

WOMEN'S SEARCH FOR ARTISTIC RECOGNITION IN BRAZIL AND CANADA: FROM OUTLAWS TO POWERFUL CONSTRUCTORS OF A HERITAGE

MULHERES EM BUSCA DO RECONHECIMENTO ARTÍSTICO NO BRASIL E CANADÁ: DE CRIMINOSAS A PODEROSAS CONSTRUTORAS DA HERANÇA CULTURAL

Lidiane Cunha¹

Submetido em 30 de junho e aprovado em 7 de outubro de 2013

Abstract: Brazilian and Canadian women writers emerging from the 1960s to the 1990s celebrated women's role as artistic creators, but were they not naïve. Helena P. Cunha, Lya Luft, Margaret Laurence, and Margaret Atwood show that the cultural and governmental foundations of a society largely affect women's abilities to pursue professions as painters, writers, and musicians, as seen in the image constructed by their secondary characters. These external views are not the same in Brazilian and Canadian novels, leading their female protagonists to approach their artistic roles and fight for their success in strikingly different ways. Women artists portrayed in Brazilian fiction must confront the views their society uses to undermine the value of their profession, but they often cannot overcome their cultural barriers. Their Canadian counterparts also encounter challenges to become successful. However, their social environments provide a more encouraging opinion of women in artistic careers than that offered in the Brazilian novels.

Keywords: Inter-American Studies; women's writing; representation of women artists in fiction; gender and art.

¹ Lidiane Cunha holds a Bachelors and a Master's degree in English. In 2012, she finished her PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta, in Canada. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on the representation of women as mothers and artists in Brazilian and Canadian literatures in the second part of the twentieth century. Her research interest includes the portrait of women artists in Romanticism and contemporary fiction, the feminist discourses of motherhood, and the cultural representations of motherhood in North and Latin American cultures. lidiane@ualberta.ca

Resumo: As escritoras brasileiras e canadenses que conquistaram um espaço nas letras entre as décadas de 60 e 90 celebram a função da mulher como criadora artística, porém não são ingênuas. Helena P. Cunha, Lya Luft, Margaret Laurence e Margaret Atwood mostram que as bases culturais e governamentais de uma sociedade influenciam a capacidade das mulheres de buscarem uma profissão na indústria cultural de seu país e de se tornarem pintoras, escritoras, musicistas, conforme são percebidas pelos personagens secundários. Essas visões externas não são as mesmas nas narrativas brasileiras e canadenses, o que leva as personagens principais a vivenciarem seus papéis de artistas e a buscarem o sucesso em suas carreiras de formas extremamente diferentes. As artistas representadas nos romances brasileiros precisam confrontar as imagens negativas usadas pela sociedade para desvalorizar sua profissão, contudo, elas nem sempre conseguem superar suas barreiras culturais. As personagens canadenses também encontram desafios para alcançarem seu sucesso. Entretanto, a sociedade nas quais elas estão inseridas oferecem imagens mais construtivas sobre mulheres artistas do que as opiniões disseminadas nas narrativas brasileiras.

Palavras-chave: Estudos Interamericanos; romance de autoria feminina; representação da mulher artista; gênero e arte.

Brazilian and Canadian women emerging from the 1960s to the 1990s celebrated women's role as artistic creators, but they were not naïve about female experience in the arts. In their works, Helena Cunha, Lya Luft, Margaret Laurence, and Margaret Atwood show that when a society provides women artists with cultural and legal support and recognizes their professional choices, it affects their abilities to pursue a career as painters, writers, and musicians and increases their opportunities to succeed in their respective cultural industries. In contrast, the absence of those foundations and a negative reception of women in the arts create a detrimental image for a woman artist, which discourages women from fully developing their artistic potential. As the protagonists of Lya Luft's *O Quarto Fechado* (1984, 1986), Helena da Cunha's *As Doze Cores do Vermelho* (1988),

Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974), and Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* (1988) become artists, the images of the woman artist that secondary characters construct in the novels allow the readers to have insights into how Brazilian and Canadian societies supported, received, and recognized women's artistic positions in the second half of the twentieth century.

The external images of the woman artist are not the same in Brazilian and Canadian fiction, leading their female protagonists to approach their artistic roles and fight for their success in strikingly different ways. In their search for social acceptance, women artists portrayed in Brazilian fiction must confront the views that their society uses to undermine the value of their profession, but they often cannot overcome their cultural barriers. Their Canadian counterparts encounter challenges that both male and female artists are likely to face to become successful. However, the societal environment the Canadian authors portray in their novels provides a more supporting and encouraging opinion of women in artistic careers than that offered in Brazil. This study will show that the responses to women artists' professional aspirations in the works by Cunha, Luft, Laurence, and Atwood can be read as the typical reception of the women in the arts at the time, thus illustrating well the differences in the way the societies and artistic communities of each country received women artists from the 1960s to the 1990s and hence influenced their professional failure or success.

