
UNIT 6 CANADIAN LITERATURE: SCANNING THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this unit is to familiarize students with tendencies and trends that embody English-Canadian writing. With the emergence of a keen interest in literatures that emanate from beyond the boundaries of Britain and the United States, this unit will focus on the historical, social and literary impacts that have helped Canada evolve its own literary tradition and identity. It will also aim to present a survey of this literature from the early beginnings to its present invigoration and variety.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

With the end of World War II, the sun set on the British empire. Previously colonised national units scrambled to assert and obtain their independence. Reverberations of this emerging scenario of political de/reconstruction found their echoes in the literary arenas of nations across the world. The literary commonwealth of English speaking/writing peoples, with its legacy of an inherited idiom, usage and tone, set about evolving its own indigenous counterparts. This meant that each national-literary entity had to struggle to come to terms with literary traditions determined by the erstwhile centre. This underlines the clash between the forces that represented anxiety (or tradition) with those that stood for value which had to be reconsidered and reframed given the new ground realities. The need for an indigenous literary outpouring was keenly felt. New literatures reflected the contemporary historical, social, and political pressures as they endeavoured to speak in a tongue that equally addressed native and global readership. There also emerged a rapidly changing scenario that revolved round evaluative procedures in literatures. In a fast changing world literature was slowly incorporated into a bigger domain of reference called "cultural studies." These new literatures had to traverse forward with grim determination and carve out their own niche in the pantheon of literatures written in English.

Canada belongs to the literary commonwealth of English speaking/writing nations. It has also had to come to terms with its unique position in the North American

subcontinent. Canadian literary traditions have had their roots in England, France and the United States. It is a young nation as far as its written history goes. Populated by indigenous peoples since the earliest of times, Canada saw the advent of Europeans in the fifteenth century. Skirmishes between English and French settlements in North America continued intermittently till 1759 when Britain gained control of all of Canada. The ensuing American Revolution revealed Canada's anomalous position. It was characterised by a sense of loyalty to Britain, the mother country, on one side, and the desire to establish selfhood, like the United States, on the other. The nation's history, therefore, reflects strains of both continuity and breach, as the country has had to look across its eastern seaboard and its southern boundary. Its early literature in English, too, has shown similar trends, but only for a short while. By the early nineteenth century, however, Canadian writing has endeavoured to evolve its a voice which bore the hallmarks of assertion and strength. In the twentieth century, especially in the second half, creative resilience and variety can be perceived in its literary enterprise. Towards the close of the century, Canadian writing can be seen to have metamorphosed into stances characterised by growth, coherence, and selfhood, as the nation marches ahead in its quest for modernity.

The formation of the Canadian canon was initiated by early literary histories of the country. Most of these emerged from the extra-literary concept of the nation that involved the "Canadian-ness" of literature written in the country. The early literary historians have looked at literature and canon-formation along with the spiritual and political development of the nation. Later Canadian literary output has consciously broken out of these restrictive shackles by aspiring to address readership across the globe.

6.2 CANADA: COUNTRY AND CHARACTER

6.2.1 History

Literature can never written in a vacuum and writers respond to the pressures of society of which they are a part. They are affected by the kinds of people that make up their milieu and their nation. In their writings are rendered reflections of, and responses to, these realities.

National literary canons attempt to bring into existence a definition of a national literature that is tied to the concept of nationhood. Such canons provide the literary vision that shapes newly articulated work and expresses how a culture locates its writings within its larger history. It, thus, becomes essential to undertake a brief exposition of Canada's history. It is the second largest country in the world and enjoys a unique Janus-like position, (Roman god with two heads guarding two doors) in which it looks towards two aggressive and dominating neighbours--the United States of America to the south and Great Britain, across the Atlantic, in the east. It was only in 1867 that Canada emerged as a stable political entity whose present national boundaries were finalised as late as 1949.

