portrays the abysmal conditions in which the peasants in northeast China found themselves before and during the Japanese invasion. Writing from a female point of view, Xiao Hong expresses her particular concern about the fate of women, who, because of male cruelty and indifference, "bore an extra burden of suffering over and above their male partners" (Li Ziyun 302). As Zito and Barlow point out, "[b]y virtue of their bodiliness, the fact that they menstruate, bear babies, can be raped, and

die of sexual disease, these women can turn against a masculinist national discourse" (14).

At the height of her literary career, Zhang Ailing produced such stunning works as *The Golden Cangue* (Jinsuo ji) (1943) and *Love in a Fallen City* (Qingcheng zhi lian) (1943). In the opinion of C. T. Hsia, *The Golden Cangue* is "the greatest novelette in the history of Chinese literature" and "undeniably the creation of a highly distinctive and individual talent" (398). The story focuses on the gradual fall of its young heroine from innocence to madness. In the story the heroine finds herself trapped in a hopeless marriage to a man half-dead. Her married life is reduced to a barren existence devoid of love, understanding and caring. The disillusionment and subsequent resignation to her fate drive her to an insanity of sadistic and destructive tendency.

Many of Zhang Ailing's works are stories of the well-to-do daughters and wives of degenerate merchant and bureaucrat families. These women commit adultery out of boredom, or use all their wiles to land a big catch. They muster all their wits and wiles to play on men's need in

order to secure their status in the family (Li Ziyun 303). Their mentality is distorted and humanity stifled. Significantly, Zhang Ailing's pen touches the inner lives of her heroines, unveiling all the humiliations brought upon them as sexual and reproductive tools and the hate and resentment dominating them in their desperate struggle for survival. Zhang Ailing's heroines are fully aware of their dilemma. They keenly realize that they are only the playthings of men, or their reproductive tools. Never before did any other Chinese writer offer such clear-eyed treatments of the topics as Zhang Ailing in her incisive and vivid description of the fate of women.

"The Red Beans" (Hongdou) written in 1957 by Zong Pu was in fact the last moan of the female voice in the fifty years from the 1930s to 1978. The story is a vivid description of a female university student, who sacrificed love for the sake of revolution. When Zong Pu's heroine later happened to see the red beans, the symbol of her love, she could not help revealing some of the pain she felt. But that kind of individual emotion expressed in her work was enough to incur accusations and attacks upon the

author in the Antirightist Campaign. After that, virtually no female voices were heard from the Chinese literary scene.

Such a phenomenon is understandable because the women's movement in China has always been subordinate to social and political movements since the May Fourth. The impetus for promoting women's rights that the May Fourth heritage provided has repeatedly been overwhelmed by other political priorities. In the 1930s, the Anti-Japanese War became the most dominant concern. Accordingly, the issue of national survival preceded all others. Women's energies were channeled into a nationalist war. Under such circumstances, the subordinate position of literature to politics was emphasized to an even greater degree. Even Ding Ling was censured for her feminist views. In her 1942's article "Thoughts on March 8th" (Sanba jie you gan) Ding Ling proclaimed that sexism ran high within the Communist Party. She was brought back to the Party line: War effort first, women's rights second. Consequently, such emphasis silenced women's voices initiated by Ding Ling. This situation was aggravated after 1949. The Chinese

Communist Party has long claimed that women have constituted important and reliable allies in building a peasant revolution and then in constructing socialism. The government of Communist China made provisions for women's political, economic, and legal rights. However, Chinese women acquired their rights at the expense of their own femininity. On the literary scene, the policy that literature must serve the interest of the workers, peasants, and soldiers was translated into the fact that only people of those classes could be heroes in literary works. Based on the Marxist premise of the class nature of literature and art, it was taken for granted that literature was only an ideological tool for class struggle and for the promotion of communism. This state of affairs was pushed to an extreme during the Cultural Revolution, when women became mere vessels of class ideology. In the so-called eight model operas produced in those years, women were all sexually neutralized revolutionary militants. As a matter of fact, Chinese women are one of the most oppressed sectors of Chinese society. Their tragedy lies in the fact that "they get short shift on both ends: whenever there is

a political crisis, they stop being women; when the crisis is over and the culture rebuilds itself, they resume their more traditional roles as wives and mothers as part of the concerted effort to restore order" (Rey Chow 88).

Things began to change in 1978, which saw art and literature, repressed for so long, enjoy a revival. From the end of the 1970s Chinese women writers began to raise questions regarding women's situation and to express their concerns. Obviously, they explored more widely and probed more deeply than those writers of the May Fourth period. They came to realize that although the law ensured their economic independence, patriarchy still dominated their whole life and they were still no more than the "second sex." They were keenly aware that despite constitutional guarantees and official pronouncements of the Communist Party, equality between the sexes had yet to be achieved. In search of self-realization, they faced sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and the persecution of women under the old ethical code. Confronting such obstructions and frustrations, women writers initiated a general attack against patriarchy,

describing the revolt of women against such repression of human nature and appealing for their fundamental rights. It was against this background that women's discourse, silenced for almost fifty years since the 1930s, began to revive.

As Li Xiaojiang says, "from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, [Chinese] women's literature centers on the subject of women's awakening" (118). Standing at the forefront were Zhang Kangkang (b. 1950), Zhang Xinxin, and Zhang Jie. Implicit in their works are such questions as: Do women have the right to love? Is it fair to sacrifice women's rights for the sake of a seemingly happy family? Are women still discriminated against in their pursuit of careers? Zhang Kangkang's "The Right to Love" (Ai de quanli) (1979) and Zhang Jie's "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" brought up the issue that love belongs to people of all classes, not the bourgeoisie alone. These two stories shook the literary world, for Chinese women writers, silenced for so long, finally stood up and appealed for their fundamental rights.

At the same time, Zhang Xinxin asked whether it was proper for women to lose their femininity. In her short

story "How Did I Miss You?" (Wo zai nar cuoguo le ni?) (1980) Zhang Xinxin's heroine is a ticket seller on a public bus. On the packed bus she has to fight and shout her way through the crowd. Wrapped in a shapeless blue cotton padded jacket and wearing a pair of high, tight-fitting pigskin boots covered with mud, she seems to have lost almost all the traces of femininity (Zhang Xinxin, "How Did I Miss You?" 92). The young woman is also a talented writer whose play has been accepted for production by an amateur dramatic group. She falls in love with the director of the group. The director is impressed by her talent but repelled by her aggressiveness and her rough masculine manner. Feeling frustrated and disappointed, she wishes that she "had all along been gentle, refined, and soft-spoken" (Zhang Xinxin, "How Did I Miss You?" 119). Describing her heroine's feelings of frustration and hurt, the writer asks: "Now who made her what she is in the first place? Is it not men themselves, who make all the rules? Why did they 'mold' her into such a shape and then reject her for being what they have made of her" (Li Ziyun 308)? There and then, Zhang Xinxin seizes the essence of the

issue. Although the official policy of the male-dominated society upheld equality between the sexes, such equality only served the policies of the government, which encouraged women to meet male standards and undertake hard manual labor. However, men did not want any "masculinized" women. Women were required by convention to be "womanly," that is, to support their husbands in adversity and look after them at all times. When women tried to gain their own independence and succeeded in their chosen careers, they were neither encouraged nor supported. On the contrary, they could only expect obstructions. Under the circumstances, many women found it hard to choose between career and family. Similarly, Zhang Xinxin's *On the Same Horizon* (Zai tongyi dipingxian shang) (1981) and *The Dream of Our Generation* (Women zhege nianji de meng) (1982) address such issues as women's forced masculinization, the awakening of women's consciousness, and women's frustration and pain in their choice between career and family.

Before we start to look into contemporary Chinese women's works, it must be pointed out that while it is possible to analyze Canadian women's writing in light of

Western feminist literary theories, in particular French feminist theory, which investigates the ways that the "feminine" has been defined, represented, or repressed in the symbolic systems of language, it could be far-fetched to approach Chinese women's literary works with exactly the same frame of reference. Different methods and strategies are required for the observation and exploration of the works produced by Chinese women writers.

"Love Must Not Be Forgotten"

Among contemporary Chinese women writers, Zhang Jie deserves credit as a pioneer who highlights women's problems as early as 1979, when most Chinese writers were just beginning to use the tolerance of the authorities by gingerly breaking out of their confines and treating such forbidden topics relating the "dark aspects" of society and "bourgeois sentiment." Consequently, some of her stories have been most controversial. One of her earliest stories, "Love Must Not Be Forgotten," caused quite a furor when it was published in 1979. It justifies love outside marriage, albeit of the most platonic kind, implying that the only

moral marriages are those based on love. It also suggests that a girl should remain single unless she can find a man she loves and respects. Because of this, critics accused Zhang Jie of undermining social morality, insomuch as most Chinese take it for granted that everyone must marry.

In her works, Zhang Jie describes the problems that women face in the family, and in the society as well. Her heroines are usually ten or even twenty years older than Zhang Xinxin's and therefore have had richer experience. Consequently, they have suffered much more in their lives; and confronting the male-dominated society, Zhang Jie's heroines seem to be more aggressive in challenging cultural and social traditions than Zhang Xinxin's protagonists.

Zhang Jie's stories reveal the emotional sufferings of her female protagonists, concentrating on the pain of loveless marriages and the importance of real love in life. The theme of Zhang Jie's "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" is straightforward: by problematizing and challenging the traditional conception of love, the narrator of Zhang Jie's short story "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" strongly believes that the pursuit of genuine love is worth any sacrifice. In

this story, "a daughter finds guidance and meaning for her life as she reflects across generations and think of her mother's divorce and unrequited love" (Prazniak 276). By recalling conversations with her mother and reading passages from her mother's diary, the daughter has obtained access to her mother's experience, which provides her with some perspective and insight into her own decision whether to accept a proposal of marriage or not. After serious consideration, she decides that she should wait for genuine love instead of simply fulfilling the traditional role of women. On behalf of love-pursuing women, she appeals to the public:

> Let us wait patiently for our counterparts. Even waiting in vain is better than loveless marriage. To live single is not a fearful disaster. I believe it may be a sign of a step forward in culture, education and the quality of life. (Zhang Jie, "Love" 13)

This decision is significant because in China a woman unmarried at thirty would arouse suspicion among people. Zhang Jie's heroine remains single, in defiance of aspersions inevitably cast upon her desirability. Here, Zhang Jie is certainly not arguing against marriage, but

she does see it as only one variety of love that should not eliminate alternative considerations. She does not believe that one should marry without love and thus pervert one's life and sense of self just to appear to be happily united into a family. Through the mouth of her protagonist, Zhang Jie articulates her point that women must mature beyond motherhood and wifedom as part of their essential journey to self-consciousness--not necessarily by abandoning the roles of mother and wife but by choosing them under conditions that support their self-confidence and awareness as full social beings.

Zhang Jie's "'Love Must Not Be Forgotten' is a story of unfulfilled love" (Hu 40). In this story, the author encourages people to make a clear distinction between love and marriage, a distinction previously often blurred. Zhang Jie justifies her point by describing the abnormal behavior of the narrator's mother, who remained married while being in love with someone else. Apparently, for more than twenty years she read and reread *The Collected Works of Chekhov*, simply because it was a present from her "lover." Although a former committed Communist, she has, yet, to place her

hope on her afterlife because any extramarital affair would damage her political career. Her dying words reveal her dilemma and despair:

> I am a materialist, yet I wish there were a Heaven. For then, I know, I would find you there waiting for me. I am going there to join you, to be together for eternity. We need never be parted again or keep a distance for fear of spoiling someone else's life. Wait for me, dearest, I am coming--. (Zhang Jie, "Love" 12).

Zhang Jie's "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" implies the difficulty in balancing the quest for love with the demand of society that love lead to marriage. The question of the relationship between love and marriage is quickly asserted when the narrator asks her suitor why he loves her. His response is that she is "good" (Zhang Jie, "Love" 2). She appreciates his honesty, but at the same time she wonders if they can fulfil their duties to each other in a marriage based upon respect for goodness and gratitude for honesty. The narrator's question about love and marriage reminds her of her mother's story. Before her marriage, her mother had fallen in love with a high-ranking cadre, and apparently he had felt the same love for her. Unfortunately, their love was never fulfilled. The old cadre is married. Years before

a man had saved his life at the expense of his own, leaving a wife and daughter. The cadre married the daughter "out of a sense of duty, of gratitude" (Zhang Jie, "Love" 6). Regretting her own marriage which is solely based on convenience and not love, the mother warns the narrator:

> When you are young, you don't always know what you're looking for, what you need, and people may talk you into getting married. As you grow older and more experienced you find out your true needs. By then, though, you've done many foolish things for which you could kick yourself. You'd give anything to be able to make a fresh start and live more wisely. (Zhang Jie, "Love" 4)

After all, the mother's story is brought to light because the daughter herself finds herself in the dilemma of deciding whether or not she should marry her friend Qiao Lin, whom she finds physically handsome but intellectually inadequate. She is reminded by her mother: "Shanshan, if you aren't sure of what you want, don't rush into marriage--better live on your own!" (Zhang Jie, "Love" 3).

This story rightly reflects the dilemma facing Chinese women who are at a loss about how to love. The ending of "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" reveals a combination of frustration and resignation on the part of the narrator.

> Each time I read that diary "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" I cannot hold back my tears. I often weep bitterly, as if I myself experienced their ill-fated love. If not a tragedy it was too laughable. No matter how beautiful or moving I find it, I have no wish to follow suit! (Zhang Jie, "Love" 13)

Zhang Jie's writing illuminates a contradiction in women's literature based upon the inability of women to match feeling with reality. Such a contradiction is usually found in the conflict between the pursuit of love and the doubts concerning the validity of marriage, and between the power of eros and the lack of sexual equality between men and women.

"Emerald"

In her "Emerald" (Zumu lǜ) (1984), Zhang Jie moves one step closer to the contrast between love and marriage, on the one hand, and social responsibility, on the other. There are three characters in the story, two females and one male. The two women have both fallen for the same man. Beihe is the wife of Zuo Wei, but Zeng Linger was the first of his lovers. All three had been in college together and now are working together on a supermicro-computer project.

The conflict between eros and equality is seen in the conversation between the two women about the difficulty of working together. Beihe, realizing that her husband needs help in the project, is the one who recommends Linger for the job. As Linger does not understand her motive, Beihe tells her: "You don't understand him, Linger. Although you were head over heels in love, what you loved was simply one side of him. I took over the whole of him" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 54). The "one side" to which Beihe refers is the erotic side. When they were young, Linger and Zuo Wei were lovers, and the night before they parted to work in separate sections of the country, "Linger became a woman" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 31). From that union, a son is born, but Zuo Wei is never aware of that.

Zuo Wei is incapable of love, but he needs both women. He needed Linger when he was younger because she protected him from criticism during the Cultural Revolution and later helped him through college. Now he needs Beihe because she knows how to seize opportunities. In fact, "people had hinted that without a wife in her position, he would never have got anywhere" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 23).