I am aware of the challenges in analyzing two cultures that have been, according to Sandra Almeida, separated by the vast gap between their current social and political realities (2001, p. 57). Their differences impose problems for examining the cultural experiences that inform the works by Brazilian and Canadian women writers. Such a comparative methodology could create "a hierarchy in which some literatures, texts, and authors are always perceived to be at the top while others are automatically relegated to a secondary status" (MCCLENNEN; FITZ, 2002, n.p.). Nevertheless,

while challenging my study, the unique cultural, social, and political patterns of each country allow me to create a valid dialogue between South and North America. As Sérgio Bellei explains, an analysis of Brazil and Canada requires “an impossible comparative method (contrasting, exploring the spaces of meaning and silence).” Yet, such a method “makes possible a more clear understanding of the nature of the theoretical practices in the north and south of the Equator” (BELLEI, 2005, p. 15).¹ Indeed, one of my concerns is to explain the different expectations of what it is to be a woman artist in the cultural imaginary of Brazil and Canada, without polarizing their artistic productions or enlarging the gap between these two cultures. A comparative approach in literary studies can be dangerous, as it often creates “a hierarchy in which some literatures, texts, and authors are always perceived to be at the top while others are automatically relegated to a secondary status” (MCCLENNEN; FITZ, 2002, p. 2). Therefore, even though I will show how the unique cultural factors that constitute Brazilian and Canadian societies have generated two specific female experiences with the arts, I hope to explore Brazilian and Canadian female literature as equally significant traditions.

Cultural Support and Societal Responses to Women in the Arts in Brazil and Canada

It is true that the generations of Brazilian women who emerged at the time gradually found more space in artistic professions than did their female ancestors. Female writers, for instance, contributed to the creation of a strong literary tradition. As Earl Fitz observes, “Since the 1950s in Brazil [...], the novel and the short story have been practiced by a number of outstanding women [...] who deal with issues of gender, sexuality, and power in nontraditional ways” (2005, p. 185). Many Brazilian female writers from this period “attained greater critical recognition than did their

counterparts in Spanish America.” However, we cannot overlook the fact that Brazilian female writers “are only now beginning to receive the critical attention they deserve” (PAYNE; FITZ, 1993, p. 3-4). In the second half of the twentieth century, female artists still confronted a government that did not support cultural production and an artistic community that did not recognize or celebrate women’s contribution to the arts.

Indeed, Brazilian artists in general struggled with a government that did not provide support to artists until 1986, when Act 7505 was implemented to collect taxes for the creation of the Fund for Cultural Promotion. Nonetheless, in 1991, the approval of Act 8313 allowed the government to extinguish this fund, along with the Ministry of Culture. The implementation of Act 8313 in the subsequent years was criticized as “an attempt to exempt the state from any responsibility to finance culture – through the destruction of one of the most important public cultural institutions in the country and the drastic reduction of funding in the area” (MOISÉS, 2011, n.p). Later on the government created the National Fund of Culture and restored its position to encourage and protect artistic production in Brazil. Women faced challenges in pursuing a profession in the arts not only because of the scarce financial support provided to artists in general but also because of the existence of an exclusionary cultural tradition that disregarded women’s works in particular. In literature, for instance, the criteria for including texts in the canon were based on supposedly objective “aesthetic standards” that were, in reality, “contaminated by a gendered discourse” and favoured a “masculine perception” (SCHMIDT, 2008, p. 133-34). Such biased standards of evaluation pertaining to literary criticism for a long time rendered women invisible in major literary anthologies, as though no female writer had ever existed before Rachel de Queiroz and Cecília Meireles (Idem, p. 131). For instance, Schmidt explains that Mário da Silva Brito and Alfredo Bosi do not fairly include significant women writers in their anthologies *Histórias do modernismo*

brasileiro (1964) and *História concisa da literatura brasileira* (1965). My analysis of José Castello's *A literatura brasileira* (1999) shows that women continued to be excluded from literary anthologies in Brazil later in the twentieth century.² The preference for male writers is also noticeable in the country's most prestigious literary association. Although the Brazilian Academy of Letters (ABL) was founded in 1897, it excluded women among its honorary members until 1977, when it accepted its first female member, Rachel de Queiroz. Over 280 past and current writers have been selected and granted membership in the ABL, but only 2.5% of them are women. While renowned intuitions disregarded women's contribution to culture, the publishing market was reluctant to welcome works by women writers even at the turn of the twentieth century. In a 2007 analysis of "all the novels published by the major Brazilian publishing houses (Companhia das Letras, Record and Rocco) in the prior 15 years [...] women writers did not reach 30% of all writers edited" (DALCASTAGNÈ, 2007, p. 128). The canonization of male writers in anthologies and the selection of few women by literary institutions and publishing houses clearly reflect the discouraging reality that aspiring and professional women artists faced in the second half of the twentieth century in Brazil.

Cunha and Luft denounce the discouraging experience faced by the typical Brazilian woman who attempted to follow her creative ambitions at that time. Central characters of their novels do not encounter in their families and society the necessary support for their careers. As I will show in this section, their families, friends, and communities respond to the protagonists' artistic ambitions with harsh opinions that constrain and devalue their profession just as, during the period when the novels were published, the Brazilian government did not support artists while the artistic communities, market, and critics in the country discriminated against women. Cunha and Luft make the reader aware of the existence of a similarly exclusionary environment by creating negative images of the woman artist

throughout the narrative. The protagonists' friends, families, and partners use those images to degrade the female characters' artistic positions and work.

Cunha's *As doze cores do vermelho* is a multifaceted novel structured in three temporal dimensions: past, present, and future. The past introduces the reader to a nameless girl who dreams of becoming a painter, but has her dream destroyed by the traditional female role her family convinces her to accept. The present exposes her difficult relationship with her husband and two daughters and her decision to postpone her training as a painter. The future provides insights into her rebellion against society as she finally establishes herself as a visual artist. In the second dimension, after Cunha's nameless protagonist has her first child and attempts to paint, her husband tells her that "instead of taking care of your daughter, you're wasting time with these paintings that nobody can understand" (CUNHA, 1988, p. 19).³ His first critique of the painter's work suggests that investing in a career that does not have much value for society is often considered a waste of time. Cunha initially protests against the devaluation of the role of artists in general. But, later on, her novel shows that the painter is actually subject to discrimination against women artists, which becomes clear when an important art critic invites the protagonist to exhibit her works. Instead of supporting the painter, her husband humiliates her: "You must not have an exhibition in the gallery on the beach or you will run the risk of ridiculing yourself and, after all, nobody will buy those eccentric paintings" (CUNHA, p. 77).