Before the advent of white man, its native peoples, the Indians and the Inuits inhabited it. In 1497, when John Cabot of Italy sailed up the Gulf of St. Lawrence, the white men first made his appearance in this rugged, sparsely populated land. Initially the eastern seaboard saw the establishment of white settlements that existed either as trading posts or as military garrisons. Imperialist designs encouraged the French and the British to establish these settlements. Till the seventeenth century it was the French who dominated this imperial race but colonial ambitions brought about the inevitable clashes between the two. The French were defeated in 1759, ensuring that most of settled North America was British. This state of affairs continued for a brief period till the American War of Independence in 1775. It left Canada in a peculiar position as it comprised communities that chose to align themselves with the British rather than the United States. On one hand, these

communities sought to establish a life of modified British social and political traditions; on the other, they hesitated in severing connections with the mother country and adopting the extremes of complete breakaway and independence from it. It was this tendency that laid the social, political and psychological foundations for what eventually cohered as the Canadian nation.

The success of the American War of Independence led to a substantial influx of the Loyalists from the United States to Canada. The War of 1812 united not only the English-speaking Upper Canada and the French-speaking Lower Canada against the expansionist designs of the newly constituted United States; it also promoted a sense of distinctiveness and readjustment within. Napoleonic wars on the Continent resulted in massive European migration to Canada that witnessed new waves of settlers proceeding towards the sparsely populated western regions. Beneath the semblance of peace burned the fires of French-British rivalry. This led to frequent skirmishes between the French and English-speaking populations till 1837 and resulted, ultimately, in Lord Durham's Report of 1839 which paved way for responsible government. A series of conferences led to Confederation in 1867. This meant the creation of the Dominion of Canada that initially comprised the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec. Other provinces joined this Confederation over time; in 1949, New Foundland was the last to join. The national flag was adopted as late as 1975 as the Canada of today emerged with its ten provinces and a central federal government.

6.2.2 Canada's Cultural and Literary Milieu

The Canadian enterprise of nationhood reflects, and is reflected, in its literary history. Four permanent factors emerge as landmarks in its history. They are a **northern character, a historical dependence, a monarchical government, and a committed national destiny** that takes into account special relations with other states. The northern character is ancient in its origins as it harks back to northern European maritime aspirations. What distinguishes the discovery and occupation of Canada from the rest of the Americas is that it was the outcome of the year-round expeditions of Norse seamen-farmers probing the northern seas for new harbours and fisheries, new hay and timber sources. The nation's dependency takes into account the varying degrees of economic, political and strategic reliance that Canada has exhibited down the ages. The northern character itself is a dependent one as it seeks to locate its markets not only for staples and luxuries but also for the needs of the mind and the body. It is the quest for these locations that produced the ancient Norse and Icelandic sagas and gave rise to a new nation in which the political fabric united the technology of an advanced industrial base with the exploitation of the natural resources of its vast area. In the twentieth century, this dependence underwent a transformation in which it was transmuted into the spirit of free association and free alliance with the United States as well as Britain. The country has had to steer cautiously in its dealings with these two juggernauts in political, as well as, economic terms. Canadians have shown little of the republican sentiment and have chosen to remain a British constitutional monarchy. In doing so, they have consciously adopted a national destiny that operates on the twin principles of continuity and change.

One of Canada's starkest realities is the fact that it has two major cultures, the anglophone and the francophone, and many smaller ones. Dual culture, it must be pointed out, is one of history's many harsh gifts to Canada and it has given rise to friction and weakness. As a result, the two predominant cultures have often presented varied perspectives on common experiences. In the one respect that both cultures are united is the shared psychology of endurance and survival, and it is these qualities that engender and sustain modern Canadian writing. It is against the backdrop of these factors in Canadian history that the country's literary history can be better appreciated. The earliest Canadian writing had fulfilled a utilitarian purpose as it was done to help the country's pioneering forefathers keep records. This was followed by another phase that saw the importation of foreign models. This stage was succeeded

by yet another in which imitation and translation of foreign models becomes a norm. The end of this was phase marked by the production of a literature reflecting the Canadian locale and setting. The next phase was characterised by the intensification of this tendency and resulted in the production of independent works. Several literary generations later emerged the early classics of the country's national literature. They mark the penultimate stage of evolution and set the standards of independence and interest that mark a deviation and breaking away from restrictive national moorings. National literary traditions emerged subsequently, defining the parameters of nationalistic standards. In its final stage--that of maturity--the national literature was seen to shed its national concerns, and gain international recognition, thereby opening itself up elsewhere for translation and imitation.