To Beihe, however, the need for love is a weakness. She is described as having "sufficient good sense and strength to resist all temptation and safeguard herself" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 23). However, the good judgment becomes futile when love is concerned, for she "couldn't help loving Zuo Wei. No doubt everybody had some similar weakness" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 23).

While Beihe is a vital part of the success of her husband, Zeng Linger is the character who is victimized by the growing expectation that woman will be the social equal of man. As a result, she has to resist her personal desires, her emotional needs. All her energy and time have to be transformed into efforts to strive for success as a professional woman. Seeing Linger as a success, Beihe says to her: "You are already above it all, because you are no longer in love. As soon as you stop loving, you have won" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 57). To Beihe's surprise, Linger replies: "Life gives us a huge variety of roles to choose from. You should cherish yours. Perhaps what I represent is just some kind of unambitious attitude" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 58). Unfortunately, neither woman finds

fulfilment, either in love or in work.

Zhang Jie's story indicates that although Linger finds herself in a fate which throws her into a conflict between eros and sexual equality, she is not a tragic character. Even though she has discovered that she cannot match feeling with sexual expectation, she "gently sighed, rested both hands on the window-sill and breathed in the sea air..." (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 62).

Zhang Jie's "Emerald" repeats the theme in her "Love Must Not Be Forgotten": the pursuit of genuine love is worth any sacrifice. At the end of the story, Linger is about to tell the newly-wed woman, whose husband has just drowned in the sea: "[S]he would tell her that her love has already been reciprocated, that she had already experienced the most profound love, the kind that is reciprocated, and that even one day of that love can be enough. So many people lived their whole lives without ever experiencing that" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 62). By realizing that, Zhang Jie's heroine seems to have gained a rebirth and transcended to "another plane of human experience" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 62).

Obviously, the relationship between man and woman is a particularly important element in a woman's life. In a male-oriented society such a relationship dominates the life of women much more than that of men. Criticism of marriage, since it deals with the usual man-woman relationship, is therefore a classical concern of the feminist movement. First, criticism of marriage aims at particular marriages, and husbands are inevitably involved. Secondly, criticism of marriage is directed toward an institution. The two aspects cannot be separated because dissatisfaction with a particular marriage can always contain scepticism toward the institution as such.

"Love trilogy"

In the 1980s Wang Anyi emerged as one of the most prolific and promising novelists in mainland China. Her consistent effort is impressive: she has published numerous novels, collections of short stories and novellas ever since she first tried her hand at this genre in 1980. Significantly, although Wang Anyi explores different subject matters in her writing, it is those stories

centering on amorous and sexual adventures that best demonstrate her keen powers of observation, insight, and literary skills. More significantly, although Wang Anyi insists that she is not a feminist writer, her works certainly convey a feminist consciousness. She focuses her attention on women themselves, that is, women's sexual consciousness, their sexual awakening, and their sexual experience. Different from such male writers as Zhang Xianliang, whose female characters are always submissive, sacrificing themselves for the interest of their male partners and seldom complaining about their humiliating fate, the heroines in Wang Anyi's works are a new type of women: They know how to assert their own rights, in particular their right to sexual love. In Wang Anyi's works, women are no longer men's submissive sexual objects. On the contrary, they usually take the initiative and play the active role.

Wang Anyi's "love trilogy" (san lian), dubbed "sexual fiction" (xing'ai xiaoshuo) by a number of critics, includes *Love on a Barren Mountain* (Huangshan zhi lian) (1986), *Love in a Small Town* (Xiaocheng zhi lian) (1986),

and *Brocade Valley* (Jinxiugu zhi lian) (1987). "In these works, Wang Anyi explores with keen insight the male-female relationship in the content of contemporary Chinese society" (Leung 178). During the anti-bourgeois liberalization campaign of 1987 in China, though Wang Anyi was not directly criticized, some accusing fingers pointed to "san lian," because her love trilogy deals with sexuality and extramarital affairs, which were still a taboo subject at the time of its publication.

Wang Anyi claims that her works "express love through sex" (Leung 186). Her trilogy portrays the sexual awakening of young women. Although the author presents her heroines in different circumstances, one common theme runs through the descriptions of all these young heroines: once aroused, they are insatiable. All her characters, educated or ignorant, derive unutterable ecstasy from sexual experience, whether carried out under the veil of romantic love, or thrust forward in crude and naked, even perverted form (Li Ziyun 315). Wang Anyi's trilogy attracted a lot of attention in mainland China, because it was the first time that a woman writer brought the bedroom into view and

presented sex as an instinctive drive born with women, and because it was the first time that a woman writer chose for her protagonists women who were no longer a passive tool for male satisfaction, but actually the active party in sexual love with their male partners. Wang Anyi's works suggest that like men, women are entitled to pursue their ultimate satisfaction and happiness in sex, and like men, women have their right to sexual satisfaction and happiness. Equally noticeable in her works are "the author's keen powers of observation, her interpretation of the roles of men and women in love, her evocative lyrical prose and her sense of humor" (Hung ix-x).

Wang Anyi's *Love on a Barren Mountain,* the first novella of her love trilogy, is roughly divided into two parts. The first two chapters center on how the heroine and hero respectively come of age, while the third and fourth chapters focus on how their extramarital affairs start and develop. Before Wang Anyi's hero and heroine meet each other, they are both married. The hero is a cellist, shy, introverted, sentimental, and emotionally dependent upon women. Even before he gets married:

> he was shy with women, and since he could not overcome his shyness he was always alone, though at heart he preferred women to men. He needed a strong woman, one who could help him overcome his shyness, one on whom he could depend, one who could provide not only a soft, comforting embrace but a pair of strong arms. (Wang Anyi, *Love on a Barren Mountain* 49)

In contrast, the heroine, beautiful and fashionable, is good at flirting with men and sees that as great fun. Before she is married, she has numerous boyfriends and knows how to remain in control of the male-female relationship:

> As for going to bed with men, she had her own ideas about this and no one needed to worry about her. Her "boyfriends" ... all had a clear idea about it too. When they were with her, they all wanted to do it, but none of them could really do it. She was as slippery as a fish and as alert as a nymph. Whatever their sweet talk, there was no way they could cross the threshold. In her heart she knew that was the most precious thing a woman had, it was a woman's dignity, her whole worth. (Wang Anyi, *Love on a Barren Mountain* 54-55)

In a sense, their different personalities prepare them for the adulterous affair.

It happens that Wang Anyi's heroine and hero come to work in the same cultural center in a provincial town, and it is there that their romantic encounter takes place.

Significantly, in Wang Anyi's stories, "men play supportive and subordinate roles." And "[w]hen a heroine falls for a man, she does so either because she can protect him or because she can seduce him" (Ngai 369). As usual, the heroine takes the initiative:

> "I'm not bad-looking, am I?" she asked all of a sudden.
>
> He mumbled, not knowing what to say.
>
> She laughed so hard that her whole body shook. After she stopped laughing she asked, "This sweater I'm knitting, is it pretty?"
>
> She spread out her half-done sweater and held it up in front of her face, telling him to look. He had to turn around and look.
>
> The sunlight was behind her, illuminating the sweater, and her features could be seen very clearly. The sweater looked thick just because the pattern was in lacy stitches. It was in fact rather flimsy. But still it acted as a barrier and he calmed down and looked at her fine features behind it. She, being on the other side of the sweater, could see him very clearly. She finally saw the look in his eyes and, assured of victory, she was overjoyed. He suddenly discovered that the eyes behind the sweater were shining mysteriously. Flustered, he looked away and mumbled.
>
> "Very pretty."
>
> She put down the sweater and continued knitting.
>
> Neither of them spoke for quite a while. After a period of silence she suddenly asked, "Which do you mean is pretty, me or the sweater?"
>
> He knew that she was faking naïvety to embarrass him, and this made him angry. And yet she was really lovely, so he replied, "You're

> both pretty." After he said that he blushed and his heart jumped; he almost wanted to run away. (Wang Anyi, *Love on a Barren Mountain* 119-20)

Finally and inevitably, as is often the case in Wang Anyi's stories, they are dominated by sexual passion. Their desires rise steadily, and finally they are completely out of control. After dinner they try to find an excuse to go out and meet in some remote place. They roll under the bushes and embrace passionately. Their adultery brings them the joy of love, the excitement of adventure, the elation of tragedy, and the great happiness of rebellion: "They are shameless, out of control, and care nothing for consequences; in their search for sexual satisfaction, everything is swept away. Only pleasure prevails" (Li Ziyun 315).

Love in a Small Town, the second of the trilogy, centers on carnal desires and "lays bare the blinding power of sexual passion over a young man and a girl, who eventually become the victims of their passions" (Ngai 281). Whereas *Love on a Barren Mountain* concentrates on the process of seduction, *Love in a Small Town* focuses on the courting couple's physical attraction. In this story sex is

presented as an instinctive drive, uncontrollable because it provides the ultimate happiness. The story begins with two adolescent dancers, the female twelve and the male sixteen, who are in the same ballet group and working hard to improve their skills. Although neither of them is a principal dancer, they both practise hard. The next four years see their daily contact, which in fact prepares them for their future sexual adventure. Then the heroine turns sixteen and the hero twenty. Although she is inexperienced in sexual matters, he is already mature. Gradually he begins to lose control of himself in their daily physical contact:

> She still asks him to help her turn her legs and loosen her joints, just as she used to when she was young....
>
> She lies before him, her legs bent in front of her chest, and slowly parts them to either side. He cannot control the turmoil in his heart. He is panting loudly, almost suffocating with the effort to suppress himself. Sweat pours down from his head, his face, his shoulders, his back and from the inside of his thighs.... When he helps her to loosen up, an evil thought takes hold of him; he wants to hurt her, so he pushes hard. She screams; a scream like the siren of a ferry. It frightens him; his hands weaken, letting go of her knees. (Wang Anyi, *Love in a Small Town* 13)

Slowly but inevitably, the man and the woman are drawn

to each other and set out for their adulterous journey. Like their counterparts in *Love on a Barren Mountain*, they find ecstasy in their sexual adventure:

> Every day at nightfall the two of them disappear, leaving the dark studio behind. Then as the polar star sinks in the west and morning mist whitens the pitch black night, they appear in the courtyard, one after the other, like ghosts, their hair tousled, their clothes untidy and their eyes shining in the dark. Treading on the wet stone slabs they steal black into their dormitories. It has been a night of bliss. After the excitement of petting and rubbing against each other's body they feel blissfully exhausted and proudly languid. Their lover's touch seems to have seeped into their pores and mixed with their blood, which flows along their veins singing a happy tune. This feeling of blissfulness almost makes them sigh. They would like to tell everyone, to make everyone envious. (Wang Anyi, *Love in a Small Town* 41)

Explicit in their sexual experience is their insatiable carnal desire. They are totally dominated by their sexual instincts: they begin to have sex, and the more they have sex, the more insatiable they become:

> It is as though a river, long frozen, has melted, and spring waters pour down-stream. Nobody understands why all of a sudden they look blooming.
>
> .....
>
> Like enemies they ignore each other as they brush past one another, their eyes looking straight ahead, but in their hearts they exchange

> mysterious glances and cunning smiles, feeling ever so proud of themselves. When no one else is around, they are inseparable, as if glued together. They don't really know what love is; they only know that they cannot suppress their need for each other. (Wang Anyi, *Love in a Small Town* 39-41)

As their sexual desire cannot be fulfilled at the time when such love affairs are still taboo, their sadistic instincts overwhelm them. They vent their uncontrollable yearnings and unfulfilled passions through mutual infliction of pain. They fight. And they fight hard:

> It is a fight rarely seen in the history of the troupe. He tramples her underfoot so hard that she is almost suffocated. Yet somehow she manages to crawl up from the ground and pounces on him. He falls to the ground, and she picks up a stone and hits him right on the head. There is no sound, and then blood streams down onto the stone slabs. (Wang Anyi, *Love in a Small Town* 69)

From that day on they become sworn enemies. A mere brush will be disastrous:

> The exchange of a few words will see them throwing themselves on one another, and however hard the others try they cannot separate them; they are like two copulating dogs.... They just cannot stand being apart. If they do not see each other for a single day they start looking for each other as if they are under a spell. And when they lay eyes on each other they rush forward and start hitting and kicking. And so an unforeseen battle commences. (Wang Anyi, *Love in a Small*

Town 69-70)

Understandably, this kind of relationship can only be short-lived because sexual instinct alone can never lead to ever-lasting love. Their passion burns out quickly, and a sense of guilt and shame begins to afflict them. The woman even attempts to commit suicide. But when she finds that she is pregnant, she decides to live on. The birth and rearing of her two children bring her eventual salvation as the story draws to its close:

> "Mama!" the children shout.
>
> "Yes," she answers. This is a sound which can wake her from the deepest sleep.
>
> "Mama!' the children shout again.
>
> "Yes," she answers.
>
> "Mama!' the children shout repeatedly, and their voices reverberate in the empty studio. It is like a voice from the heaven. She feels enveloped in a sense of sacred solemnity, so she too becomes solemn. (Wang Anyi, *Love in a Small Town* 103-104)

Commenting on the third novella of Wang Anyi's love trilogy, Eva Hung says: "in [*Brocade Valley*] the physical existence of the hero becomes irrelevant, Wang Anyi has perhaps achieved the ultimate in her women-centered love stories" (xii). The heroine in *Brocade Valley* finds herself in two different worlds, one of which is her married life--

routine, real, and boring--, and the other, her extramarital experience--adventurous, romantic, and exciting.

The story begins on an Autumn morning:

> She got up and sat on the edge of the bed, drowsy and lethargic; her mouth was sour, a yawn rose in her throat, her eyes blurred with tears.
>
> .....
>
> [Her husband] lay on the bed, face up, arms and legs sprawled wide, occupying the half of the bed which she had just relinquished. The wind blew in the bamboo blind, shifting the morning sunlight; his body lay in darkness one minute and bathed in light the next. Her mind also shifted from dark to bright and dark again, as if it were on a swing going up and down, until she felt slightly nauseous.
>
> .....
>
> She sat there calmly, relaxed and at ease, watching him without seeming to. Then at last he was awake; the light of sense and reason dawned in his eyes. Seeing her seated on the edge of the bed, he asked about breakfast. She answered briefly, pointedly, and got to her feet. (Wang Anyi, *Brocade Valley* 1-2)

Implicit in this passage is the heroine's dissatisfaction with the routine of marriage. A sense of tedium dominates the narrative.

Different from the two poorly educated young lovers in her *Love in a Small Town*, Wang Anyi's heroine in *Brocade Valley* is an editor and her romance is much more

"delicate." This time, the romantic encounter is situated at Mount Lu, where the heroine, during her business trip, falls for a writer. Mount Lu, whose face is shrouded in clouds, symbolizes the unfathomable depths of self in classical Chinese poetry and serves in the story as a metaphoric locus for the heroine's pursuit of self (Liu 50). In this story, the mountain offers the heroine an opportunity to realize her desire: to be a different person from that petulant housewife at home. "In order to impress and attract her lover, Wang Anyi's heroine has to personify feminine perfection" (Ngai 348). The heroine's romance helps her create a different persona. Compared with the one who occupies herself with a boring job of editing second-rate novels and endless household chores back at home, Wang Anyi's heroine seems to have changed into another person, who is beautiful and seductive. Different from the one who nags all day at home, Mount Lu unveils another side of her personality, which is serene and composed.