In Cunha's fictional portrait of twentieth-century Brazilian society, people do more than simply humiliate women artists; they also disseminate negative images of women artists. A woman who searches for an artistic identity becomes a threat to the laws that sustain the patriarchal family and the exclusionary artistic communities of Brazil. Hence, by trespassing

on the boundaries of a “masculine” career and deviating from the roles of submissive wife and pious mother, women artists are often considered out-laws and prostitutes. In the third temporal dimension of *As doze cores do vermelho*, after the central character finally establishes herself as a painter, she never ceases to be a caring mother. However, whenever she needs to leave the traditional space assigned to a housewife and mother to exhibit her art in galleries and conventions, her husband tells their children that she “only thinks about travelling and abandoning her children” (CUNHA, p. 41). In his opinion, the painter “is destroying the family and [...] their daughters will be harmed permanently” because of her choice to work as an artist, which he defines as “criminal egotism” (p. 53). This is not the case. Both daughters actually develop psychological problems before the central character becomes successful. Her younger daughter is an infantilized, asexual and psychotic teenager, whereas the older daughter experiments with drugs and unconventional sexual behaviour and embraces rock and roll music at a young age. Because the protagonist does not dedicate herself exclusively to her daughters and steps outside the norm of femininity, her choice to invest in a career is regarded as a “criminal” act and she is held accountable for her daughters’ extreme behaviour.

Since her career also liberates her from the constraints of her former position, Cunha’s protagonist is considered a prostitute. One of the central character’s former high school friends discovers that her husband is having an affair with the painter and tells her that “some women [...] want to steal the husband of honest housewives and make a career acting like prostitutes” (p. 89). By identifying the painter with the group of women who “sell themselves and, instead of money, receive trips and gold medals” (p. 89), her friend accepts a judgemental perception of women artists, downgrading the value of the central character’s art, as well as her career. It is true that the protagonist crosses several ethical borders by committing adultery, but she is rewarded with valuable prizes because of the quality of

her art, not her body. Yet, more than simply denouncing how her society misjudges women in the arts, Cunha conspicuously associates the woman artist with the image of the prostitute. By doing so, she emphasizes that her protagonist is able to transgress the boundaries of the patriarchal family and its definitions of mothers/housewives as passive and often asexual individuals. Cunha's heroine undergoes a deep process of awakening of her mind and body, developing her self-confidence on the professional level and striving for sexual liberation.

Luft's *O quarto fechado* tells the story of middle-aged Renata, who attends her son's funeral and reflects back on her life, from her aspirations to become a musician at an early age to her restrictive experience as a housewife and mother of twins. During her childhood, Renata's parents respect her artistic potential treating "her as someone special" (LUFT, 1986, p. 12).⁴ Their support allows her to become a successful musician. Nevertheless, Renata's artistic identity is perceived as a menacing power during the peak of her career. When her future husband, Martim, meets Renata for the first time on stage, he is impressed because she "unleashed on the piano energy that he had never imagined," and which led him to feel "moved to tears" (p. 28). After they are introduced to each other, he "could not forget the energy she had hidden within her, the power" (p. 28). Martim's attraction to Renata's creative energy, nonetheless, goes beyond admiration. He actually "wanted to make her soul his" and "would possess even her art" (p. 29). His need to dominate her music suggests that Martim supports the view that a woman's artistic potential is a threatening force that needs to be contained.

Renata accepts to get married to Martim believing that "she might play again" in the future (p. 30). After the former pianist has children, she "ached to be with her music," which she identifies as "her real life" (p. 30). Renata begins to shut herself in the living room to play the piano, but

her behaviour deviates from the traditional female roles expected from a woman in her society. Just as the nameless protagonist's decision to paint in Cunha's novel is socially rejected, Renata's private escapes to music also elicit criticism. Martim, for instance, believes that her secret performances in the house are harmful to their relationship. He begins to question "her crazy habit of locking herself in the living room and playing alone, with a passion that she never expressed with him: wasn't she then getting away from him little by little?" (p. 29). By associating Renata's passion for music with madness, Martim undermines the value of a woman's artistic identity. Renata's attempts to dedicate herself to her music are also considered destructive to the order of the traditional family. In Martim's patriarchal opinion, Renata's position as a musician can distract her from being a "good" mother and, as a result, damage their children. When she has her third child, baby Rafael, Renata enjoys being a mother. But she soon realizes that her maternal experience cannot replace her artistic ambitions: she needs to play the piano, "not just casually [...] to distract herself, but passionately to expose the depths of her soul" (p. 86). During one of Renata's momentary escapes, her sister-in-law leaves baby Rafael unattended, he falls down the staircase and dies. After the accident, Martim and Renata are "separated by an unasked yet logical question: Renata, what were you doing when our son..." (p. 87). He indirectly blames Renata and her music for the accident, selling her piano and abandoning her after Rafael's funeral.