To find a literature is to determine the solidity of the nation's existence in time. The European advent represents the stage of occupation that was marked by the raising of garrisons/fortifications. It is characterised by an attitude of a garrison mentality or a closed community whose values, customs, and manners have been transported intact from another environment and refuse to be influenced by the new surroundings. The situation is characterised by a lack of reconciliation or assimilation. This was succeeded by conflict where the experience of a community's imported reality clashes with the amorphous, but immediate, local reality. This attitude symbolises the frontier mentality that is marked by flight, discovery, and the struggle to endure. Once the community familiarises itself with the new territory, the colonial mentality emerges. It is marked by a fragmented transportation to a newly civilised location which still glorifies an idealised past. The fourth stage is reached with the establishment of a self-defining nation opening itself to the immigrant. He is the outsider seeking entry into an area of conflicting and alien orders and conditions. Canada's literary history reflects this pattern of evolution.

6.2.3 Forging a literary identity

The nationalist leanings of the country's literature have, since its earliest manifestations, remained steadfast in prioritising national self-definition and self-promotion. Nationalist values have occupied the centre-stage in the Canadian literary enterprise as it has sought to define and differentiate the "nation" through myriad literary voices. These literary voices embody the tugs and pulls of creative and critical writing of Canada that has, since its earliest days, been involved in an endeavour to make a strong case for distinctiveness.

English Canada showed an inclination towards maintaining links with the parent culture while French Canada favoured the notion of itself as a fragment pursuing its down separate destiny in North America. Recent canonical and literary debates acknowledge a sense of spiritual continuity with British or American models but insist that ethnic diversity is a reality and will hold sway in the times to come. In his "Conclusion" to the *Literary History of Canada*, Northrop Frye had posed a significant historical question about Canadian identity when he asserted that it is not the literary voices answering the "Who am I?" question that truly spoke for and represented Canadian identity. It is, rather, those literary voices that chose to respond to the "What is here?" question that truly addressed themselves to the country's formulation of its literary canon. This assertion underlines the topographical bent of Canadian writing which focused on the physical environment of the land. Canadian national consciousness emphasizes a sense of difference that is steeped in the awareness of the uniqueness of place. Geography complemented history as literary creativity took off.

The seminal event of Confederation in 1867 is a defining moment in the history of Canada and it can be taken as the event that set into motion Canada's historical/cultural clock. In the early days, the favoured form of writing was poetry, and the poetic aesthetic governing it had been inherited from Britain. Poetry was perceived as a treasure that presented the close communion of the material and

spiritual worlds. This communion symbolised the juxtaposition and merger of the spiritual, political, cultural and historical realities, subsuming in itself the nation. Such writing was imbued with heroic and picturesque features, which, in turn were succeeded by the era of political and constitutional struggle that ended in the establishment of responsible government, and ultimately achieved fruition in the establishment of the Confederation. This phase is characterised by that peculiar bent of mind that revealed and participated in the endeavour of nation building. Reflections of this are to be found in Canadian literary history when pre-Confederation literature that does not reflect the collective struggle for national self-determination is relegated to the canonical margins, as informative but imitative or incidental. That writing which described transcontinental travel, exploration or regional detail with the specificity that suggested mastery is privileged as a kind of literary equivalent to physical and political control over the environment. The writers of the Confederation generation then come to occupy canonical centrality because of the coincidence of their literary maturity with that of the political will and character of the people.

Canada's existence as a nation in the face of the rejection of the American Revolution by the Canadian Loyalists and reverses suffered by America in the War of 1812 are two historical realities that gave to impetus the sense of national identity and pride within the Canadian psyche. Canadian writing initially emerged from a colonial derivative culture and then attempted to deviate and evolve into a mature national identity in which maturity is not just a national but a particular geographical, political, and cultural version of a universal ideal. Subsequent writing and canonical studies are an apt example of this propensity as the seeds of this emerge from the preoccupation with national identity. Canadian writers at the end of the nineteenth century were more inclined towards defining the contours of the vast expanses of land that comprised their country and they aspired for an emotional equation with it. The common trend noticeable through the literature of that era was an adherence to the Romantic/Victorian literary models of the mother country (England). This propensity indicated only too clearly the colonial shackles that still bound the land.