Unlike *Love on a Barren Mountain* and *Love in a Small Town*, the romance in the last novella of Wang Anyi's trilogy does not fall into physical adultery. Returning

home, the heroine even doubts if anything has ever really happened. Her efforts to recall the details of the romantic encounter get nowhere. Her adventure seems to be something she has fabricated because it is too illusory and lacking in substance. However, it does not matter whether the romance has really been materialized or not. After all, this is the heroine's fabrication of a love, which provides her with a chance to prove her value.

Many of Wang Anyi's works tend to address problems that women face in life, and particularly in love. Implicit in her works is her insight:

> Women are born to suffer and to be lonely, patient and humble. Glory always belongs to men; magnanimity is a male attribute. Would you believe if I told you that through their endurance of loneliness and hardships, women may have long surpassed men in terms of human nature? (Wang Anyi, Afterword, *Love on a Barren Mountain*)

In all the three love stories written by Wang Anyi, "the heroine is the dominant partner as well as the center of the story" (McDougall and Chen vi). Obviously, Wang Anyi's female protagonists are no longer traditional victims. They know how to assert their rights, and they fight for their rights at all costs. It must be pointed

out, however, that Wang Anyi's works are also the products of favorable political conditions in which people are allowed to write with a relatively free hand. It must also be pointed out that Wang Anyi does not limit herself solely to feminine issues and many of her works transcend gender limits and concern themselves with broader issues, such as the human condition, human nature, and the loneliness of modern human beings.

The Ark

The concern about the fate of women runs through Zhang Jie's "Love Must Not Be Forgotten," "Emerald," and *The Ark* (Fangzhou) (1982)--the last in particular. *The Ark* focuses on three women who live together--two are divorced and one is separated from her husband. Many of the problems they encounter are ones commonly faced by divorced women. Their experiences, though fictitious, attests to the difficulties of being a divorced woman in China.

The Ark was another story of Zhang Jie's that shocked a number of people, and was even more controversial than "Love Must Not Be Forgotten." *The Ark* is indeed an

ambitious attempt in a feminist perspective, dealing with the suffering and alienation of divorced intellectual women in contemporary China. It centers on a brief period in the lives of three such women and emphasizes how miserable and hard it is to have been born a woman, as the epigraph and the last sentence of the novella state: "You are especially unlucky because you are a woman."

Jinghua, Liu Quan and Liang Qian are divorced or separated women in their forties who went to school together in the idealistic early post-revolution period. University, marriage and the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution sent them in different directions, but they are reunited on their return to live and work in Beijing. Their situations have led them to construct an alternative life together, sharing an apartment and struggling against social disapproval and emotional unfulfillment, both of which they find preferable to the unhappiness of their former married relationships.

Jinghua, an educated youth, spent many years in the northeast. Because of the need to support her father, a former rightist who was deprived of his income during the

Cultural Revolution, she had to marry a forestry worker. Because of the continuing financial pressure, she subsequently underwent an abortion, thus permanently alienating her husband, who announced that he no longer wanted her as a wife because she had denied him a child. By the time the story begins, Jinghua, now a Marxist literary critic, is already divorced, and one of her essays is being seriously criticized by the authorities for its political "incorrectness."

Liu Quan, an interpreter, in contrast, initially married of her free will. But such a choice proved disastrous. Soon she learned that her husband was interested only in the acquisition of material possessions and that, in addition, he was unbearably sexually insistent. Feeling demeaned and violated by his nightly insatiable demands, she wished every evening that she could hold onto the sun to prevent it from setting, but if she resisted his advances he would grab her roughly and shout: "Are you my wife or not?" (Zhang Jie, *The Ark* 166). Obviously, he did not regard her as his wife at all, only as something he could use for sex. Like Jinghua, Liu Quan

also signed her divorce agreement. But that does not end her tragedy. Pursued by a leader in her office who constantly harasses her, she has to apply for a transfer. However, approval must be granted by the same leader, who seizes this opportunity to further harass her. She is now more vulnerable because of the circumstances under which she has divorced her husband.

Liang Qian, the third of Zhang Jie's heroines and a film director, married out of love and out of admiration for the musical talent of her husband, an accomplished violinist, but as his fame grew, his sensitivity and aesthetic concerns were displaced by the ambition to increase his power in political life. No longer a dedicated, disciplined musician, he spends his time smoking, drinking, and having affairs. Because he refuses to relinquish the personal advantage afforded by Liang Qian's father's high official position, he agrees to a permanent separation, but not a divorce. Moreover, he is totally unsympathetic to her efforts to succeed as a film director, accusing her of ignoring her role as a wife and complaining that she has sacrificed too much of her womanly

appeal for her work.

At home and at work, Zhang Jie's characters are oppressed because they are women. Each rejects the role conventionally assigned to her sex: Jinghua is childless, Liu Quan refuses to remain a sexual object, and Liang Qian neglects her feminine appearance. At the same time, each is vulnerable at work: Jinghua is the target of degrading rumors, Liu Quan is always pursued by her boss, and Liang Qian is discredited by her husband's damaging allegations about her film.

The Ark reminds the reader of the stigmatization imposed upon divorced women. One of the most humiliating aspects of being a divorced woman is that others may regard her as sexually available. At one point in the story, for example, a female neighbor came to their apartment. When Jinghua answered the door, the neighbor asked:

> "Has our cat by any chance come over to your place?"
>
> "No," Jinghua replied quickly. "Why should it come here?"
>
> "Oh dear, my Comrade Zao (Jinghua). Don't you know? Your [female] cat has been playing court to all six of our toms." And [the neighbor] tittered sarcastically. (Zhang Jie, *The Ark* 122)

Zhang Jie treats sexual abuse of women as the widespread and inevitable consequence of the deep-rooted historical and traditional belief that men possess the right to dominate women and to use force to coerce compliance with their wishes. The significance of her treatment lies in the fact that she does not hesitate to criticize, indirectly as least, a political system which claims to protect women against any inequality in their social, political, and economic life. The three women are presented as individuals fighting for survival in a sea of hostility and alienation. Old ties have broken down, idealism has vanished and there is no sense any more of mutual help on a community level. The ark of the title, the image of a boat battered by hostile seas to illustrate the dire situation in which the three women find themselves, suggests a struggle for survival. Zhang Jie's own solution is to keep on fighting, not to give up. In order to survive they have to form new ties and new forms of cooperation.

Zhang Jie's novella is a well-ordered, densely-packed, sustained narrative that makes a point and argues it effectively. The novella, however, does not end neatly,

with all the problems solved. In Zhang Jie's story, ambiguity pervades, and the women's problems remain unresolved. The ending of the story seems to be more despairing than hopeful, and life seems to continue almost unchanged. There are, however, signs of hope in the final scene when the three women, and Mengmeng, Liu Quan's young son, are together for the first time. The emphasis here is on the need for solidarity with all women, and there is a suggestion that salvation might lie with the next generation.

Patriarchy recognizes no geographical or cultural boundaries. As one critic points out:

> *The Ark* is a harsh tirade against the humiliations and obstacles faced by all women but by divorced urban intellectual Chinese women in particular.... Couched in strong, deliberately straightforward language and images which sometimes seem over-exaggerated, the story promises no swift amelioration but instead presents a forceful argument to prove that statement. (Bailey 98)

That statement is clear and concise: It is hard to be a woman. Exploring the unequal conflict between men and women in contemporary China, Zhang Jie, in *The Ark*, shows through repeated examples that the socialist system does not

guarantee women real emancipation, but instead imposes upon them an empty liberation in a world dominated by men. My conclusion is therefore different from Roxann Prazniak's assertion that "Zhang [Jie] ... retains socialism as an ideal and envisions women's emancipation within that larger social context" (273).

The Challenge to Socialist Realism in Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin's Writing

Li Ziyun, a feminist critic in China, describing the most recent development in Chinese literature, emphasized the fact that "[w]e are witnessing a second upsurge in the literary output of female writers in mainland China. This is marked not only by the extraordinary number and quality of women's works but by the vanguard role some of those works have played in Chinese literature. I am referring to their disregard for existing literary conventions, their exploration of new horizons in terms of theme and experience, and their experimentation with form" (Liu 34).

In order to tell women's lives in new ways, contemporary Chinese women writers like Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin endeavour to develop fresh thematic as well as formal resources for narrative interpretation.

The discussion of narrative strategies in Chinese literary works often concerns the term "realism," which predicates for the author an autonomous platform of objective observation and operates on its readers through catharsis, by arousing and then purging the unpleasant emotions of pity and terror from their minds. In contrast, traditional Chinese literary theory was dominated by a notion of literature as the spontaneous expression of the author's emotional life. Even when a place for observation was identified in literary composition, it was understood as only a stage in a process of ethical cultivation. At both the creative and receptive ends, then, realism introduces a fundamentally new model of aesthetic experience. However, realism has always been a topic of dispute in China. Problems and concerns associated with realism have been central in Chinese literary criticism since the May Fourth movement. Anderson points out that in

China, "realism came to carry the profoundest burden of hope for cultural transformation. And realism generated the largest body of literature in the years that followed [the May Fourth movement]" (3). Realism was embraced during the May Fourth period as one major element of the larger crusade to modernize China and regenerate its culture. In the late 1920s, political transformations led the discussion to converge on problems of the term realism itself. At that time, many of China's young writers and critics were interested in socialism, and the "realism" they identified was defined by the concerns of Marxism. The debate about realism centered on the contrast between voluntaristic elements and the deterministic side of realism. The former allows the writer significant influence in the social arena through cultural action that takes place in the superstructure, while the latter insists on an absolute relationship between the economic base and the superstructure, placing the writer in the position of a passive reflector of social change. In other words, the former focuses on writers' responsibility for identifying evidence of progressive social evolution, while the latter

views writers as objective social scientists, or detached and impartial observers. The former aspect of realism--its ability to reflect progressive social evolution--was also central to literary debates in Yan'an and to the literary thought of Mao Zedong, who believed that the task of awakening the masses should be placed among the top priorities of literary creation while passive reflection of social reality should not be the attitude adopted by any progressive writer. As Leo Ou-Fan Lee points out:

> Mao's "Yan'an Talks" is concerned more with the *what* and *why* than the *how* of literary writing: the correct attitude of the writer, the need for a popular language comprehensible to the masses, the prerequisite of "extolling" and not "exposing" revolutionary reality, and so forth. (162)

In this belief, Mao reaffirmed the importance of the ability of the superstructure to influence society, and separated transformation in the superstructure from an absolute link with the economic base, thus strengthening the voluntaristic approach to realism. This tendency is exhibited in the term *socialist realism* (as opposed to *critical realism*), and in the post-1949 years *revolutionary realism*, which requires the writer to express the

"evolution" of society. This basically voluntaristic definition of realism in post-1949 China has caused it to become associated with a particular political framework--that of the Chinese Communist Party. The Party claims that at all times China is indeed experiencing progressive social evolution.

"The Modernists ... believe themselves to be 'living in the temporal belatedness of a cultural aftermath'" (Davis 13). In many ways the situation in post-Mao China mirrors Europe after World War I. A sense of spiritual dissolution and crisis becomes a salient element of the society, while the decay of political orthodoxy and the increasing pressure to industrialize and make projections about the future catch millions of Chinese, especially the so-called "lost generation," in a dilemma between self and society. In the early 1980s, there was a nation-wide discussion about Western modernism and its influence on Chinese literature. One Chinese critic summarizes three major points of controversy emerging from this discussion: 1. Chinese Modernism is a necessary corollary to modernization; 2. authority and tradition are obstacles to

the liberation of thought and the reform of literature; 3. any artistic innovation necessitates a clash with and in some cases the destruction of pre-existing aesthetic tastes and artistic habits (He 49-54).

Some Chinese critics were vehemently opposed to what they perceived as Western modernist influence. They equated modernist narrative techniques with "bourgeois or petit-bourgeois individualism and anti-rational anarchism" (Cheng 3). And they perceived modernism as a reflection of the "hopelessness, emptiness, and desperation" of the Western capitalist system (Cheng 8). It seems that their views are based on Lukács' belief that since the content of modernism is reactionary, modernist form is equally unacceptable.

In support of modernism, Anderson argues that "Realism served an indisputable purpose in China as long as it was being used to question the underlying principles of traditional Chinese culture, but once this goal was accomplished, its status became increasingly problematic" (74). Proponents of different kinds of modernism viewed those who opposed modernism and advocated realism as conservative; and realism was identified as a conservative

literary and philosophical ideology. Their views may have had considerable influence on the works of Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin, the latter in particular.

Judith Kegan Gardiner points out that "[f]eminist literary historians are now defining the contribution of women to modernism" (355). Modernism is generally perceived as a kind of realism appropriate to the Western situation--the kind of writing that uses reflection of reality much in the same way as realism. The difference is that the object of the reflection is a chaotic, pessimistic, disintegrating world, not the progressive world that must, by definition, be shown as evolving if a writer uses a realist ideology. In subject matter, modernism emphasizes the non-rational, the psychological, and the self-referential; in technique, fractured narrative, stream-of-consciousness, "obscure" symbolism, idioglossia, and so forth. As one critic points out, "[t]he 'call for form' ... is a distinctly modernist gesture" (Davis 13).

Significantly, Kristeva "considers that modernist poetry actually prefigures a social revolution which in the distant future will come about when society has evolved a

more complex form" (Selden 80). As a means of undermining the symbolic order, the "language" of the semiotic is fluid and plural, and opposed to all fixed, transcendental significations. Kristeva regards "this poetic revolution as closely linked with political revolution in general and feminist liberation in particular: the feminist movement must invent a 'form of anarchism' which will correspond to the 'discourse of the avant-garde'" (Selden 144). Anarchism is necessarily the philosophical and political position taken by a feminism determined to end the dominance of phallogocentrism.

As a matter of fact, the concept of "modernism" is relatively new in China. In the late 1920s and 1930s, some poets like Li Jinfa and Dai Wangshu used modernist poetic techniques developed by Baudelaire and others in Europe, but a complex set of conditions, including the rise of Marxism, the redefinition of the intellectual, and the continuing wartime conditions, prevented modernism from becoming widespread and popular. Therefore, in creating modernism in China, writers like Zhang Xinxin writing in the early 1980s had few Chinese models to turn to, but

could look at the Western modernist works of the early twentieth century that employed the techniques of stream of consciousness, plotlessness or lack of narrative progression, lack of didactic social message, emphasis on individual psychology, and internal monologue.