The women artists portrayed in Canadian fiction confront several obstacles to succeeding in their careers, but they are not always subject to the gender discrimination that devalues the image of the woman artist in the Brazilian society that Cunha and Luft represent. The conflicts experienced by the female protagonists of the selected Canadian works capture the reality of a group of women artists who had access to a more inclusive cultural community than did their Brazilian counterparts. Still,

I do not ignore the fact that critics and artists have often questioned the myth of women's prominent status in Canadian culture between the 1960s and the 1990s. As Laurence explains, "in those years," women's literature "was generally regarded by critics and reviewers in [Canada] with at best an amused tolerance, at worst a dismissive shrug" (1989, p. 5). Gerson analyses the representation of women in anthologies of English Canadian literature and claims that the criteria of selecting who becomes part of the Canadian literary canon involved "an unacknowledged component based on education, occupation, academic connections, and therefore, by extension, gender" (1990, p. 57). Although the process of canonization of writers in Canada was subject to gender inequality, the claim that women writers often reached prominent status in French and English Canada is not over-optimistic and generalized. Even prior to the 1960s, prestigious literary societies accepted women and recognized their work. For example, the Canadian Society of Authors "announced that they would make 'no distinct sex'," and the Royal Society of Canada elected Gabrielle Roy as its first female member in 1947 (GERSON, 2010, p. 84) – three decades before the ABL granted membership to Queiroz. Moreover, the increase in the participation of Canadian women in literary associations, from the 1960s to the 1990s supports my view that a large number of Canadian women had enough confidence to fight for their literary careers, whereas their Brazilian counterparts reacted more timidly against their prejudiced culture. In the *Société d'écrivains canadiens*, women represented 25% of its members in the 1960s and 52% in 1978 (GERSON; LUNEAU, 2004, p. 95). They also made up approximately 31% of the Canadian Authors Association English-speaking membership from the 1920s to the 1980s (GERSON; LUNEAU, p. 95).

To be confident about pursuing artistic careers and feel integrated in their artistic communities, Canadian women needed concrete support from their societies. Their Brazilian counterparts faced a system that repressed

women's artistic production. In contrast, Canadian women artists generally encountered a cultural community that supported artists and valued female creativity. Artists began to fight for the implementation of a favourable cultural condition as early as 1936, when a group of them formed a trade union in Toronto to "protect their trade or profession" (VIVASH, 1937, p. 22). While Canadian artists actively demanded the value of their work, the government made significant investments on the arts later in the twentieth century. Since the 1950s, it has offered programs to assist aspiring and professional artists, especially writers. Through interventions like the Massey Report of 1951 and the subsequent creation of the Canada Council of the Arts in 1957, the state helped to create "[n]ewer resources for writers" (DAVEY, 2004, p. 106). Writers had access to programs initiated by the Canada Council, such as the Writer-in-Residence Program, funding for public readings, and grants to Canadian book publishers and periodicals, not to mention the increase of funds to finance literary grants (p. 107). Indeed, over the course of the twentieth century, the government's arts programs not only had a positive effect on Canadian writers' critical acclaim, but also improved their economic realities. This "development arose through increased sales of their work, and also through a growing infrastructure of support" (p. 113). When the government established an infrastructure of support in Canada's cultural industry, generating economic opportunities for writers in general, it also developed a market in which women writers could attain some level of financial independence. Financial need has, for a long time, justified "a middle class woman's recourse to literary labour to support herself or her children" (GERSON, 2010, p. 68). In fact, "over the past several centuries, writing has 'afforded' women one of their few economically viable opportunities to work" (p. 68). Such financial independence indirectly challenged the traditional perception of women writers as individuals excluded from the production of literature and, in some cases, allowed Canadian women writers to pursue social au-

tonomy in the twentieth century. Even the idea of the marginality of the Canadian female tradition “is a changing concept,” for women writers in the country have often been “far from destitute and they are not dependent on men” (STEENMAN-MARCUSSE, 2001, p. 49).

The Diviners and *Cat's Eye* do not idealize the lives of Canadian women artists because Laurence and Atwood acknowledge their characters' limitations as they search for professional fulfilment. In *The Diviners*, Morag's major obstacles to establishing her literary career are related to the challenging nature of the writing process. Before her marriage collapses, she decides to invest in her literary potential. Her husband Brooke offers to revise her stories, but his comments on the implausible endings of her texts discourage her (LAURENCE, 1974, p. 260). In his attempts to undermine Morag's literary ambition and assert his power in their relationship, Brooke's behaviour is similar to that of the male characters represented in the artist novels by Luft and Cunha. Nonetheless, even though his critiques are “condescending” (STOVEL, 2008, p. 260), Brooke's comments draw Morag's attention to two valid aspects of literary production. First, writing requires effort. She learns this lesson when her novels are rejected, when she has to do major revisions, and when her published works receive harsh literary criticism. Even after Morag becomes successful, she confesses that she “always thought [writing] would get easier, but it doesn't” (LAURENCE, 1974, p. 248). Second, writers need a large amount of time to reach literary maturity. Once Morag becomes a single mother, she realizes that her maternal responsibilities compete for time with her writing. With little or no help to nurture her young child Pique, Morag doubts if she will be able to finish her new novel. By exposing Morag's anxieties, Laurence shows that, if the literary process demands availability and effort from writers in general, writing can be a challenging career for women whose time and energy are constantly consumed by the act of mothering.