The turn of the century was marked by the arrival of waves of immigrants from other nations. Time and conditions conspired together, compelling and generating fresh perspectives in the creative arts. Twentieth century Canadian writing is characterised by this new outlook that seeks to reconsider and transform the earlier impulses and literary responses. A number of Canadian writers lamented the absence of a critical climate and underlined the stringent need for a more critical approach for evaluating its writing. The fundamental criticism against writing was that it ignored the intelligence by not addressing the individual and, as a result, it seemed enervated. By failing to arouse the intellect, such writing could never authenticate that basic component of modernism that is concerned with real experience. Its absence, thereby, precluded it from the domain of modernism. The outstanding reason for this was various forms of narrowness that manifested themselves in Canada as Puritanism, provincialism and colonialism.

In determining critical parameters, the A. J. M. Smith/ John Sutherland debate occupied the literary centrestage. Smith's cosmopolitan ideal attempted a synthesis of national distinctiveness with international merit and represented the fusion of the traditional criterion of universality with the modernist standard of internationalism. Sutherland viewed the literary landscape from a perspective of socialism that had strong Canadian undertones. He suggested that the unreal and ethereal quality of Canadian writing was due to the fact that the middle-class Marxist writer usually came from England into an environment doubly alien because it was passing through a period of special change.

The first two decades of the twentieth century had seen a revolutionary turn of events. These events had inspired writers into repudiating the old ideas and set them off on a new path of creative energy and experimentation. Geographically speaking, localised and concentrated literary activity shifted from the environs of Montreal to Toronto.

The 1930s and 1940s witnessed the polemics of militant writing that was doctrinaire, aggressive and in revolt against society to an extent never seen in Canadian literature. The 1950s saw the emergence of another trend that was antithetical to the aggressively realistic writing of early modernism. This new writing exhibited a combination of simplicity, power, sympathy and intelligence as the guiding spirits, especially in the field of criticism. By emphasising the need for a critical outlook in literary assessment, the writers/critics laid the foundation of the emergence of Canadian schools of criticism. At the close of 1950s, there emerged new perspectives that eclipsed earlier tendencies. They sought to highlight a brand of modernism that displayed a strain that was both urban and realist. They advocated the principles of artistic freedom and integrity, and sound standards of craftsmanship.

This new phase in Canadian writing was characterised by creative ebullience and self-confidence. By shedding the vestiges of Victoriana, the country's literary enterprise sought to formulate new parameters for itself, especially in the sphere of literary evaluation and judgement. This resulted in the acknowledgement of a writer's presence within the sphere of contemporary time and space. The ways of seeing a setting were given far more importance than the setting itself and this became a pervasive influence on the writer's perceptions of reality instead of reality itself.

The pre-1950s phase can be described as one of *gemeinschaft* or a discourse that was characterised by an older type of village commune which had been replaced by the modern *gesellschaft* or a discourse of a conglomeration of isolated individuals in a market system. Given the emergence of new critical and theoretical perspectives on Canadian literature, it becomes quite apparent that the canon of the 1950s onwards had been greatly inclined towards creating a space for itself.

As the centre of Canadian life moved from the fortress to the metropolis, the garrison mentality changed correspondingly. It began as an expression of the moral values that were generally accepted and then, as society got more complicated and more in control of its environment, it became more of a revolutionary garrison within a metropolitan society. One recurrent feature of Canadian life reflected in its literature is the paradoxical superimposition of vast empty spaces and the lack of privacy from prying, avaricious eyes. Due to this, a tone of deep terror linked to the soul of men pervaded writing and manifested itself as anxieties representative of repressive morality. Writing revolved round the inheritance of political and moral disillusionment and predicament. Such themes found great favour with the Canadian writers of the 1960s.

The literary milieu that now emerged placed a premium on critical analysis and debate. Criticism had earlier favoured perspectives that were author-centred, thematic, and concerned with social matters; now it tended to focus on structural and technical commentary. The 1970s were a period that was dominated by a poetics that took into account not only theory but also the idea of nationhood. The two subsequent decades witnessed more changes. Abandoning the garrison of an exclusive culture in favour of experimentation with an imaginative construct of a wilderness, it focussed on creating an identity that had to be realised through commitment, not to a cause or doctrine, but to a sacrificial view of life. This view of life stresses the desirability of a metaphorical dying into life that all great art affirms and celebrates.