"Love Must Not Be Forgotten"

Zhang Jie's writing claims immediate social relevance as well as some novelty in literary technique. Her story "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" emphasizes the relation of writing, gender, and authorship (Liu 41). The narrative of the story takes place between the narrator, Shanshan, and her late mother, Zhong Yu, whose writing she attempts to decipher. The first-person narrator in this story is the daughter who reads her mother's diary after her death and tells about the latter's love to a married man, who also loves her mother deeply, but has to marry another woman whose father saved his life in a moment of danger. The whole story is filled with Zhong Yu's heart-rending love for the man she hardly sees and "never once even clasped hand" with (Zhang Jie, "Love" 12). Her love is personified

in a set of *Selected Stories of Chekhov* he gives her as a present because Chekhov is one of her favorite authors. She reads or just gazes at the books every day. When she is dying, she asks to have those books cremated with her. In fact, she lives in her dream of him, and the only way she pours out her love to him is writing her diary in which she talks with him.

In Zhang Jie's story, the daughter, a first-person narrator, attempts to interpret the incoherent words contained in a notebook that the mother left behind and successfully subverts the discourse of a literary tradition (Chekhov and *Romeo and Juliet*) to which her mother has subscribed as novelist, heroine, and woman. "By reconstructing the mother's life in writing, the narrator is able to rewrite the story of a woman's destiny so that independence rather than romantic attachment to a man will become her priority" (Liu 43). And, "[b]y asserting her difference and exercising independent authorship, the narrator achieves autonomy (Liu 43). In this story, a first-person female voice has provided fertile resources for a renewed interpretation of women's lives.

Significantly, the insistent presence of the first-person narrator in Zhang Jie's "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" blurs the transparency of the language of the story and problematizes the discourse on romantic tragedy. As Joanne S. Frye puts it, "the narrating 'I' finds additional ways, both thematic and structural, to avoid narrative entrapment, new ways to subvert the power of old stories" (8).

On the Same Horizon

Zhang Xinxin is modernist not only in spirit but also in technique, taking political and social risks (she was a prime target of the campaign against "spiritual pollution" in China from 1983 to 1984), experimenting restlessly with different media and literary forms, and constantly searching for new cultural frontiers to traverse.

Zhang Xinxin's novella *On the Same Horizon* is a tale about a young woman disillusioned by her marriage, focusing on a personal relationship and its fate. In this story, the author gives both protagonists their say in their own authentic voices in separate segments of the text. Both

characters freely vent their spite against each other in a rationally ordered stream of reflections and memories. The story tries to overcome the stylistic constraints of the realistic mode through devices such as dreams or symbols to form this Chinese variant of "stream of consciousness."

The novella starts with the contradiction in the heroine's life between family and career. This is actually the first and surface framework of Zhang Xinxin's structure. Underneath the surface is a complex structure of the heroine's inner self fighting against her frailty, exploring her deepest feelings, and longing for the impossible or unattainable--her husband's understanding of her. The story is made up of small incidents and minute details mingled with psychological insertions to reveal the female protagonist's illusion and disillusion, determination and indecision, fulfilment and failure.

On the Same Horizon moves like a movie with the scenes shifting back and forth from "she" to "he" as the story, or rather "she," develops, from past to present, from actual happenings to psychological yearnings. Chapter Three is quite a typical one. This chapter is not long, but the

range of time and space covered in it is tremendous, and its significance strikes deep. It is a rainy day. "She" is talking. The first scene is in a local district office where she and he come to apply for a divorce. This is also the place where they came to register for marriage. Quite naturally the scene moves back to a year and a half before: "One never intends to recall these insignificant moments, but now they suddenly turned up from the depths of my memory. And they were so clear" (Zhang Xinxin, *On the Same Horizon* 183). Then, back to the present, in front of the reader is a scene of a Chinese official and his bureaucracy:

> The official examined my household registration, work ID, and letter of introduction one by one. He was as meticulous and thorough as a customs officer. Then he raised his head and said with a complacent smile:
>
> "According to the regulations laid down, you really ought to start procedures in your own district."
>
> "But, but it was here that I was issued the marriage certificate!"
>
> "Don't be so anxious. Divorce is different, and it's not that simple. You have to go through reconciliation procedures, and investigation, and then put your name on the waiting list, as there are quite a few people trying to get a divorce these days. If you cannot get anywhere at your own district office, we will look at your case

again." (Zhang Xinxin, *On the Same Horizon* 184) The implications are definitely clear--the red tape, the rigid restrictions, the difficulty of getting a divorce, the helplessness of the applicants.... However, the heroine's mind often wanders elsewhere while listening to the bureaucrat. She cannot help recalling the quarrel in which the word divorce first blurts out in a sudden fit of fury. Then the word is repeated every time they quarrel. But the time comes when she starts to consider seriously the implications of the word, and finally she is actually sitting and waiting to be granted the release from the marriage bond. The scenes move back and forth in the heroine's mind as well as in the reader's eyes.

Then there is a sudden and significant change in the time and setting. When the heroine and the hero come out of the office, it is still raining. With this sentence, "[t]he rain battered down on my rainhat as though there were nothing between heaven and earth but the sound of the rain" (Zhang Xinxin, *On the Same Horizon* 184), the reader is suddenly brought to another downpour in a totally different setting--the village where she works and where "he" first

enters her life. There is no conjunction linking the two incidents, nor is there any word of hinting the change of the scene. It is just like film montage: in a flash, the audience find themselves in a place where "the bamboo huts dotted along the dam, the mimosa trees spread out like umbrellas over the uncultivated ground, the clusters of waving phoenix-tail bamboo, the mountain ranges weaving round us on all sides ..." (Zhang Xinxin, *On the Same Horizon* 184). Another friend of hers takes her to his shed to shelter her from the downpour. Her thirst for art and culture in such a remote and desolate place makes her feel close to his paintings and then to the painter himself. Then suddenly, the scene shifts back again to the present--in her room. He has already moved out. A party is going on celebrating her acceptance into college. The room is filled with laughter and blessings. Most of her friends believe that she will have a promising future. Yet, in a moment, we read her mind: "... there was not much joy in my heart after all; instead it was hollow and empty" (Zhang Xinxin, *On the Same Horizon* 186). This chapter is built up by the shifting of the scenes: the past and present, the

revelation of the heroine's deeper feeling, and the confrontation of a new challenge at the end of the chapter. And this is only a small structure within the bigger structure of the whole story.

There are altogether eleven chapters in Zhang Xinxin's story. For the first nine chapters "she" and "he" alternate by chapters with the exception of Chapter Six in which "he" talks first and then"she" comes in. Chapter Ten follows the structure of Chapter Six; this time "she" talks first, and then "he." In the last chapter "she" and "he" are waiting for the official in charge of handling divorce cases to come back from his lunch break so that they can get the divorce papers. She and he talk alternately with very short intervals between them as the author tries to bring out the discrepancies between what they say to each other and what they think about each other. The shorter and shorter intervals of alternation also produce a faster tempo, which implies that they both seem still to have a lot of feeling left for each other. However, neither of them has the chance to reveal their true emotions, and the eventual separation seems inevitable.

Zhang Xinxin is clearly influenced by modern Western fiction and attempts to incorporate various new techniques into her writing. Obviously, her arrangement of structure is different from Zhang Jie. By varying her structure, giving no names to her main characters, and employing a movie-like style and tempo, Zhang Xinxin seeks to "free her fiction from the topicality so characteristic of post-Liberation and 'post-Mao' literature" (Wakeman and Yue 202).

The Dream of Our Generation

Zhang Xinxin's second novella *The Dream of Our Generation* is a psychological portrait of a woman of the author's own generation. As the author puts it:

> In this novella I tried to express the following theme in art and ideology: In real life, after being pounded repeatedly, I realized that once the beliefs and ideals of the people in our generation were shorn of their flowery language, many people have become engulfed in trivial and ordinary lives, becoming more and more "practical." This "practical feeling" has specific causes historically. But the decline of idealism gives rise to a series of problems which are worth thinking about. Therefore I attempted to probe into the psychological changes in an ordinary young working woman. ("Biyao de huida"

76)

Like Zhang Xinxin and her peers, the heroine is sent to the countryside to be "reeducated." For quite a few years she has to work on an ill-fated irrigation project in Inner Mongolia. Finally she returns to the city, finds a job, and takes up her expected roles as a wife and mother.

Carolyn Wakeman and Yue Daiyun notice that "[a]gain in this second novella Zhang Xinxin has abandoned conventional narrative structure to express the yearnings and frustrations of an anonymous woman" (203). In this story, through the use of a variety of cultural intertexts, our attention is variously directed toward Pinocchio and Thumbelina, Bjorn Borg and John McEnroe, the oracles of fortune-tellers and the texts of their trade, the slogans of the Maoist era, the jargon of office politics, and the Japanese heroes of martial arts. Added to this cultivation of "chaos" is the technique of disjunction, particularly through the interior monologue of "dreams."

The first chapter of the story begins with a fairy tale:

> Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was a

> poor little girl, whose only companion was a small boat with red sails. Once, a stranger passing by saw the small boat with red sails in her hand, and said to her: "When you grow up, a handsome prince in a boat with red sails will come for you." Rumour of the prophesy spread like the wind; of course, no one believed it. Only the lonely little girl continued to remember it. She gazed blankly into the sky, glorious illusions one after the other drifting in and out with the clouds. One day, when the sun had just risen, a splendid boat with red sails really did come for her from the great, wide ocean.... (Zhang Xinxin, *The Dream of Our Generation* 7)

Obviously, Zhang Xinxin's fairy tales provide an alternative to social realism. In her story, "[a]rt comes to represent an alternative to life, illusion an antidote, and occasionally a supplement, to life" (Wake and Yue 203).

The constant shift from reality to dream, from off-stage to on-stage, from the outer world to the inner self, is an important part of the formation of Zhang Xinxin's structure. In *The Dream of Our Generation*, the protagonist moves in and out of her dream of a childhood fantasy. She once meets a boy while camping, and he is transformed into a fairy prince; she has sought him ever since in both her day and night dreams. At last she seems to identify him, and he turns out to be a very vulgar and mean person. The

childhood fantasy remains a dream. In this fashion Zhang Xinxin departs from earlier, orthodox socialist literature, or *revolutionary realism*.

Significantly, Zhang Xinxin's works reflect her radical efforts to open a new horizon beyond that of realism. In narrative style, Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin are noticeably different. Zhang Jie's narrative style is characterized by simplicity and directness of the language, which is fully in keeping with Dorrit Cohn's suggestion that writers "who do not wish to take risks with the readability of their works" will avoid stylistic experimentation in rendering consciousness (89). In contrast, Zhang Xinxin abandons linear narrative and consistent point of view, and her "narrative structure becomes explicitly and daringly experimental" (Wakeman and Yue 201). In her *On the Same Horizon*, alternating first-person monologues convey the simultaneity of the estranged lovers' feelings of anger, frustration, resentment, and loss. Here, "[c]ritical realism, an effective vehicle for exposing society's failings, seemed ill-suited to the

representation of those inner needs so long subordinated to the public good" (Wakeman and Yue 201). The narrative style of Zhang Xinxin's stories is complex and "plotless" by Chinese standards of the times--full of flashbacks, shifting points of view, and "stream-of-consciousness." More prominent to the reader, though, was the sense of estrangement and lack of clear bearings it seemed to communicate. As a matter of fact, Zhang Xinxin's style could be understood within a well-defined category of "young people's writing," as a work of youth alienation, indeed feminist youth alienation. Zhang Xinxin's modernist "disruption" technique links her quite concretely to the international modernist movement.

CHAPTER THREE

COMMON EFFORTS:

THE PURSUIT OF SELF IDENTITY

IN CANADIAN AND CHINESE WOMEN'S WORKS

The preceding chapters have attempted to pinpoint the different thematic concerns and narrative strategies of Canadian and Chinese women's works. It is certainly necessary to point out these different emphases. Yet it is more important to bring our attention to the common efforts shared by writers of both countries when they insist that women, be they Canadian or Chinese, have the right to assert their selfhood. The investigation of female identity represented in women's literary works may provide a key to understanding the special qualities of contemporary writing by women. Twentieth-century women writers express the experience of their own identity in what and how they write. Often they communicate a consciousness of their identity through paradoxes of sameness and difference--from other women, from men, and from social injunctions for what

women should be, including those inscribed in the literary canon.

Literary criticism is one of the places where feminism confronts patriarchal values. Elaine Showalter emphasizes that "it is important to see the female literary tradition in ... relation to the wider evolution of women's self-awareness and to the ways in which any minority group finds its direction of self-expression relative to a dominant society" (11). Showalter's helpful definition of women's literature as a subculture with its own patterns of relationship, themes, images and concerns provides a starting-place from which feminist criticism may counteract the ahistorical tendency of much work in the field. She points out that "each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex" (Showalter 11-12). Rather than concentrating on a special vision inherently belonging to women, Showalter studies their contributions to literature as part of "the female subculture." Accordingly, she replaces traditional literary periods with three stages in women's literary

history, stages which record their growth in consciousness as feminine, feminist, and female. These correspond to phases of other literary subcultures:

> First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. (Showalter 13)

Showalter is "intentionally looking, not at an innate sexual attitude, but at the ways in which the self-awareness of woman writer has translated itself into a literary form in a specific place and time-span" (Showalter 12). For Elaine Showalter, the existence of separate literary traditions is less a matter of biological differences than the result of differences in the socialization process of the still-evolving relationship between women writers and their society. More significantly, Elaine Showalter sees "self-discovery," "a search for identity," as the main theme of women's literature since 1920 (13). This assertion is largely true

with the contemporary writings of both Canadian and Chinese women writers.

Search for Identity in Canadian Women's Writing: Achievements and Ambivalence

Lives of Girls and Women

In Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, the heroine Del gradually obtains her selfhood partly by realizing the difference between herself and others. As the first-person narrator and a superb observer of the world around her, Del exults in the details of the country life on the Flats Road and of the city life in Jubulee. She lives in a world of conflicting values. When she is a child, she feels quite secure in her family structure. On the other hand, she is aware that there is another world outside somewhere, in which "people could go down in quicksand, be vanquished by ghosts or terrible ordinary cities; luck and wickedness were gigantic and unpredictable; nothing was deserved, anything might happen; defeats were met with crazy

satisfaction" (Munro, *Lives* 26).

In order to understand Munro's heroine better, the reader may have to look into the way she is defined. Realizing that "[o]nce you make that mistake, of being--distracted, over a man, your life will never be your own" (Munro, *Lives* 173), Del's mother warns her that a change is coming to the lives of girls and women. Such a change will bring them something more than their connection with men. They will be able to have lives of their own; they will be able to have self-respect. However, Del is not satisfied; she desires more. She is aware that her mother's advice is basically the same as the other advice given to girls, which invariably assumes that the female is "damageable, that a certain amount of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection" are required (Munro, *Lives* 173-74). Women are encouraged to judge their inner selves through their external physical appearance and to equate the two. At the same time, they are urged to produce socially approved images of themselves by manipulating their dress, speech, and behavior.