The protagonist of *Cat's Eye* is often concerned about women's ability to participate in the cultural tradition of Canada. When Elaine is pursuing her final arts degree at university, many female students are discouraged from following an artistic career. In her Art and Archaeology class, "[n]one of the girl students wants to be an artist; instead they want to be teachers of art in high schools, or, in one case, a curator in a gallery" (ATWOOD, 1988, p. 301). After she becomes a renowned painter, Elaine is also subject to discrimination in prestigious art institutions. She accepts the offer of a group of women artists to organize her exhibition because she knows "how hard it is to get a retrospective anywhere, if you're female" (p. 91). Elaine feels "cheesed off because the Art Gallery of Ontario wouldn't do it. Their bias," she explains, "is toward dead, foreign men" (p. 16). In this passage, the painter shows that prestigious art institutions in Canada discriminate not only against women but also against Canadian artists in general. As Atwood claims in *Survival*, the Canadian audience and art critics suffered for a long time from a sense of cultural inferiority in the twentieth century. They often defined Canadian literature as "'second rate,' 'provincial,' or 'regional'" (ATWOOD, 1972, p. 181-82). As a result, they depreciated the quality of their national art and became dependent on cultural production from England and the United States (BESNER, 1992, p. 10).

Although Laurence and Atwood expose the typical anxieties faced by Canadian women artists, their novels represent a cultural environment that has created favourable conditions for women's participation in the arts. Whereas Luft and Cunha denounce the devaluation of women artists in a society that fails to appreciate their work and defines them as criminals, prostitutes, and destroyers of the family, the aforementioned Canadian writers capture the inclusive and supporting factors of their culture. Families, friends, and the artistic communities (readers, viewers, literary reviewers, and art critics) support the protagonists' pursuit of artistic ca-

reers, recognize the value of their profession, and/or disseminate meaningful images for the woman artist. In *The Diviners*, when pregnant Morag has no choice but to work as a servant in a boarding house, a publisher's representative informs her about the acceptance of one of her novels overseas and encourages Morag to write short stories and articles for local newspapers. He values her artistic skills and believes that Morag "should be writing," instead of working as a domestic servant (LAURENCE, 1974, p. 350). Later in her life, she feels lucky and does not "*know what difficulty means*" because "*there are some royalties dribbling in from past books, although not much, and*" even if she "*were really broke, [she] could go to the publishers and ask for a small advance on the next book*" (p. 426). Morag receives not only encouragement and financial assistance from her publishers, but also recognition from her readers. When she visits her dying stepfather in her hometown, a young nurse tells her that she is "glad [Morag is] from Manawaka" and that "[t]hey've got [her] books in the library" (p. 459). Moreover, her reviewers acknowledge her contribution to the Canadian literary tradition. They consider her an established writer, although Morag still thinks "of herself as a beginning writer" (p. 490). As Morag attains economic stability and literary prestige, Laurence shows that a woman's artistic identity can be accepted and respected by her audience, her literary critics, and the publishing industry in Canada.

Atwood also represents a woman artist who is socially accepted in her decision to become an artist. When Elaine chooses her career, her parents support her professional decision even though they "were worried about how [she] would make a living" as a painter. Her mother reassures Elaine, saying that her choice "was fine if it was what [she] really wanted to do" (ATWOOD, 1988, p. 300). Elaine's partners also respect her position. Her first husband, the visual artist John, never pressures Elaine into abandoning her professional ambitions and staying in the position of a

traditional housewife. He actually hopes that they both reproduce the Romantic image of artist as an individual who “can’t live like other people, tied down to demanding families and expensive material possessions” (p. 366). Elaine, however, does not entirely share his view because, first, she privileges her financial stability and, second, she refuses to reject her maternal potential when she faces an unplanned pregnancy. Moreover, Atwood underlines the fact that her society evaluates artists according to their professional and economic success, not simply their gender. Young Elaine is aware of the financial restrictions that artists typically face, but, to avoid these problems, she complements her Fine Arts degree with Advertising Art courses. In these classes, students “have serious ambitions” and “want paying jobs when they graduate” and so does she (p. 356). Later on, she also applies for jobs in the area and accepts a position in “the art department of a publishing company,” where she designs “book covers” (p. 358). Elaine also explains that the “word artist embarrasses” her. She prefers to identify herself as a “painter, because it’s more like a valid job.” If painters “make a lot of money,” they are not “looked at strangely” (p. 16). Although Atwood does not overlook the economic devaluation of artists in any society, she may be suggesting that an artist who is committed to working hard may enter the cultural industry in Canada. This observation illustrates another major difference in the reception of women artists in Brazilian and Canadian cultures. In the novels by Luft and Cunha, gender prejudices undermine women’s potential to succeed in artistic careers. Nevertheless, the Canadian society Atwood portrays in *Cat’s Eye* recognizes the potential of a hard-working artist, independently of his or her gender. Elaine is more concerned about the pressure to increase her economic value than the obstacles imposed by gender discrimination.