Canadian writing was seen to incline towards metafiction or the process of creating order through myth and art. It was involved in investigating the relationship between art (and language) and reality, on the one hand, and between the discourses of art and the structures of social and cultural power, on the other.

The new postmodern theoretical framework of reference brings together separate disciplines like philosophy, linguistics, history, sociology, literary criticism and psychoanalysis. The reader, writer and text have to meet within the context of these. When Canadian postmodern writing takes up issues like ethnicity, feminism, and

immigration, it once again reiterates this point. This writing has transfigured the emphasis on regionalism in literature into a concern for the different, the local, and the particular. Canadian writers re-figure the realist regional into a postmodern different. This is done through challenges to authority in nationalist politics, gender politics and issues related to indigeneity. Canadian writing of the 1990s focussed on communicating diversity and dismembering universality. The most remarkable effort in this direction was made by criticism. Impetus has been provided to Canada's literary enterprise in various forms and through the encouragement given by various extra-literary sources. These include the state's cultural policy, the publishing industry, and the role played by journals and little magazines.

6.3 THE WRITING ON THE WALL

In the myriad manifestations of art--painting, music, architecture, poetry, or prose--can be discerned the essence of an environment or a country. Over the years, Canadian literary enterprise has striven hard to find its moorings and communicate the flavour of the quintessential soul of the land. In the country's literary discourse can be perceived the rapid changes that have overtaken the social, moral and economic fabric of the nation. Individual writers, by resorting to their preferred modes of expression, have contributed to the discourse by foregrounding experience shared with their peers but conveyed through a medium that is particularly personal and individualistic.

6.3.1 Overcoming the odds

Despite its protracted beginnings in the eighteenth century, Canadian literature has traversed a long way in reaching the dimensions of the colossal verbal explosion of the 1970s onwards. This literature has encountered a number of obstacles in its growth. The primary one has been the psychological barrier that has existed in the creative faculties of Canadian writers due to the colonial repercussions of its history. Canadian writing has had to overcome the oppressive psyche of being dominated by the American and British literary traditions. It has also had to juggle with the frontier mentality that earlier formed the basis of its political consolidation and entity. The hold of Puritanism has been another stumbling block in the emergence of a strong Canadian tradition of writing. The Puritan outlook diluted the importance of the arts because it conceived of the artist only as a font of moral ideas, thus endorsing literary standards with a high degree of moral and social orthodoxy. The intensity of this outlook dwindled with the advent of the twentieth century. Another hurdle in the path of Canadian writing, has been regionalism. Strong undercurrents of it can be seen in the anglophone/francophone divide, the vivid western flavour of the Prairie provinces, and the eulogistic tone of pre-Confederation writing of British Columbia. The literary enterprise has had to address and negotiate with these issues. The unsound economic situation of Canadian publishing added to difficulties. Canada has faced stiff competition from its American and British publishers. Canadian writers, who were able to secure a British/American publisher or a British university guarantee, were assured of recognition. This situation compelled many a Canadian writer to migrate. A conscious effort has been made to establish a strong publishing network. Yet, the singular outstanding feature of this literature has been a hankering for a mode of expression that embodies the Canadian consciousness and psyche. This cultural concern has remained dominant, though sometimes dormant, and is evidenced in the numerous shade of writing that have emerged over time. Canadian writing can be viewed as a transition from its early phase of regional awareness and reflection to a marked interest in imagery, myth, symbol, value and psychology. These interests waned and were displaced by new critical strategies that sought to decode available writing and were encouraged in by different modes of institutional support.

In the twentieth century, little magazines embody a peculiar literary phenomena associated with the growth of poetry. In Canada they were the core component of the country's literary world and infrastructure. Little magazines first emerged in Canada in the nineteenth century, but it was only after the World War I that they acquired a recognised literary stature. The emergence of these magazines marks a critical juncture in the history of printing and publication. They reflect the extension of literacy by reaching out to mass audiences. They also mark the stage at which paper and printing became available for private and limited publication. These magazines served as important outlets for writers of poetry and prose.