Without any hesitation, Del decides to do what the men

do--"to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud" (Munro, *Lives* 174). Her relationship with Garnet French proves her determination. In a dramatic struggle in the river, she is amazed to find that Garnet should think that he could force her to be baptized, that he could even imagine that he had "real power" over her (Munro, *Lives* 234). For the power she granted him has been "in play" (Munro, *Lives* 234). She refuses to be baptized, even at the price of losing Garnet. She will never give up her freedom to any person or any institution. For Munro's heroine, fighting for freedom is "fighting for life" (Munro, *Lives* 235). Once away from Garnet, Del finds that "[t]rees, houses, fences, streets, came back to [her], in their own sober and familiar shapes" and "the world resumes its own, its natural and callous importance" (Munro, *Lives* 236). This section of the novel, "Baptizing," demonstrates Del's sexual initiation and her sharpest conflict with the cultural expectations of women. Garnet's challenge to her makes her realize that she has to choose between her own autonomous aspirations and the opposition: baptism,

marriage, and children.

The end of the Munro's story reads like a spiral. Finally, as E.D. Blodgett remarks, "the narrator distinguishes herself from her childhood, passes judgment upon it, and in the word 'applause' reminds us that the novel, while initially dominated by a man, is about the lives of girls and women" (*Alice Munro* 40). The adult Del sees herself, "at last without fantasies, or self-deception, cut off from the mistakes and confusion of the past, grave and simple, carrying a small suitcase, getting on a bus, like girls in movies leaving home, convents, lovers" to embark on her new life (Munro, *Lives* 238). The adult Del seems fully cognizant of the errors in thought and perception she made as a child and adolescent. Del will begin her "real life." However, this process of defining oneself will continue as she may find that the real life is also unreliable.

Who Do You Think You Are?

"By turning women's lives into narrative, Munro denies women the secrecy that has traditionally kept them

mysterious and articulates the problems they encounter as desiring subjects" (Irvine 95). Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* explores a crisis in the development of a female protagonist, who is presented as independent, powerful, and able to act out certain desires, although her independence is not always reliable, as her power is weakened from time to time, and her ability sometimes limited. The novel is about self-realization, as is suggested by its title. It explores the tensions between the orderly and the uncontrollable in the modern world, particularly as they affect women. In this novel, by shedding light on the dark side of women's existence, Munro looks into her heroine's childhood, adolescence and womanhood, centering on her journey to search for her identity, to obtain her independence and to reach her self-realization.

As one critic points out, "much of the story turns upon Rose's growing awareness of difference, of her desire to transcend her origin, and especially the pain it will cause" (Blodgett, *Alice Munro* 86). For Rose, Munro's protagonist, rejecting stereotypes in a male-dominated culture is the first step. She is fully aware of what her

father expects of her:

> A woman ought to be energetic, practical, clever at making and saving; she ought to be shrewd, good at bargaining and bossing and seeing through people's pretensions. At the same time, she should be naive intellectually, childlike, contemptuous of maps and long words and anything in books.... (Munro, *WDY* 45)

Rose, however, has no wish to be driven into such a role. One of her early wishes is "to attach herself to those waffle-eating coffee-drinking aloof and knowledgeable possessors of breakfast nooks" (Munro, *WDY* 38). Obsessed by her constant struggle to gain recognizable success, she knows that she has to be an intruder, aligning herself with the townies at school.

Rose's constant attempts to escape are obvious throughout the novel. She flees West Hanratty. She leaves behind her little town legacy. But she cannot escape oppression and solitude. Her most significant escape in her adult life is her career as an actress. She finally becomes "an actress to the marrow of [her] bones" (Munro, *WDY* 157). Although there are only a few scenes in which she is actually performing, she is almost always acting, in a broader metaphorical sense, and also watching herself and

others acting. Although she has managed to gain a better life by fleeing West Hanratty, symbol of poverty and isolation, Rose cannot as easily escape her role as victim. What she fears and what she later experiences is powerlessness as opposed to power, passivity as opposed to activity, following as opposed to leading.

One of the major themes Munro conveys in this novel is the humiliations of love. Rose constantly fails--in her marriage, and in her sexual connections as well. Ever since her childhood, the overwhelming erotic feelings, "the increase, the flow, of love," "[t]he high tide" and "the flash flood" have threatened to drown Rose (Munro, *WDY* 33). She is a potential drowning victim. When she steals candy for Cora from her step-mother's store and Cora returns this "clownish" love-offering to Flo, her step-mother, Flo sarcastically berates her because she "saw the danger," and "read the flaw," of such a childish, homoerotic crush, and she warns her against "the enslavement, the self-abasement, [and] the self-deception" (Munro, *WDY* 35).

When Rose and Patrick become lovers, she fears sexual, as well as social, humiliation. She is terrified, sensing

that "there was a great humiliation at store, a great exposure of their deceits and stratagems" (Munro, *WDY* 81). But with Patrick, her social humiliations are far more profound and persistent. "The problem of self-recognition, then, is defined and exacerbated ... by a clash of discourse, by her embarrassment about her family's speech and her failure to find a discourse that can be shared with Patrick through which she might see who she is" (Blodgett, *Alice Munro* 95). Rose comes to realize how great the social differences between her lover and herself are, and is getting more and more confused and miserable about this wide distance. To end this confused misery, Rose decides to break her engagement. And with "great pleasure" and "energy" she humiliates Patrick, feeling that he is completely exposed to her and enjoying such an advantage (Munro, *WDY* 92). What triggers this break might be that she is unable to "resist such a test of [her] power" (Munro, *WDY* 95). She equates power with freedom when she recalls in "Simon's Luck" that only with Patrick "had she been the free person, the one with [the] power" to order a man: "Come here ... or go away" (Munro, *WDY* 169).

But even such temporary freedom or power may turn out to be a sham because she admits that it is Patrick that "she was bound to..." (Munro, *WDY* 96). And even nine years after their divorce, she is still haunted by that feeling. Ever since Patrick, Rose has frequently found herself trapped in sexual life. Her relationship with Clifford finds her in more miserable humiliations. Rose and Clifford arrange a secret tryst to consummate their relationship. When Clifford arrives, he says that he cannot hurt his wife and calls the whole thing off. In her hope that "there must be some way to turn things around and start again" (Munro, *WDY* 122), Rose tries to persuade him to shed the mask of the "dutiful" husband to which he has reverted, only to hurt herself more. At that time, her ultimate "shame" is "like a whole wall crumbling in on her, rubble choking her" (Munro, *WDY* 123). When she calls Clifford in the middle of the night, her humiliation reaches its peak. Her attempt to persuade him to talk to her only results in his ambiguous repetitions. "That's okay, Joss" (Munro, *WDY* 125), which may be interpreted as his reassurance to his wife of his fidelity. Finally, deep in "[a]n entirely dishonorable

grief" and full of "[a]ll smashed pride and ridiculed fantasy," she weeps all the ways home, where she, in an attempt to recover her pride, claims to Patrick that she has "had an affair with Clifford" (Munro, *WDY* 131). Unfortunately, her bid to erase such a humiliation produces only more humiliations.

Rose's relationship with Simon is significant in that Simon is the direct opposite of Clifford. Instead of disappointing or exploiting her, Simon is wise and protective. Delighted by this "warm" man in "the widespread sunlight of the moment," who provides the warmth that she desires--not only love, but also "a remarkable supper" and practical advice on how to make her chilly house warm, Rose is convinced that he is "the man for [her] life" (Munro, *WDY* 161-164).

But his failure to come the next weekend, after Rose has made elaborate preparations for his visit, throws her into the dark and cold again, driving her into humiliation once more. She remembers then all the "mortifications" that she has undergone, sadly brooding upon "how many crazy letters she had written, how many over-blown excuses she

had found, having to leave a place, or being afraid to leave a place, on account of some man" (Munro, *WDY* 168).

Caught in another undeserved and unbearable sexual rejection, Rose leaves her job and her cold house and drives westward, struggling to "leap free" of the ambivalent feelings that keep tempting her to turn back (Munro, *WDY* 169). Once again, like her escapes from poverty and isolation in early years, she sees the point of struggling for distance because the tempting force of pulling her back "did weaken, with distance" (Munro, *WDY* 170). Thus, she "kept driving. Muskoka; the Lakehead; the Manitoba border" (Munro, *WDY* 169-170). She has crossed the borders, physically and psychologically; she has overcome the invisible borders as well as the visible ones. Now "[s]he felt relatively safe ... and sane" (Munro, *WDY* 171). Her sense of security, however, may still be an illusion, because she admits that "[e]ither way [she was] robbed of something" (Munro, *WDY* 170).

Rose's stories navigate between extremes: on the one hand, caring too much; on the other, not caring enough. Love presents itself as a perilous venturing force; and it

entails the risk of appearing ridiculous, since the beloved may well prove unworthy or unreliable. In this novel, sexual relationships are constantly found to be at the center of crisis and conflict. Rose wants a lover, a "man for [her] life" (Munro, *WDY* 164), someone who will be so considerate as to see, as is Simon in "Simon's Luck," that the furnace is not functioning well and that what she "needs is some insulation" (Munro, *WDY* 160). Rose wants to love and to be loved. But she cannot risk exposure because she is afraid that if she reveals her need, opens her heart entirely to a particular "other," she will scare him away. He will react to her as if she were an abnormal woman, whose "tenderness is greedy, [whose] sensuality is dishonest" (Munro, *WDY* 169). Again, filled with a "low, steady hum of uneasiness, fatigue, apprehension" (Munro, *WDY* 158), she wants to be protected by the warmly protective Simon, but when she recognizes her desire for such total domination, she realizes that there will be some potential humiliation: She would be able to do nothing "but to lie under Simon," "but to give way to pangs and convulsions" (Munro, *WDY* 165). Thus, she is caught in

between her desire for the protective warmth of a man and aspiration for freedom and independence.

The basic question "Who do you think you are?" is left unanswered at the end of the novel. When Munro's heroine returns to Hanratty, finishing her circling journey, she is still not sure of who she is. Her last effort is to forge honest connections with Ralph. For her, trying to understand Ralph is analogous to trying to understand herself. But "[w]hat could she say about herself and Ralph Gillespie, except that she felt his life, close, closer than the lives of men she'd loved, one slot over from her own" (Munro, *WDY* 206)? Munro's heroine seems not to see any hope in finding an answer.

Surfacing

Obviously, Atwood does not limit her protagonist in *Surfacing* to the role as victim. She treats her subject in a broader perspective: "Canada as a whole is a victim" (Atwood, *Survival* 35). Her heroine's escape from city to wilderness, her rediscovery of her self, and her survival and salvation are paralleled by her assumption of the role

as cultural exorcist. What is particularly remarkable in *Surfacing* is then the combined process of searching for both individual identity and national one: "Where is here?" as well as "Who am I?" In this sense, the female voice "politically and culturally personifies Canada" (Irvine, *Sub/vision* 11).

The novel's turning point is in Chapter 17. It is in this chapter that Atwood's heroine dives into a lake in search of aboriginal paintings she believes her missing father has discovered on an underwater cliff face. It is also in this chapter that she finds what turns out to be her father's drowned body. Imagining it to be like a foetus in a bottle, she recalls an abortion she has undergone a few years before, an experience that she has repressed, and that only now "surfaces" in her mind.

As a result of this strange atonement with her naturalist father, Atwood's estranged and curiously numbed heroine is revitalized. She begins to attune herself once more to the wilderness she has known as a child. She makes contact with the "gods" of the place; with "the abodes of powerful or protective spirits" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 111),

and with "the sacred places, the places where you could learn the truth" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 155). Atwood's heroine instinctively sloughs off "Americanism," the derivative barbarism that Atwood views as characteristic of modern Canadian culture, and that she is careful to show is not confined to America itself:

> It doesn't matter what country they're from, my head said, they're still American, they're what's in store for us, what we are turning into. They spread themselves like a virus, they get into the brain and take over the cells and the cells change from inside and the ones that have the disease can't tell the difference. (Atwood, *Surfacing* 139)

Atwood's heroine proceeds to assume the role of cultural exorcist, that is to say, someone who has been exposed to "Americanism" but who has absorbed it only in order to divest herself of it more effectively when the time comes in order to "refuse to be [its] victim" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 206). And it is in this role that she makes an offering to the guardian spirits of the lake. It is also in this role that, after offering up her wedding ring, together with the drawings and scrapbooks of childhood, she ritually undresses:

> I untie my feet from the shoes and walk down to the shore; the earth is damp, cold, pock-marked with raindrops. I pile the blanket on the rock and step into the water and lie down. When every part of me is wet I take off my clothes, peeling them away from my flesh like wallpaper. (Atwood, *Surfacing* 191)

The upshot of the heroine's cultural exorcism is a complete attunement to her environment. Once she has ritually decontaminated herself, she is as if indistinguishable from, or transparent to, the primeval natural order. She might be one of the "man-animals" of the aboriginal drawings discovered by her father: "I'm ice-clear, transparent, my bones and the child inside me showing through the green webs of my flesh, the ribs and shadows, the muscles jelly, the trees are like this too, they shimmer, their cores glow through the wood and bark" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 195). Moreover, when Atwood's heroine proceeds to reject the idea of language itself, language considered as the quintessential human characteristic, it is as if she has emerged into the environment: "I am not an animal or a tree," she thinks, "I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow. I am a place" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 195).

Finally, after discovering and performing the foregoing rituals, the heroine consummates her atonement with her parents. Now she realizes that she must reassume the ways of the society she has symbolically rejected: "To prefer life, I owe them that" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 202). Indeed, although the ending of the novel is unresolved, the reader may well understand that, on her re-entry into "American" culture, this cultural exorcist will at least carry with herself a new sense of place, the place that is Canada.

"Who am I?" and "Where is here?": the process of searching for both individual and national identity is remarkable in many contemporary Canadian novels. Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?* demonstrate the process of searching for individual identity. Despite the fact that *Lives of Girls and Women* is narrated from the point of view of Del as an adult, it remains essentially a story of the movement from childhood to adolescence. We know nothing of the specifics of Del's adult life and we do not see her functioning as an adult

other than in her perceptions of her past life and self. It is obvious that the process of defining herself will continue into her adulthood. The fundamental question in *Who Do You Think You Are?* remains unanswered at the end. But such an ambiguous ending implies something promising, suggesting that Rose's future is full of possibilities as well as uncertainties. It may also imply that whether Rose has found her identity or not is not important: essential to the novel is the quest itself. Thus, *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a spiral. It witnesses noticeable changes in its protagonist, who does not end where she started, and who, by fleeing poverty and isolation, by fighting against the expectations of her father and that sexually biased society, and finally by getting out of misery of sexual humiliations, moves closer to her desired independence and freedom.

Needless to say, on one level, Atwood's *Surfacing* is a perfectly traditional quest for identity: its heroine attempts to reconcile herself with the parents from whom she has become estranged, and thus in a sense to become her own parent, an autonomous self able to parent a child. But

Atwood does not limit herself to that sense alone. She draws attention to the wider significance of this quest. For *Surfacing* is also very much concerned with "the range of responses Canadians have had to the American presence" (Broege 111), with the possibility of a distinctive Canadian identity, and Atwood uses her female character to dramatize the cultural ambiguities that constitute the Canadian identity. To be more exact, it is concerned with the "place" that is the basis of this cultural identity. As Northrop Frye once said of the Canadian imaginative sensibility in general: "It is less perplexed by the question 'Who am I?' than by such a riddle as 'Where is here?'" (220). In that sense, Atwood's *Surfacing* adds a further dimension to Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?*, for it combines the national search for a cultural identity with the feminist quest for a distinctive gender selfhood.