Destruction and Meaningful Creation in Female Art in Brazilian and Canadian Fiction

By portraying women whose partners, friends, and children consider their investments in artistic careers illegal, perverse, and destructive, Cunha and Luft underline the fact that their culture misjudges and misrepresents women who are artists. In *As doze cores do vermelho* and *O quarto fechado*, the references to women artists as outlaws, prostitutes, and dangerous individuals have negative effects on the lives of women artists. As they postpone or abandon the battle against the biased images that undermine the value of their artistic experience, the women artists portrayed in both novels are not able to fully fulfil their artistic potential. For a long time, the painter of *As doze cores do vermelho* accepts her husband's humiliating criticism, but she finally finds the courage to fight for her creative work and reject the judgemental images of women artists. She promises one of her friends that she "will never want to hear the voices that close her free path" (CUNHA, 1988, p. 67). Nonetheless, she realizes that the social prejudice against her profession continues to impose such a powerful conflict on her life that she feels divided between two incompatible roles. On the one hand, she is constantly pulled by a self-sacrificing maternal function, which Cunha defines through a spatial reference called *o lado de cá* (this side). She often returns to this confining space because she feels guilty about her lack of aptitude to understand and help her two daughters. On the other hand, she is attracted by *o lado de lá* (the other side), which stands for the unconventional private space – the room of one's own – in which a woman can develop her creative profession and gain financial and intellectual independence. *O lado de lá* offers "the horizon without limit and size [...] The other side without borders" (p. 53). When her younger daughter is hospitalized in an asylum due to a mental breakdown and the older one is arrested for drug dealing, the painter feels pulled by *o lado de cá*, in which she becomes aware of her failure

to mother and protect her daughters from their excesses. At the same time, however, *o lado de lá* attracts her and frees her from her responsibilities. She knows that “the two sides will enclose her” (p. 101). In a moment of confusion and distress, the painter speeds in her car, has a traffic accident, and tragically dies. Her “failure” to mother her daughters, as it is perceived in Brazilian society, and her feeling that she cannot escape her conflict between art and life create a situation in which the painter annihilates her self.

Whereas Cunha’s painter at least rejects the social disparagement of her work and momentarily enjoys her artistic profession, the pianist of *O quarto fechado* does not have “the strength to make further changes in her life” (LUFT, 1886, p. 32) and becomes “a spent, broken woman” (p. 87). In her state of paralysis, Renata is unable to restore her public career as a musician: “she never played the piano again” (p. 87). She also feels split into two incompatible selves and, as a result, faces a difficult reality by the end of the text. One of her twins, Camilo, dies in a horse accident when he is an adolescent. His death mirrors Renata’s state of paralysis and symbolic death. Both characters suffer from the destructive consequences of the conflict between the rigidity of social expectations and the freedom and power of artistic expression.⁵ At Camilo’s funeral, Renata is reminded of her conflicts between the traditional maternal role she passively accepts and the artistic career she has abandoned. She feels “the anguish that had punished her doubly” (p. 105). First, Renata fails as a mother and feels responsible for not being able to help her son. She expresses her guilt when she asks her deceased son: “What have I done to you, my son?” (p. 8). Second, she loses her passion for music, since “the urge, the compulsion that moved her, that made her moan like a soul in torment, had also died within her” (p. 105). In short, both her maternal and artistic sides have been destroyed: “It was all over” and “Renata’s heart was empty” (p. 105). Nevertheless, it should be noted that Luft does not fully blame men for

reinforcing negative perceptions of the woman artist. Martim contributes to Renata's anxieties when he pressures her into sacrificing her passion for music. At the same time, he expresses his compassion: "She is suffering, very much, and I can't help her" (p. 30). Luft actually does not believe that "men have always wanted to have at their side useless adornments or apathetic slaves" (LUFT, 1997, p. 158). Instead of simply blaming Martim for the tragic course that Renata's life takes, Luft shows that Renata is partially responsible for it. Her idea of what an artist should be also prevents the pianist from combining a successful career and healthy personal life. In the early stages of her life, Renata believes that "Art had made her self-centered," but she had "to be like this, giving all her passion to her art, to be a good pianist" (LUFT, 1986, p. 26). After Camilo's death, she questions her perception of artistic identity by asking if "music was not a deception as well" (p. 105). When the pianist expresses her regret for perceiving her artistic role as such an egotistical position, Luft challenges not only the traditional views of motherhood that demand that women sacrifice their professional ambitions, but also the Romantic image of art that requires the artist to reject her personal relationships, her children, and her society. In a society that undermines the value of women's art, perhaps Renata's position is the only option left to women who want to become successful professionals. However, such an option is problematic, especially if women use their careers to merely escape this patriarchal reality, without trying to confront and change it.

Since the protagonists of the Canadian artists novels examined in this study are able to overcome most of their conflicts and feel generally respected in their positions as artists, they not only identify in their artistic experience the potential to understand themselves but also use their works to shape their cultural heritage. In *The Diviners*, because her culture recognizes the value of her work, Morag is able to develop her artistic potential and perceive her career as an empowering role. For Morag, the purpose of

writing goes beyond the creation of literature; it is also an act of divining. Diviners, such as Morag's neighbour Royland, use their mysterious abilities and find water in the depths of the earth. Initially, Morag is not sure about what she is "divining for" (LAURENCE, 1974, p. 118), but later she understands that, just like diviners, she and other artists portrayed in the novel write fictional and private words, tell stories, compose songs, and paint their realities in order to search for meaning in the depths of their inner selves. In Morag's last novel, supposedly entitled *The Diviners* (STOVEL, 2008, p. 262), she writes "down the remaining private and fictional words" (LAURENCE, 1974, p. 525). Her semi-autobiographical novel answers the question of what writer Morag is divining for: her own self. But more than a diviner who uses art to better understand her own life, Laurence's protagonist plays an influential role in shaping her cultural heritage and passing it on to younger generations of artists. This contribution is perhaps the most powerful role that Laurence assigns to her heroine. Morag explains that she "stand[s] somewhere in between" the old pioneers and the new ones. Throughout her life, she "worked damn hard," and, even though she has not "done all [she] would've like to do," Morag has built "some kind of a garden" (p. 474). Laurence thus draws our attention to the metaphorical relation between gardening and writing, reminding us of the constructive nature of both acts. For Morag, this garden "is needed, not only by [her]" (p. 474), for her writing reaches others – readers, critics, and younger artists – and becomes part of her literary tradition. From this perspective, the active role that Morag has as an artist is not in conflict with the constructive discourses of femininity and motherhood that she embraces. As a mother, the protagonist is involved in the development of a better society for her child. As a writer, she is engaged in the construction of her cultural heritage in order to pass on her "gift, or portion of grace" (p. 524) to younger generations of artists, including her daughter. At the end of the novel, Morag's gift is "finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else" (p.