Through radio and later, television, the writer intruded into Canadian homes, carving a niche of acceptance wherever he/she found an appreciative audience. Readings of poetry and fiction became extremely popular as they purveyed literature in audio-visual form. University depts also started teaching Canadian Literature.

Many associations like the British Association for Canadian Studies were established. All these various forms of encouragement have made a significant contribution towards establishing the credentials of Canadian literature.

6.3.2 Prose

It is in prose that anglophone Canadian writing first manifests itself. Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* is acclaimed as the first Canadian novel and it typifies the phase of literary importation. Written in the epistolary tradition, the novel is born out of the author's experience of a Canadian garrison town of the 1760s where her husband was chaplain for five years. This literary importation was replaced by the emergence of works that sought to come to terms with the environment in imaginative as well as practical ways. This involved writing which displayed the stirrings of local colour by giving primacy to Canadian settings and Canadian responses to them. Reality was perceived not so much as a set of objects as a construction of the writer in the guise of an observer. The narrative is a miscellaneous collection of impressions, character sketches, anecdotes, short stories, and poems that oscillate between a variety of tones and moods artificially heightened by the author. This tendency symbolises the psychological tensions that prevail in the immigrant's mind and haunt literary consciousness even today.

John Richardson, Thomas Chandler Haliburton, Catherine Parr Traill, and Susanna Moodie are some of the writers of the early phase. Imitation of British models remains the underlying mode in these works; they break free from any other shade of importation by being imbued with a spirit and environment that is markedly Canadian.

Travel literature *per se* surfaced as an important medium of expression in Canada in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It contained a pragmatic response to the scenery of the country in verbal form. It often arose out of exploratory ventures undertaken to determine the locale and volumes of natural resources in the new dominion. Some well-known writers of this genre were Paul Kane, William Francis Butler and G. M. Grant. Other modes adopted were the historical romance, the fantasy, the social satire, the animal stories and the comedy of manners.

In the twentieth century there was a clear break from the influence of importation. Writers consciously moulded a native tradition in which material specific to Canada would forge the imagination and channelise its writing. In representations that range from physical settings to conflicts, this spirit manifests itself. Stephen Leacock, Laura Salverson, Martha Ostenso, Frederick Philip Grove and Hugh MacLennan deserve special mention in this regard.

By the 1960s Canadian literature came into its own. It not only broke free from the shackles of influence and importation, but it also confidently overcame its

preoccupation with cultural/national identity. It was marked by a spirit of self-confidence, energy and sophistication that underlined the change from its earlier trend of realism. The new trend grew out of realism in a direction that drew it towards symbolism under the subtle influence of writers like Lawrence, Kafka and Joyce. Authors like Robert Kroetsch and Rudy Wiebe broke new ground by adopting a postmodernist stance and expression. Jack Hodgins justified the emergence of Canada's own brand of magic realism. This technique has worked its way into the writings of Hodgins himself, apart from Kroetsch, Susan Swan and Michael Ondaatje. Their works throw up myriad possibilities of interpretation arising out of the merger of the fantastic and the serious. A number of accomplished women writers have emerged since the 1950s. Some of the outstanding ones are Mavis Gallant, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro and Margaret Atwood. Laurence's fiction is born out of her African experience that is strongly grounded in the tribal culture that gives privacy to family, clan, ethnic group or class, within a national existence. The *Manawaka* series places all its five heroines as strangers in a foreign land, the spirit of which seeps into their psyche. Even when they all eventually leave, their emotional ties to it are never severed. Laurence's contribution in the sphere of Canadian fiction lies in articulating a sensibility in which the sense of place holds away and women's perspectives find expression.

The ethnic fabric of Canadian society underwent a significant change in the 1970s with the opening up of borders to Asian immigrants. By the 1980s, the impact of their arrival was clearly manifest in the literature of the times. Prominent among them are Michael Ondaatje, Rohinton Mistry, Joy Kogawa and Austin Clarke. Critical inputs in response to their writings found a congenial soil in *The Toronto South Asian Review*. On both creative and critical fronts, the Canadian literary milieu encouraged immigrants to foreground and discuss issues that had to do with physical, psychological and social alienation and displacement, and their struggle for survival and establishment in unknown territory.