Struggle for Identity in Chinese Women's Writing: Efforts and Limits

On the Same Horizon

In the words of Lydia H. Liu, "[r]omantic love and marriage are often rejected as a result of woman's quest for selfhood, which explains why the majority of female protagonists ... are single, divorced, or have troubled marriage" (51). Zhang Xinxin's novella *On the Same Horizon* serves as a good example of a work in which female subjectivity challenges male egotism.

Soon after her story *On the Same Horizon* was published, Zhang Xinxin was severely criticized for her bourgeois liberalism and individualism reflected in this work. One critic says:

> This work solely stresses individual strife as decisive, brazenly advocates the protagonists' individualistic philosophy of life.... The author sympathizes with and eulogizes [her protagonists] and regard their attitude as progressive.... [Zhang Xinxin's protagonists] are mad competitors fighting against the "whole world" simply for their own benefit: social status and money. Understandably, they find it hard to shed off their sense of emptiness and pessimism. We should ask: what is there in [Zhang Xinxin's characters]

> that deserves our sympathy and eulogy? Isn't it clear that to praise them is the same as to advocate and promote extreme individualism and the bourgeois theory of survival for the fittest? (Zhu 4)

The two protagonists of the story are widely different in character. The woman married the man at a moment when one further examination would have qualified her for entrance to the university. This is the beginning of their conflict: Resisting her husband's entreaties, she does not want children, and eventually seizes her last chance to get into the Film Academy. This step away from her husband is accompanied by an abortion and a request for divorce. In the story, Zhang Xinxin's heroine constantly complains about her husband's male egotism: "He only expected me to love him; but he never thought of loving me. He wants to enjoy family happiness and wants me to sacrifice everything else for his sole enjoyment" (Zhang Xinxin, *On the Same Horizon* 177). She is very much aware that "if I give up everything for him and have nothing left for myself, I will not be his intellectual equal anymore, and consequently he will lose interest in me" (Zhang Xinxin, *On the Same Horizon* 177). She keeps raising such essential questions

as: "What about me? Who am I?" (Zhang Xinxin, *On the Same Horizon* 196). Obviously, Zhang Xinxin's heroine is disturbed by an undercurrent of dissatisfaction. Her husband's indifference to her aspirations and feelings agonizes and frustrates her. Determined to find, rescue, and reshape her self from oblivion, she insists on pursuing her own goals, even at the expense of love and marriage.

Particularly noticeable in Zhang Xinxin's *On the Same Horizon* is the heroine's uncompromising individualism as well as feminist consciousness. In the story the heroine acquires and then loses both love and marriage. As one critic points out, "this story reflects the author's pursuit for sexual equality" (Wang Fei 46). "She," Zhang Xinxin's heroine, wants to write and study after coming back from the countryside; and "he," her artist husband, is so much engrossed in the world of competition that he ignores her, her wishes, and their life together. She has her aspirations and is determined to pursue her own goals. She believes that both she and he are standing on and starting from the same "horizon," and she attempts to reach for a higher "position" just the same as he does. However,

while he throws himself entirely into the pursuit of fame and fortune, he sees her striving to become a movie-maker as unnecessary and worthless and her endeavors futile. He often says to her when a dispute breaks out between them: "Your problem is that you have too strong a character, and you always want to be among the best" (Zhang Xinxin, *On the Same Horizon* 200). Their similar strong characters cause many contradictions between them, and the contradictions accumulate. Disappointed and frustrated by his failure to understand her and determined to follow her own pursuit, she leaves him and has an abortion, which leads to their eventual separation and divorce. The story ends in a restaurant, where the couple is about to finalize their divorce.

The Ark

In Zhang Jie's "Love Must Not Be Forgotten," Zhong Yu, the tragic heroine, longs for idealistic romantic love. She feels keenly the lack of such love in reality, and, therefore, she has to live in her dreams of love. Although she has an object of love, he is only a dreamlike or

illusory image existing and accompanying her in spirit. She seems to keep a self to her own, but this is not an independent self; it is a fragile self which is fundamentally dependent on her love for a man. Both her emotional and physical existence is sustained by this love.

Whereas her "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" depicts the tragedy caused by the separation of love and marriage, Zhang Jie's *The Ark* moves one step forward. The latter indicates that in order to seek a less painful and more independent life, women may get out of their unhappy marriage by leaving and divorcing their husbands, although this effort is an agonizing and frustrating process. In this story Zhang Jie raises some basic problems that women have to face. Her story portrays women as sex objects and as possession of men, the contradiction between career and family, discrimination against women in job and other opportunities, and relation with men as single women. By endowing her heroines with enough strength and courage to reject the role as victims of patriarchal oppression, the author reminds the reader that "[t]rue liberation was more than gaining improvement of economic and political status;

it was also necessary that women develop confidence and strength in order to realize their full value and potential" (Zhang Jie, *The Ark* 156).

However, there is a discernible ambivalence in Zhang Jie's story. Zhang Jie's heroines have enough courage and strength to walk out on their husbands because they cannot tolerate the unhappy marriage any more. They try to establish an independent self with dignity and integrity by working honestly and conscientiously. They even believe that "it might soon be time for 'the mare to pull the cart.' If it were really true that the world developed in circles, then wasn't a return to the matriarchal society inevitable" (Zhang Jie, *The Ark* 114)? Their confidence and diligence, however, seem to have brought them little hope and comfort. Jinghua writes conscientiously, but her essays are being criticized for her candid views. Liu Quan's efforts to transfer to a better job run into one obstacle after another. Similarly, Liang Qian sees little hope of success as a film director. Furthermore, these heroines seem still to be longing for strong arms to rely on. They need the love of men and cannot have a happy life without

that love. Liu Quan's situation best illustrates their dilemma: although she suffered a great deal when living with her husband, she still "thought back about her own husband without any leftover anger or resentment." She still misses his "strong and ... broad chest" (Zhang Jie, *The Ark* 166).

In this story, the author tries to find another solution for her heroines, that is, female bonds. Zhang Jie's three heroines, all being single, live together in an apartment nick-named "Widows' Club." They try very hard to build a common life for themselves. They cook together, they plan an outing, and they attempt to set up a nice and comfortable home. The bond of the three women and their friendship are vital for them to survive. In the words of Zhang Jingyuan, "female bonding, not maternity (muxing) or uxoriality (qixing), is closer to what we mean by 'femininity (nüxing)'" (34). Furthermore, Zhang Jingyuan perceives female friendship, or female bonding, not only as a disruptive force against patriarchy but also as the very essence of femininity.

Unfortunately, such alternatives as female bonds or

female friendship seem not to provide a satisfactory solution to the problems that Zhang Jie's heroines face. They still feel a vast void in their lives which cannot be filled except for the true love of a man. Although the author tries very hard to establish her heroines as independent women, her protagonists seem to be still vulnerable:

> Liang Qian put her cup down, leaned over and, as if she were a man, patted Liu Quan's shoulder.
> "Have your ice cream. It's already melted."
> Ah! Liang Qian had patted her shoulder ... as if she were a man! (Zhang Jie, *The Ark* 193)

So Liu Quan gets some momentary comfort because she feels as if Liang Qian were a man and she were getting comfort from a man, strong and caring.

The description of Zhu Zhenxiang and his wife reveals again the author's idea of an ideal family and a perfect relationship between husband and wife. Liu Quan and Zhu are talking at Zhu's home. Then the wife comes in and puts down two cups of juice and leaves the room, "[s]he had barely turned around to look at Liu Quan and had cast no suspicious or disapproving glances in her direction." The wife gently closes the door behind her "to cut out the soft

sound of music wafted in from another room" (Zhang Jie, *The Ark* 184). Obviously, this is a home full of gentleness, caring, harmony, and music; and the couple is filled with love, trust and support for each other. So Liu Quan feels that "[e]ven the china in this house carried the mood of compassion, understanding and serenity" (Zhang Jie, *The Ark* 184). And she believes that she would be a lot more confident if she should live in such an environment. The story indicates that such is a life that women should be living. Such is a life that the author admires and endorses because she writes these passages in minute detail and with ardent admiration.

Zhang Jie's story implies that friendship among women is no substitute for the genuine love between men and women. That is why the three heroines are in endless trouble and their life is often a mess. What is equally true is that they may lose all their feminine beauty, as Liang Qian finds herself in that situation:

> How had she gotten to this state? ... He (her separated husband) noticed her thin, stick-like legs and her wasted hips. Then, following his gaze upwards, he saw her sunken chest and her thin yellow face. He could no longer find

> anything lovable or even interesting about her. How on earth could she have become so haggard, so pathetic? (Zhang Jie, *The Ark* 143)

Liang Qian's situation suggests that a woman who lacks the love of a man withers. In this respect, Zhang Jie's women cannot free themselves from the male gaze and can only find their self in men's eyes. Obviously, their salvation is not complete, for they still desire strong arms of men to rely on. Not surprisingly, their pursuit for self identity has not achieved as much as they wish, despite their endless efforts.

"Emerald"

In Zhang Jie's "Emerald," "the protagonist Zeng Linger becomes a female subject not through identifying with other women but through enduring intense isolation and overcoming her romantic love" (Liu 49). In this story, the heroine Linger is established as an ideal model of devoted love and selfless sacrifice:

> She had fixed her eyes raptly on Zuo Wei, who was sitting in one corner hanging his head. Come clean? Confess? She could think of nothing but him, the man she loved. She would gladly sacrifice everything for him: her political

> future, her career, her freedom and the respect of other people. (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 25)

Her sacrifice is huge: because she confesses to his political "crimes" to save him, she is labeled a rightist and banished to a remote village, where she is forced to do physical labor. What is worse is that she gets pregnant because of her one night's sex with Zuo Wei before she leaves for the countryside. In that village, she gives birth to his illegitimate child and, in order to protect her lover, she refuses to tell anyone who the father is. She endures all the humiliation and harassment without a word of protest.

In order for the readers to realize fully the value in Linger, the author introduces another woman, Beihe, in her story, who actually represents another aspect of the self in woman. Beihe is also in love with Zuo Wei, but she knows better how to get hold of the man she covets. And she succeeds in possessing him. While Linger is sacrificing all she has--her energy, time, and body for the man she loves selflessly, Beihe is planning every step to set up a prestigious career for Zuo Wei and establish a presentable

family for him and herself. Obviously, we face two different attitudes, two different points of views, and two different ways of life, embodied in two different personalities. The author compares them to two boats:

> It seemed as though they were on two boats brushing past one another at sea. One was a sumptuous white pleasure boat, all richly decorated in gold. Moving calmly through the water, it went wherever she wanted it to. The other was an old wooden tub, its tattered sails at the mercy of the wind, pulled this way and that. Linger was grasping the rudder, holding the oars. And the boat was being tossed about, thrown up and down on the waves.
>
> [Beihe's] boat swiftly caught up with Linger's, confidently moved in front, speeding to its destination. She was standing on deck looking back. The outline of Linger's boat, buffeted up and down, became more and more indistinct. But then the crewmen suddenly told [Beihe] that their boat had engine trouble, that it couldn't be fixed, and that the boiler-room was taking in water. It was frightening. Why was it only today that she realized the truth: her life was aimless, would never have any destination to reach. She was only moving through a mirage. Wouldn't it be better to be an ordinary woman like Linger, to experience a woman's joys and sorrows? (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 57-58)

In contrast to the three heroines in *The Ark*, Zhang Jie's heroine in "The Emerald" seems to have achieved much in her struggle for self independence and identity. Linger seems to be perfect in every aspect, in as much as she has

fulfilled her duty as a lover and a mother, she has worked hard for her career, she has overcome mental and physical hardships, and, above all, she has withstood all the insults and humiliations. However, the major weakness in Zhang Jie's presentation of Linger as a perfect Chinese woman is that the heroine does not realize that she has lost her self in her worthless sacrifice, which is required of women of generations upon generations by patriarchal tradition. Instead of challenging patriarchal dominance, Zhang Jie's "Emerald" basically remains the same as many stories told before. Women suffer, women sacrifice, men succeed, and men build their success upon women's pains and sacrifice. Even Beihe comes to realize that "for many years, we fought for the same man's love, bravely sacrificed everything for him. But in the end we discovered it wasn't worth it. And he was totally unaware of our sacrifice, or perhaps thought it was what we ought to do" (Zhang Jie, "Emerald" 57).

Robert E. Hegel maintains that "[t]he Chinese conception of self expressed in literature has seldom been

apolitical or aloof from the social needs of its time" (359). Until the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese communist literature primarily portrayed the individual as a rational entity composed of a set of personal and social values. The individual was treated as a producer who applies these values in the workplace (be it school, office, factory, farm, etc.) to make a decision regarding a work-related problem. The theories behind this kind of literature presumed that by presenting such a model of the self, above or to the exclusion of any other feature of the self, literary works could encourage their readers to act as the model presented. Literature was manipulated as an ideological tool to alter perceptions and behavior.

In her article "Female Images and National Myth," Meng Yue discusses some dominant female images presented by Chinese literary works before 1978 and attempts to prove how these ideologically-oriented images serve to eliminate female subjectivity and uphold the authority of the Communist Party. She points out:

> On the one hand, the state's political discourse translated itself through women into the private context of desire, love, marriage, divorce, and

> familial relations, and, on the other hand, it turned woman into an agent politicizing desire, love, and family relations by delimiting and repressing sexuality, self, and all private emotions. (118)

Things began to change after the Cultural Revolution. More and more Chinese women writers came to realize that subjectivity, or selfhood, will give women a sense of autonomy, continuous identity, a history and agency in the world. As Linda Hutcheon puts it, "[w]omen must define their subjectivity before they can question it; they must first assert the selfhood they have been denied by the dominant culture" (*Canadian Postmodern* 6). Despite their ambivalence and limitations, Canadian and Chinese women writers share a common belief when their works present women's conscious strivings for self fulfillment and convey a strong sympathy toward their admirable efforts.

CONCLUSION

Women cannot fully understand their own lives until they see their experiences explored in literature. They cannot fully realize their own values until they understand that "it is not the inferiority of women that has caused their historical insignificance; it is rather their historical insignificance that has doomed them to inferiority" (de Beauvoir 132). Therefore, unless and until women realize that their secondary standing is not imposed of necessity by natural "feminine" characteristics but rather by strong forces of cultural and social tradition under the purposeful control of men, and that they must reconstruct their past, draw on it, and transmit it to the next generation, their oppression will persist.

Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* explore sexual relationships and particularly undermine one of the traditions of the representation of women, their passivity. What dominates the narrative development, however, is the woman's role as sufferer. While paying attention to the ways the female

characters manipulate their respective situations, this thesis has concentrated on the victim positions imposed upon them and that they act out.