524). In other words, she sees both female existence and the production of culture as processes of creation and continuity. Whereas Cunha and Luft show that women artists are pushed into perceiving these two experiences as separate if not exclusive, Laurence believes that women artists are able to combine femininity and art in their lives.

For Atwood, women artists can become imaginative seers, as well as individuals who contribute to the creation of Canadian culture. In *Cat's Eye*, Elaine adopts an unconventional way of seeing the world in her work. She begins to "paint things that aren't there" (ATWOOD, 1988, p. 366). Since Elaine is able to see "more than anyone else looking" (p. 355), she can also use her imaginative vision to capture the indeterminacy of her identity in her art. For example, in her painting *Cat's Eye*, which Elaine calls a "self-portrait, of some sorts," she depicts her head, and, behind it, "a pier glass is hanging, convex and encircled by an ornate frame." The glass reflects "a section of the back of [her] head [...] but the hair is different, younger" (p. 446). Indeed, this painting reveals the complex being that Elaine perceives in her own identity throughout the novel: she is a subject in transition, between past and present, between an imaginative girl and an established, middle-aged woman artist. Like Morag, Elaine is also aware of her responsibilities to contribute to a cultural legacy that will be inherited by the next generations of artists, but she initially feels uncomfortable about this role. When she prepares for her retrospective art exhibition, her "feelings are mixed" because she does not "like admitting [she's] old enough and established enough to have such a thing." The painter also defines a retrospective as a closing stage of an artistic career – "first the retrospective, then the morgue" (p. 16). She relates to the emerging young women artists who organize her exhibition in disruptive and continuous ways. Elaine questions their "post" status because it gives her the impression that she and her contemporaries are "all just a footnote to something earlier that was real enough to have a name of its own" (p.

92). Nonetheless, during Elaine's exhibition, the young women artists pay homage to her art and recognize her influential role in the construction of the past artistic tradition of Canada. Their encouraging opinions become "so much like what a family would say, a mother or an aunt" that Elaine is "thrown off guard." As she realizes that maybe their "warmth is genuine" and their admiration sounds "sincere" (p. 449-450), the painter finally expresses empathy toward the young women artists. Atwood's painter embraces her part in the construction of her cultural tradition in a less celebratory way than does Morag. Still, Atwood underlines the notion that women artists can attain a meaningful position in her culture and gain the power to influence subsequent generations of artists.

Conclusion

The Brazilian and Canadian novels examined in this paper are products of the writers' subjective perceptions of their societies, which can diverge from what is considered true in the lives of women in their historical realities. Even when an artistic representation partially captures elements of an artist's surroundings, which I believe art inevitably does, it cannot be strictly approached as a transparent mirror. In comparison to what women generally experienced in Brazil in the past, Cunha and Luft may intensify in their novels the violence that prevented their female ancestors from becoming professional individuals. Just as the Brazilian authors may exaggerate in their representations of the obstacles imposed upon women artists in their cultures, Laurence and Atwood may be overtly optimistic when depicting an environment that offers women the necessary resources to become successful artists. Still, in both cases, the material conditions that influence the lives of the protagonists resemble the unique economic, societal, and cultural factors that affected women's ability to attain professional recognition in the arts in the second half of the century.

Luft and Cunha emphasize that a society that does recognize and support a woman's career in the arts create obstacles to her professional and personal success, as she is not able to exist beyond the negative images of woman and artist reinforced in her culture. The writers show that a woman who lacks the motivation to pursue her artistic career or at least develop an active role in the home becomes stagnant in a meaningless position that gradually destroys her life. In the novels, because the central characters live in a culture that leads them toward stagnation in their roles as mothers and artists, they are not likely to obtain either personal or professional satisfaction. Nevertheless, even though Cunha and Luft express their concerns about the negative power of cultural enclaves on women's victimization, I do not ignore that they revalue the experience of women artists in Brazil. The protagonists of their novels temporarily break away from their silence and objectified status and become artistic and/or political beings who question their constraining conditions as housewives, lovers, and mothers. Like the two female characters, Luft, Cunha and other women writers who emerged in Brazil at the time increasingly managed to become artists or attain other public positions. Despite their social, cultural, and political restrictions, they became exemplary models, motivating the upcoming generations of women in Brazil.

The supporting responses that Morag and Elaine receive from their families, friends, audience and the artistic community lead the two artists to perceive the empowering nature of their art and guarantee their positions in the developing cultural industry of Canada. Robyn Sarah argues that nowadays Canadian female writers "benefit from a well-established creative writing culture" (2004, p. 42) and have access to "[g]enerous publishing advances, grants and book awards, contests with generous purses, international book fairs and authors' festivals." However, Sarah "can't help wondering what the publicity machine is not telling [...]: has it really become so easy?" (2004, p. 42). Perhaps my analysis of the aforementioned

Canadian novels is as dangerously optimistic as the opinion of those who oversimplify the difficulties faced by the groups of women who were artists from the 1960s to the 1990s. Nevertheless, I believe that both writers represent an image that is consistent with what middle-class Canadian women artists often perceived in their artistic communities in the second half of the century, without idealizing the experiences of those generations. Indeed, the works by Laurence and Atwood show both sides of women artists' experiences. Their protagonists confront economic instability and the need to make extra physical and mental efforts to create their art. At the same time, their examples suggest that women can express their voices and visions in a profession in the arts. Laurence and Atwood show that female experiences do not necessarily preclude women from succeeding in their artistic careers, just as a profession does not have to be considered an obstacle to their personal fulfilment as women and mothers.