It was as late as the 1960s when the Canadian native peoples were granted citizenship rights and enfranchisement. Yet the native/non-native rift continues in the form of economic, social and cultural inequalities that are a legacy of the country's colonial past. In the 1970s, native authors actually got down to recording their own history and commenting on Canadian society. These efforts were often dismissed as "protest literature." The 1980s saw a proliferation of native literature. This came about due to a conscious effort by the state to inculcate university-trained native writers, to generate an enthusiastic response/readership by staging festivals to introduce native writers, and to hone writing skills by forming aboriginal writing groups and conducting workshops. Native writing has concerned itself primarily with social, political and economic history as it navigates between issues of right and wrong, truth and fiction, men and nature. Well-known authors in this field are George Kenny, Tomson Highway and Evan Adam, Beatrice Colleton, Jeanette Armstrong, Joan Crate, Bruce Chester, Beth Cutland, Wayne Keon, and Daniel David Moses.

Children's literature has for its ancestors the didactic Christian doctrine and catechism purveyed by the Puritan establishment in the seventeenth century. It took almost two hundred years for it to evolve and mature into a creative medium that did more than just eulogise the pioneer struggle for survival in a bleak land. The end of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new trend in children's writing. This had to do with the portrayal of youth in a manner that was sentimental and cloying. Narratives revolved round protagonists whose insidious charm solved not only their personal difficulties but also resolved those of the adults around them. The first half of the twentieth century saw a resurgence of native tales retold through a romantic European perspective. Children's literature of the 1950s focused on fantasy and humour. The 1960s saw a radical change in the established patterns of this writing. The upheaval and change in contemporary society resulted in the emergence of themes that lay at the intersection of the adulthood and childhood. These included divorce, drugs, child abuse and other related problems, giving rise to a new realism

that had urban settings. Some well-known writers in this area are Marsha Hewitt, Clair Mackay, Paul Yee, Cora Taylor and Bernice Thurman Hunter.

6.3.3 Poetry

The Loyalists who came to settle in the Maritime provinces after the American Revolution wrote the earliest Canadian poetry. These were people whose political loyalties had been jolted by the success of the Revolution that saw the snipping of the final thread between Britain, the imperial power, and America, her colonial outpost. As disappointed Tories, they moved to Canada and their verse reflects this outlook. Oliver Goldsmith, the grandnephew of his English namesake, was the first poet who also attempted to describe the challenge that settlers faced in the new land. He wrote his long poem, *The Rising Village*, as a sequel to his relative's earlier work entitled *The Deserted Village*. Joseph Howe's *Acadia* reflects the same tradition of descriptive and reflective narrative; Adam Kidd's *The Huron Chief and Other Poems* also belongs to the school of romantic sentimentalism practised by Byron earlier.

The latter half of the century saw the rise of a new perspective in poetry. This was a reflective embodiment of the socio-political scenario in which the country endeavoured to subdue the wilderness, the native peoples, and the rebellions. The War of 1812 and the threat of American annexation hastened the birth of the spirit of national unity. Its literary manifestations took shape in the form of a national ideal that found expression in poetry. In the verse of Charles Sangster, Alexander MacLachlan, and Charles Mair can be identified the reflections of this ideal. Mair's *Tecumseh* is a verse drama that draws upon history in the inappropriate medium of a Shakespearean tragedy.

The golden age of Canadian poetry which dawned with the arrival of the Confederation Poets. They were assigned this nomenclature as they were unwittingly associated with each other through friendship, correspondence and perusal of each other's works. Though named after the country's Confederation in 1867, these poets were mere children at the time. Their significance lies in voicing the representational concerns of their generation despite being influenced by British/American writing. Their achievement can be gauged through the evolution of styles and attitudes that characterised the spirit of the new dominion at home and abroad. Charles G. D. Roberts, his cousin, Bliss Carman, Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott comprise the Confederation group of poets. The writing of each of the Confederation poets was highly individualised.