This thesis has also attempted to investigate and analyze the different narrative strategies of Canadian and Chinese women writers and understand in what sense and to what degree these narrative differences contribute to the feminist consciousness embodied in their works. "The most obvious tension in the Canadian literary situation is the use of language" (Northrop Frye 219). Clearly, Canadian women writers are constantly obsessed with language and its contexts. The protagonists in both Gallant's *A Fairly Good Time* and Kogawa's *Obasan* attempt to establish a dialogue or association with their mothers. In Gallant's novel, Shirley is making constant efforts to find a language with which she can communicate with her mother, only to find herself in a dilemma of a "dialogue of the deaf." The generations fail to contact. Throughout the novel, the mother and daughter seem to be performing a dialogue of the deaf. Shirley's failure to establish any significant dialogue with her mother is largely due to her situation in

language. She is caught between language and significance. In *Obasan*, the daughter's attempt to establish an association with her mother has also to be achieved through language. With the discovery/recovery of the "Young Mother of Nagasaki," the narrative voice finally becomes an affirmative voice and is replaced by the poetic voice, in which the speaking subject celebrates the most personal of human bonds. The presence of this poetic language in the novel rearranges the other genres of writing and adds the power of the semiotic to the expression of racial memory.

By analyzing the works written by such Chinese women writers as Wang Anyi, Zhang Jie, and Zhang Xinxin, this thesis has intended to answer these questions: How did Chinese women's literature develop in the eighties? What distinguishes contemporary Chinese women writers from their Western counterparts in thematic concerns? What are the favorable strategies employed by contemporary Chinese women writers to demythify male-centered discourse? The Chinese literary scene of the post-Mao era witnessed the emergence of hundreds of stories with love themes, which marks a relatively liberal and individualistic trend that has

typified Chinese thinking in recent years. It is noteworthy that the emphasis of contemporary Chinese women writers on love is reminiscent of pre-Marxist radicalism in China around the time of the May Fourth Movement, which served as the background of Ding Ling's "The Diary of Miss Sophie." Whether or not Wang Anyi, Zhang Jie, and Zhang Xinxin are aware of this, or consciously seek to revive an earlier Chinese radical outlook, is not certain. Nevertheless, the suggestions may be worth keeping in mind for its revival of themes in Chinese radicalism that have a long, powerful legacy--regardless of whether they reveal a tendency on the part of Chinese women to respond similarly across time to similar frustrations, or the continuing vitality of memories that have been officially suppressed for decades.

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the emphasis of Chinese feminist writing of the 1980s was more political in the sense that the writers were more concerned with the injustice and inequality that women face in their social and political life and were more actively engaged in raising women's "political" consciousness of their oppression by men. Zhang Jie's novella *The Ark* initiates

such a trend. In this story Zhang Jie puts under suspicion what socialism has promised women. Implicit in *The Ark* is her bold question: Can women's liberation really hinge upon a political revolution? and if the answer is positive, why do male supremacy and socialism continue to complement each other? The author seems to warn us that women may still be victims in a society ostensibly designed for their welfare. The tone of her novella, however, is not entirely pessimistic. Although failures and frustrations are always haunting her heroines, their strivings may give rise to sound and fury in an otherwise stagnant society still ruled by men.

Critics agree that Chinese writers pay more attention to plots than narrative techniques. However, more and more women writers are beginning to focus on the narrative means which help promote feminist consciousness embodied in their works. Chinese women writers are breaking new ground not only in terms of subject matter, but also in terms of language, literary form and technique. Their works have shown how particular narrative techniques can be used to problematize and challenge orthodox literary ideology,

because "[f]eminist criticism could argue that narratology itself is ideological" (Lanser 345). Significantly, while Canadian women writers concentrate on deconstructing "the sentence," undermining the symbolic system of language with the "language" of the semiotic, their Chinese counterparts like Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin rely on particular narrative techniques to locate the core of patriarchal power. As Mieke Bal says, "[t]he use of formally adequate and precise tools is not interesting in itself, but it can clarify other very relevant issues and provide insights which otherwise remain vague" (121). Hopefully, a joint force of narratology and feminist criticism may provide a particularly valuable foundation for exploring one of the most complex and troubling issues for feminist criticism: Whether there is indeed a "women's writing" and/or female tradition, that is, whether men and women do write differently.

What makes the novels of Canadian women writers particularly valuable is, to a large degree, the seriousness with which they present women both in search of themselves. In Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do*

You Think You Are?, and Atwood's *Surfacing*, feminist impulses work to problematize the very nature of selfhood ("character formation") or subjectivity. Subjectivity in the Western liberal humanist tradition is defined in terms of rationality, individuality, and power; in other words, it is defined in terms of those domains traditionally denied women, who are relegated instead to the realms of intuition, familial collectivity, and submission. By questioning the very nature of selfhood defined in Western culture, these works attempt to "offer reasons to rethink the notion of 'definitive' inscriptions of identity, especially the ex-centric, 'minoritarian' identity: Big Bear, Riel ... women!" (Hutcheon, *Canadian Postmodern* 108).

Similarly, "female subjectivity has occupied the center stage of women's literature since Ding Ling" (Liu 45). The May Fourth literati's advocacy of the self and subjectivity engendered one of the most exciting phenomena of that era--female writers' writing about gendered subjectivity and sexuality. It is hardly surprising that half a century later contemporary Chinese women writers still face the question of female subjectivity. Like Ding

Ling, contemporary Chinese women writers such as Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin situate "female subjectivity in a process that challenges the received idea of womanhood" (Liu 50). In her *The Ark*, Zhang Jie focuses on the common plight of three women, projecting female subjectivity as a form of collective female consciousness. At the end of *The Ark*, one of the three heroines proposes a toast, hoping to strengthen their female bond. Similarly, in representing women's struggle for an individual identity, Zhang Xinxin's *On the Same Horizon* conveys a strong sympathy toward women in their quest for self. Obviously, their search for identity is both a challenge to the social norms of womanhood and an effort for establishing a new self.

David Wang points out that "[f]or all the divergences contained within, the fundamental concern of feminist criticism remains unchallengeable, namely, to establish a new paradigm of reading and writing literature in the interest of women" (237). This thesis has employed Western feminist literary theories and Third World feminist criticism to analyze literary works written by seven

Canadian and Chinese women writers. It is hoped that such an effort has contributed to this fundamental concern of feminist criticism. It is also hoped that this thesis, a comparative analysis of seven contemporary Canadian and Chinese women writers, has added another, concrete response to Yuan's questions quoted at the end of the Introduction.

APPENDIX I

Margaret Atwood

I. Biographical Sketch

Born in Ottawa in 1939, Margaret Atwood was educated at the University of Toronto and at Radcliffe College. She first taught English at the University of British Columbia, and then at Sir George Williams University, the University of Alberta, and York University. She has lived in Toronto, Boston, Vancouver, Montreal, and London, and traveled extensively. She first made her reputation in the sixties as a poet with *The Circle Game* and *The Animals in That Country*. Margaret Atwood has won quite a number of awards and prizes: Union Poetry Prize in 1969, Bess Hopkins Prize in 1974, Canadian Booksellers Association Award in 1977, Molson Prize in 1980, International Writer's Prize in 1982, and Governor-General's Award for Fiction in 1985.

II. Major Literary Works

Double Persephone. Toronto: Hawkshead, 1961.

The Circle Game. Toronto: Contact, 1966.

The Animals in That Country. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1968.

The Edible Woman. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970.

The Journals of Susanna Moodie. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970.

Procedures for Underground. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970.

Power Politics. Toronto: Anansi, 1971.

Surfacing. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972.

Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.

You Are Happy. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1974.

Lady Oracle. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976.

Selected Poems. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1976.

Dancing Girls and Other Stories. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977.

Two-Headed Poems. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1978.

Up in the Tree. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.

Life Before Man. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979.

Bodily Harm. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981.

True Stories. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1981.

Second Words: Selected Critical Prose. Toronto: Anansi, 1982.

Bluebeard's Egg. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983.

Murder in the Dark: Short Fictions and Prose Poems. Toronto: Coach House, 1983.

Interlunar. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1984.

The Handmaid's Tale. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985.

Selected Poems II: Poems Selected and New, 1976-1986. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1986.

Cat's Eye. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988.

Selected Poems: 1966-1984. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1990.

Good Bones. Toronto: Coach House, 1992.

The Robber Bride. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993.

Morning in the Burned House. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995.

APPENDIX II

Mavis Gallant

I. Biographical Sketch

Born in Montreal in 1922, Mavis Gallant spent most of her childhood in Canada. Since the age of twenty-eight, she has lived and written in Europe. Yet she has deliberately retained her Canadian citizenship. She won Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1982. She now lives in Paris, France.

II. Major Literary Works

The Other Paris. Houghton Miffin, 1956.

Green Water, Green Sky. Houghton Miffin, 1960.

A Fairly Good Time. New York: Random House, 1974.

The End of the World and Other Stories. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

From the Fifteenth District. Toronto: Macmillan, 1979.

Home Truth: Selected Canadian Stories. Toronto: Macmillan, 1981.

What Is To Be Done? Dunvegan, Ontario: Quadrant, 1983.

Overhead in a Balloon: Stories of Paris. Toronto: Macmillan, 1985.

Paris Notebooks: Essays and Reviews. Toronto: Macmillan, 1986.

In Transit. Markham, Ontario: Viking-Penguin, 1988.

Across the Bridge: Stories. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993.

APPENDIX III

Joy Kogawa

I. Biographical Sketch

Joy Kogawa was born in Vancouver in 1935. Like other Japanese Canadians, she and her family were interned and persecuted during the Second World War. She has worked as a school teacher, a writer for the Prime Minister's office, and Writer-in-Residence at the University of Ottawa. Joy Kogawa has contributed to many anthologies and periodicals. In 1981 She published her novel *Obasan* and won the Books in Canada First Novel Award. The next year her *Obasan* received the Canadian Authors' Association Book of the Year Award.

II. Major Literary Works

The Splintered Moon. Fredericton: Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1967.

A Choice of Dreams. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

Jericho Road. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977.

Obasan. Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982.

Woman in the Woods. New York: Mosaic, 1985.

Naomi's Road. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1986.

Itsuka. Toronto: Viking, 1992.

The Rain Ascends. Toronto: Knopf, 1995.

APPENDIX IV

Alice Munro

I. Biographical Sketch

Alice Munro was born in Wingham, Ontario, in 1931. She was educated at University of Western Ontario. In 1968 her first book of stories, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, was published and won Governor-General's Award for Fiction. She also received Canadian Bookseller's Award for *Lives of Girls and Women* in 1971, Canada-Australia Literary Prize in 1974, Governor-General's Award for Fiction for *Who Do You Think You Are?* in 1978, and Governor-General's Award for Fiction for *The Progress of Love* in 1986.

II. Major Literary Works

Dance of the Happy Shades. Toronto: Ryerson, 1968.

Lives of Girls and Women. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1971.

Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974.

Who Do You Think You Are? Toronto: Macmillan, 1978.

The Progress of Love. New York: Knopf, 1986.

Friend of My Youth: Stories. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990.

Open Secrets: Stories. New York: Knopf, 1995.

Selected Stories. New York: Knopf, 1996.

APPENDIX V

Wang Anyi

I. Biographical Sketch

Born 1954 in Nanjing and brought up in Shanghai, Wang Anyi was sent down to Anhui Province in 1970 during the Cultural Revolution. There she joined a local performing arts troupe as a cellist. In 1978 she returned to Shanghai, and then she started her career as a writer. She first tried her hand at prose, and published her first work of fiction in 1980. Wang Anyi is now acknowledged as one of the most promising women writers to have emerged in China in the 1980s; she is also one of the most prolific, publishing short stories, novellas, as well as novels.

II. Major Literary Works

And the Rain Patters On (Yu, sha, sha, sha). Tianjin: Hundred Flowers Literature and Art, 1981.

Short Stories and Novellas of Wang Anyi (Wang Anyi zhong duan pian xiaoshuo ji). Beijing: Chinese Youth, 1984.

Little Bao Village: A Collection of Short Stories and

Novellas (Xiao bao zhuang: zhong duan pian xiaoshuo ji). Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Arts, 1986.

A Junior High Graduate of 1969 (69 jie chuzhong sheng). Beijing: Chinese Youth, 1986.

Love on a Barren Mountain (Huangshan zhi lian). *October* 4 (1986).

Love in a Small Town (Xiaocheng zhi lian). *Shanghai Literature* 8 (1986).

Brocade Valley (Jinxiu Gu zhi lian). *Bell Mountain* 1 (1987).

Ecstatic Days on a Hill (Gang shang de shiji). *Bell Mountain* 1 (1989).

Dreams at the Sea (Haishang fanhua meng). Guangzhou: Flower City, 1989.

Brothers (Dixiong men). *Harvest* 3 (1989).

Sacred Alter (Shensheng jitan). Beijing: People's Literature, 1991.

Shangxing Taipingyang. *Harvest* 3 (1993).

Changhen ge. *Bell Mountain* 2, 3, 4 (1995).

APPENDIX VI

Zhang Jie

I. Biographical Sketch

Zhang Jie was born in 1937. During the anti-Japanese war, her parents separated and her mother, a teacher, brought her up in a village in Liaoning Province. She loved music and literature, but was persuaded to study economics, a more useful subject to New China. Upon graduating from the People's University in Beijing, she worked several years in an industrial bureau, then transferred to a film studio where she got a chance to write two film scripts. She is now a professional writer and enjoys wide popularity in China. Zhang Jie did not start to write until after the fall of the "Gang of Four" and the end of the Cultural Revolution. In 1978, her story "The Music of the Forest" won a prize as one of the best short stories of that year. Since then she has published many short stories, essays, novellas, and a novel, *Leaden Wings*.

II. Major Literary Works

"Love Must Not Be Forgotten" (Ai shi buneng wangji de). *Beijing Literature* 11 (1979).

The Ark (Fangzhou). *Harvest* 2 (1982).

"The Time Is Not Yet Ripe" (Shijian haiwei chengshou). *Beijing Literature* 9 (1983).

"Emerald" (Zumu lü). *Flower City* 3 (1984).

Leaden Wings (Chenzhong de chibang). Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1980.

What's Wrong with Him? (Ta you shenme bin?) *Bell Mountain* 4 (1986).

"The Last Altitude" (Zuihou de gaodu). *People's Literature* 3 (1989).

"Murder" (Mousha). *Authors* 5 (1989).

"The Anxiety of the Feet" (Jiao de saodong). *Tianjin Literature* 6 (1989).

"Mr. Ke's Days and Nights" (Ke xiansheng de baitian he yiewan). *Shanghai Literature* 1 (1991).

Agitation (Shang huo). Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1991.

The Red Mushroom (Hong mogu). *Shang huo*. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1991.

APPENDIX VII

Zhang Xinxin

I. Biographical Sketch

Zhang Xinxin was born in Nanjing in 1953. She was sent to the countryside in 1969 and became a farm worker in the Northeast of China. After the Cultural Revolution she entered the Central Drama Academy in 1979 and graduated five years later. She is now a director at the People's Art Theatre in Beijing. Zhang Xinxin started writing in 1978. However, her name did not draw much attention until her story *On the Same Horizon* was published in 1981. Her thematic concerns and narrative strategies made her one of the most controversial Chinese writers in the 1980s.