References

- ALMEIDA, Sandra R. G. Expanding Boundaries: Traveling Theories in the Americas. *Ilha do Desterro*, n. 40, p. 43-59.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. *Cat's Eye*. New York: Anchor, 1988.
- . *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.
- BELLEI, Sérgio L. P. O que é que a baiana tem: Comparativismo teórico Brasil-Canadá. In: ALMEIDA, Sandra R. G. (Org.) *Interseções Brasil-Canadá: Perspectivas transnacionais*. Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2005. p. 15-22.
- BESNER, Neil. Beyond Two Solitudes, After Survival: Postmodern Fiction in Canada. *Postmodern Studies*, v. 6, 1992, p. 9-25.

- CUNHA, Helena P. *As doze cores do vermelho*. 1988. Rio de Janeiro: Tempo Brasileiro, 1998.
- DALCASTAGNÈ, Regina. Imagens da mulher na narrativa brasileira. *O Eixo e a roda*, v. 15, p. 127-35.
- DAVEY, Frank. Economics and the Writer. In: GERSON, Carole; MICHON, Jacques (Org.) *History of the Book in Canada: 1918-1980*. v. 3. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004. p. 103-113.
- FITZ, Earl. *Brazilian Narrative Traditions in a Comparative Context*. New York: MLA, 2005.
- GERSON, Carole. Anthologies and the Canon of Early Canadian Women Writers. In: MCMULLEN, Lorraine (Org) *Re(dis)covering Our Foremothers: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers*. Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1990. p. 55-76.
- . *Canadian Women in Print 1750-1918*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2010.
- GERSON, Carole; LUNEAU, Marie-Pier. Social and Cultural Profile of Writers. In: GERSON, Carole; MICHON, Jacques (Org.) *History of the Book in Canada: 1918-1980*. v. 3. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2004. p. 93-100.
- LAURENCE, Margaret. *The Diviners*. 1974. Toronto: Bantam, 1975. Print.
- . *Dance on the Earth: A Memoir*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989.
- LUFT, Lya. *The Island of the Dead*. Tradução Carmen C. McClendon and Betty J. Craige. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1986.
- . Masculino e feminino: Um possível reencontro. In: Sharpe, Peggy (Org.) *Entre resistir e identificar-se: Para uma teoria da prática da narrativa brasileira de autoria feminina*. Goiânia: Mulheres, 1997. p. 153-66.

- . *O quarto fechado*. 1984. Rio de Janeiro: Guanabara, 1986. Print.
- MCCLENNEN, Sophia A.; FITZ, E. Introduction to Comparative Cultural Studies and Latin America. *CLCWeb* v. 4, n. 2, 2002. Disponível em: <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>> Acesso em 4 jan. 2010.
- MOISÉS, José A. Os efeitos das leis de incentivo. *Biblioteca: Ministério do Planejamento, Orçamento e Gestão*. Disponível em <<http://biblioteca.planejamento.gov.br>> Acesso em 20 jul. 2011.
- PAYNE, Judith; FITZ, E. *Ambiguity and Gender in the New Novel of Brazil and Spanish America: A Comparative Assessment*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1993.
- SARAH, Robyn. A Double Life. In: COWAN, Shannon; LAM, Fiona T.; STONEHOUSE, Cathy (Org.) *Double Lives: Writing and Motherhood*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2004. p. 36-49.
- SCHMIDT, Rita Terezinha. Centro e margens: notas sobre a historiografia literária. *Estudos de literatura brasileira contemporânea*, v. 32, 2008, p. 127-41.
- STEENMAN-MARCUSSE, Conny. *Re-Writing Pioneer Women in Anglo-Canadian Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001.
- STOVEL, Nora F. *Divining Margaret Laurence: A Study of her Complete Writings*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2008.
- VIVASH, A. T. Trade Union for Artists. *New Frontier*, v. 2, n. 1, 1937, p. 22-23.

(Endnotes)

- 1 All translations from essays and interviews in Portuguese are mine.
- 2 In Castello's list of Brazilian writers, women account for less than 10% of a group of 32 writers of fiction who emerged in the 1950s and 29% of a list of 31 poets and fiction writers who had their first publications in the 1960s and 1970s. His work reflects the existence of gender inequalities in a literary career. It also follows the masculine view reinforced in Brazilian antholo-

gies at the time because Castello ignores established women writers, such as Luft and Cunha.

3 All translations from *As doze cores do vermelho* are mine.

4 All English references are taken from *The Island of the Dead*, translated by Carmen McClendon and Betty Craige.

5 Camilo enjoys listening "to classical music, the same music that Renata used to listen to in private." His musical taste however infuriates Martim, who fears that "his son might want to be an artist too" (LUFT, 1886, p.68). Martim forces Camilo to play the traditional role of a strong and virile man who can run the farm. When he becomes an adolescent and can no longer take his father's pressure, Camilo decides to ride the wildest horse on the farm, falls, and is kicked by the furious animal until he dies.