II. Major Literary Works

"How Did I Miss You?" (Wo zai nar cuoguo le ni?). *Harvest* 5 (1980).

On the Same Horizon (Zai tongyi dipingxian shang). *Harvest* 6 (1981).

The Dream of Our Generation (Wemen zheige nianji de meng).

Harvest 4 (1982).

"Theatrical Effects" (Juchang xiaoguo). *Beijing Literature* 4 (1983).

"Orchid Madness" (Fengkuang de junzilan). *Literary Digest Monthly* 9 (1983).

Returning Home (Hui laojia). *Beijing Literature* 12 (1984).

The Last Haven (Zuihou tingbo di). *Chinese Writers* 1 (1985).

Chinese Profiles (Beijing ren). Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Arts, 1986.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A: Primary Source

Atwood, Margaret. *The Edible Woman*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969.

---. *Surfacing*. Toronto: General, 1972.

---. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Toronto: McClelland-Bantam, 1985.

Gallant, Mavis. *A Fairly Good Time*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1983.

Kogawa, Joy. *Obasan*. Markham, Ontario: Penguin, 1981.

Munro, Alice. *Lives of Girls and Women*. New York: Mcgraw-Hill Ryerson, 1971.

---. *Who Do You Think You Are?* Toronto: Macmillan, 1978.

Wang Anyi. *Love on a Barren Mountain* (Huangshan zhi lian). 1986. Trans. Eva Hung. Hong Kong: Research Center for Translation, Chinese U of Hong Kong, 1991.

---. *Love in a Small Town* (Xiaocheng zhi lian). 1986. Trans. Eva Hung. Hong Kong: Research Center for Translation, Chinese U of Hong Kong, 1989.

---. *Brocade Love* (Jinxiugu zhi lian). 1987. Trans. Bonnie

S. McDougall and Chen Maiping. New York: New Directions, 1992.

Zhang Jie. "Love Must Not Be Forgotten" (Ai shi buneng wangji de). 1979. Trans. Gladys Yang. *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*. Beijing: Panda Book, 1986. 1-13.

---. *The Ark* (Fangzhou). 1982. Trans Gladys Yang. *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*. Beijing: Panda Book, 1986. 113-201.

---. "Emerald" (Zumu lü). 1984. Trans. Gladys Yang. *Love Must Not Be Forgotten*. Beijing: Panda Books, 1986. 14-62.

Zhang Xinxin. "How Did I Miss You?" (Wo zai nar cuoguo le ni?). 1980. Trans. Angela Knox. *One Half of the Sky*. Ed. R. A. Roberts and Angela Knox. London: Heinemann, 1987. 92-124.

---. *On the Same Horizon* (Zai tongyi dipingxian shang). *Harvest* (Shouhuo) 6 (December 1981): 172-233.

---. *The Dream of Our Generation* (Women zheige nianji de meng). 1982. *The Dream of Our Generation and Selections from Beijing People*. Ed. & Trans. Edward Gunn, Donna Jung and Patricia Farr. Ithaca, New York: East Asia Program, Cornell U, 1993. 7-65.

B: Selected Bibliography

Anderson, Marston. *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1990.

Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.

Bailey, Alison. "Traveling Together: Narrative Technique in Zhang Jie's *The Ark*." *Modern Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals*. Ed. Michael S. Duke. New York: Sharpe, 1989. 96-111.

Bal, Mieke. "Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow: The Emergence of Female Character (A Reading of Genesis 1-3)." *Arethusa* 16.1-2 (1983): 117-35.

Berryman, Charles. "Atwood's Narrative Quest." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 17.1 (Winter 1987): 51-56.

Besner, Neil K. *The Light of Imagination: Mavis Gallant's Fiction*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1988.

Blodgett, E. D. "On Surfacing: Response to Margaret Atwood." *Peace, Development and Culture: Comparative Studies of India and Canada*. Ed. Harold Coward. Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, 1988. 83-89.

---. *Alice Munro*. Boston: Twayne, 1988.

---. "Heresy and Other Arts: A Measure of Mavis Gallant's Fiction." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 42 (1990): 1-8.

---. "The Letter and Its Gloss: Mavis Gallant's *A Fairly Good Time*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 42 (1990): 173-90.

Broege, Valerie. "Margaret Atwood's Americans and Canadians." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 22 (Summer 1981): 111-35.

Cheng Daixi. *Shikan* (Poetry Monthly) 4 (1981): 3-8.

Cheung, King-Kok. *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yammoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.

Chow, Rey. *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reaind between West and China*. Minnesota: U of Minnesota P, 1991.

Chow, Tse-tsung. *The May Fourth Movement*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1960.

Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978.

Croll, Elisabeth. *Feminism and Socialism in China*. London: Routledge, 1978.

Dai Qing. "Bu neng yong yizhong secai miaohui shenghuo: yu Xiao Lin tongzhi shangque" (Life Should Not Be Portrayed in a Single Colour: A Response to Comrade Xiao Lin). *Guangming Daily* (28 May 1980): 4.

Davidson, Cathy N., and E. M. Broner, eds. *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughter in Literature*. New York: Ungar, 1980.

Davis, Robert Con, ed. and with introduction. *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Modernism Through Poststructuralism*. New York: Longman, 1986.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. 1949. Trans. H. M. Parshley. New York: Knopf, 1964.

Duke, Michael S., ed. *Modern Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals*. New York: Sharpe, 1989.

Dworkin, Andrea. *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics*. New York: Harper, 1976.

Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.

Feuerwerker, Yi-tsi Mei. *Ding Ling's Fiction*. Cambridge,

Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1982.

Fogal, Stanley. *A Tale of Two Countries: Contemporary Fiction in English Canada and the United States.* Toronto: ECW, 116.

Frye, Joanne S. *Living Stories, Telling Lives: Women and the Novel in Contemporary Experience*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1986.

Frye, Northrop. *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination*. Toronto: Anansi, 1971.

Fujita, Gayle K. "'To Attend the Sound of Stone': The Sensibility of Silence in *Obasan*." *MELUS* 12.3 (1985): 33-42.

Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "On Female Identity and Writing by Women." *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (Winter 1981): 347-61.

Gerstlacher, Anna, Ruth Keen, Wolfgang Kubin, Margit Miosga, and Jenny Schon, eds. *Women and Literature in China*. Bochum: Studienverlag Brockmeyer, 1985.

Gibson, Graeme. *Eleven Canadian Novelists*. Toronto: Anansi, 1973.

Goldblatt, Howard. *Hsiao Hung*. Boston: Twayne, 1976.

Grace, Sherrill. *Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret*

Atwood. Montreal: Vehicule, 1980.

Greene, Gayle, and Coppélia Kahn. "Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Women." *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. Ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn. London: Methuen, 1985. 1-36.

He Li. "Modernism and China: A Summary from the *People's Daily*." Trans. Geremie Barmé. *Trees on the Mountain*. Ed. Stephen C. Soong and John Minford. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1984. 44-54.

Hegel, Robert E. "The Search for Identity in Fiction from Taiwan." *Expression of Self in Chinese Literature*. Ed. Robert E. Hegel and Richard C. Hessney. New York: Columbia UP, 1985. 344-360.

Homans, Margaret. "'Her Very Own Howl': The Ambiguity of Representation in Recent Women's Writing." *Signs* 9.2 (Winter 1983): 186-205.

Hsia, C. T. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction: 1917-1957*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1961.

Hu Heqing. "Zhang Jie aiqing guannian de bianhua" (The Change in Zhang Jie's Conception of Love). *Dangdai wenyi sichao* (The Current Tendency in Literature and

Arts) 6 (1986): 40-46.

Hung, Eva. "Introduction: *Love on a Barren Mountain.*" *Love on a Barren Mountain*. Trans. Eva Hung. Hong Kong: Research Center for Translation, Chinese U of Hong Kong, 1991.

Hutcheon, Linda. "From Poetic to Narrative Structures: The Novels of Margaret Atwood." *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text, and System*. Ed. Sherrill E. Grace and Lorraine Weir. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1983.

---. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1988.

Irigaray, Luce. "Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un." *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. New York: Massachusetts UP, 1980. 99-106.

Irvine, Lorna. *Sub/version: Canadian Fictions by Women*. Toronto: ECW, 1986.

---. "Starting from the Beginning Every Time." *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing*. Ed. Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli. Edmonton: Longspoon, 1986. 245-55.

Ivekovic, Rada. "Yugoslav Neofeminism." *Sisterhood Is Global*. Ed. Robin Morgan. New York: Anchor, 1984. 734-36.

Jones, Ann Rosalind. "Inscribing Femininity: French Theories of the Feminine." *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. Ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn. London: Metheun, 1985. 80-112.

Jones, Manina. "The Avenues of Speech and Silence: Telling Difference in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*." *Theory between the Disciplines: Authority/Vision/Politics*. Ed. Martin Kreiswirth and Mark A. Cheetham. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1990. 213-29.

Keefer, Janice Kulyk. *Reading Mavis Gallant*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1989.

Kern, Stephen. *Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

Kolodny, Annette. "Some Notes on Defining a 'Feminist Literary Criticism.'" *Critical Inquiry* 2.1 (Autumn 1975): 75-92.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Leon S. Roudiez. New York:

Columbia UP, 1980.

---. "La femme, Ce n'est jammais ça." *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*. Ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. New York: Massachusetts UP, 1980. 137-41.

---. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.

---. "Stabat Mater." *Contemporary Literary Theory*. Ed. Dan Latimer. Toronto: Jovanovich, 1989.

Ku, Yenlin. "The Changing Status of Women in Taiwan: A Conscious and Collective Struggle toward Equality." *Women's Studies International Forum* 11.3 (1988): 179-86.

Lanser, Susan. "Toward a Feminist Narratology." *Style* 20 (1986): 341-63.

Lavrin, Janko. *Studies in European Literature*. New York: Smith, 1930.

Lee, Leo Ou-Fan. "The Politics of Technique: Perspectives of Literary Dissidence in Contemporary Chinese Fiction." *After Mao: Chinese Literature and Society 1978-1981*. Ed. Jeffrey C. Kinkley. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985. 159-190.

Leung, Laifong. *Morning Sun: Interviews with Chinese Writers of the Lost Generation*. Armonk, New York: Sharpe, 1994.

Li Xiaojiang. "Beifu zhe chuantong de fankang" (Resistance to Tradition). *Zhejiang xuebao* (Zhejiang Literary Quarterly) 3 (1996): 118-121.

Li Ziyun. "Women's Consciousness and Woman's Writing." Trans. Zhu Hong. *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*. Ed. Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel, and Tyrene White. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1994. 299-317.

Liu, Lydia H. "Invention and Intervention: The Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature." *Gender Politics in Modern China*. Ed. Tani E. Barlow. Durham: Duke UP, 1993. 33-57.

McDougall, Bonnie S, and Chen Maiping. "Introduction: *Brocade Valley*." New York: New Directions, 1992.

Magnusson, A. Lynne. "Language and Longing in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*." *Canadian Literature* 116 (Spring 1988): 58-66.

Meng Yue. "Female Images and National Myth." *Gender Politics in Modern China*. Ed. Tani E. Barlow. Durham:

Duke UP, 1993. 118-136.

Meng Yue, and Dai Jinhua. *Fuchu lishi dibiao* (Emerging from the Horizon of History). Zhengzhou: Hunan People's Publishing House, 1989.

Merler, Grazia. *Mavis Gallant: Narrative Patterns and Devices*. Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1978.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983

Munich, Adrienne. "Notorious Signs, Feminist Criticism and Literary Tradition." *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. Ed. Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn. London: Methuen, 1985. 238-59.

Ngai, Ling Tun. "Politics of Sexuality: The Fiction of Zhang Xianliang, Mo Yan and Wang Anyi." Diss. U of Wisconsin-Madison, 1994.

Offen, Karen. "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach." *Signs* 14.1 (Autumn 1988): 119-57.

Prazniak, Roxann. "Feminist Humanism: Socialism and Neofeminism in the Writings of Zhang Jie." *Marxism and the Chinese Experience*. Ed. Arif Dirlik and Maurice

Meisner. Armonk, New York: Sharpe, 1989. 269-93.

Radner, Joan, and Susan Lanser. "The Feminist Voice: Coding in Women's Folklore and Literature." *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (1987): 412-25.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton, 1976.

Ruthven, K. K. *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*. Cambridge, London: Cambridge UP, 1984

Sandler, Linda. "Interview with Margaret Atwood." *The Malahat Review* 41 (January 1977): 7-27.

Selden, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Kentucky: the UP of Kentucky, 1985.

Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1977.

Stratford, Philip. "The Uses of Ambiguity: Margaret Atwood and Hubert Aquin." *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text, and System*. Ed. Sherrill E. Grace and Lorraine Weir. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1983. 113-24.

Wakeman, Carolyn, and Yue Daiyun. "Fiction's End: Zhang Xinxin's New Approaches to Creativity." *Modern Chinese*

Women Writers: Critical Appraisals. Ed. Michael S. Duke. New York: Sharpe, 1989. 196-216.

Wang, David Der-wei. "Feminist Consciousness in Modern Male Fiction." *Modern Chinese Women Writers: Critical Appraisals*. Ed. Michael S. Duke. New York: Sharpe, 1989. 236-56.

Wang Fei. "Zhang Xinxin xiaoshuo de leixing shijing yu waizai jingjie" (The Two Worlds in Zhang Xinxin's Fiction). *Wenxue pinglun* (Literary Review) 3 (1986): 44-52.

Wang Zheng. "Three Interviews: Wang Anyi, Zhu Lin, Dai Qing." *Modern Chinese Literature* 4.1-2 (Spring & Fall 1988): 99-146.

Wong, Nellie. "Socialist Feminism: Our Bridge to Freedom." *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Ed. Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1991. 288-96.

Xiao Lin. "Shitan 'Ai shi bu neng wangji de' de gediao wenti" (On the Moral View of "Love Must Not Be Forgotten"). *Guangming Daily* (14 May 1980): 4.

Yuan, Heh-hsiang. "East-West Comparative Literature: An

Inquiry into Possibilities." *Chinese-Western Comparative Literature: Theory and Strategy*. Ed. John J. Deeney. Hong Kong: The Chinese UP, 1980. 1-24.

Zhang Jingyuan. "Jiegou shenhua--ping Wang Anyi de *Dixiong men*" (Deconstructing the Myth: A Critique of Wang Anyi's *Brothers*). *Dangdai zuojia pinglun* (Studies of Contemporary Writers) 2 (1992): 31-34.

Zhang Xinxin. "Biyao de huida" (A Necessary Response). *Wenyi bao* (Literary Gazette) 6 (June 1983): 76.

Zhu Jing. "The Confused 'Transparent Sight.'" *Guangming Daily* (15 July 1982): 4.

Zito, Angela, and Tani E. Barlow. *Body, Subject and Power in China*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.