The modern movement in Canadian poetry began in the 1920's. It was marked by the simplification of diction and the divergence of themes. The romanticism of the past was replaced by the metaphysical complexity of realism that had fragmented human psyche the world over. E. J. Pratt, Earle Birney were the outstanding poets of this tradition. The 1920s and 30s also witnessed a poetic tradition that combined the cosmopolitan, the symbolist and the metaphysical strains. The chief exponents of this tradition were F. R. Scott, A. J. M. Smith and A.M. Klein, all of whom were together termed the Montreal Group. The 1940s and 50s saw the emergence of a younger generation of poets. Prominent among whom were Patrick Anderson, Patricia K. Page, Douglas Le Pan, John Glassco, Miriam Waddington, Anne Wilkinson, James Reany, Jay Macpherson and Daryl Hine. This generation honed poetry that individualised versions of metaphysical/romantic poetry which, in its basic expression and sensibility has the undeniable feel of Canada. Their poetry was succeeded by that of Robert Kroetsch and Margaret Atwood. The prose lyric emerged as the dominant tradition in the writings of Al Purdy, Patrick Lane, Milton Acorn, John Newlove, Elizabeth Brewster and Pier Giorgio Di Cicco. In their individual voices they examine and ruminate upon issues of daily life.

6.3.4 Drama

Canadian drama has lagged behind all the other literary genres in its evolution. The reasons for this are many. One of them has been the sparse demographic reality of the country's far-flung communities that did not actively encourage theatre. Another reason was the financial liability of traversing these immense distances as theatre groups sought audiences. The growth of the audio-visual medium also hampered the growth of drama. Added to all these was the deeply entrenched Puritan psyche that viewed dramas as morally undesirable and consciously discouraged its growth.

The earliest manifestations of drama in Canada were the amateur performances of the late nineteenth century. They were primarily undertaken to provide for the entertainment of garrison towns and no written records of these plays survive. At the turn of the century the fortunes of drama looked up. The reasons for this included the decline in the number of foreign touring companies, in the overwhelming popularity of films, in the establishment of drama festivals, and in the important work done by theatre critics and essayists like Fred Jacob, Vincent Massey, Merrill Denison, B. K. Sandwell and Hector Charlesworth. The most popular form of drama at this juncture was the one-act play.

At the close of the 1960s, the impact of feminism was seen in the writings of some Canadian women dramatists like Beverly Simons, Carol Bolt and Sharon Pollock. In more recent times the plays of Erica Ritter and Margaret Hollingsworth have aggressively foregrounded feminist concerns. Outstanding male playwrights of the closing decades of the twentieth century are George Ryga, D. Freeman, T. Walmsley, D. Fennario, and James Reaney.

Canadian drama of the 1980s concentrated on the elements of the comic and the Gothic. The works of Linda Griffiths, Patrick Beamer, John Murrell and David French were outstanding examples of the former trend. Gothic drama focused on the element of psychological horror and its chief exponents were Peter Colley, Tom Grainger, Carol Bolt and Jim Garrard. Regional influences were obviously apparent.

6.4 LET US SUM UP

A nation/culture has to evolve on its way to establishing its credentials of reckoning. Canada's literary enterprise has passed through many stages. It began with the stage of occupation that was marked by raising of garrisons/fortifications and a mentality of a closed community whose values, customs, and manners were transported intact from another environment and refused to be influenced by the new surroundings. This situation was characterised by a lack of reconciliation or assimilation. The second stage was one of conflict where the experience of a community's imported reality clashed with the amorphous, but immediate, local reality. This symbolised the frontier mentality which was marked by flight, discovery, and struggle to endure. Once the community familiarised itself with the new territory, the colonial mentality emerged. It was marked by a fragmented transportation to a newly civilised location which still glorified an idealised past. The fourth stage was reached with the establishment of a self-defining nation opening itself to the immigrant. He is the outsider seeking entry into an area of conflicting and alien orders and conditions.

This literature has come of age despite treading an off-beaten track. Its evolving strength has been its ability to coexist with American cultural dominance and also by producing works that have acquired repute for quality beyond national boundaries. Michael Ondaatje's *Prix Medici* award for *Anil's Ghost* (2000) and Margaret Atwood's Booker for *The Blind Assassin* (2000) are testimony to this. In carving out its place in the annals of world literature, Canadian writing has transcended the

native/cosmopolitan divide by proving that literature has little or nothing to do with a writer's home address.

6.5 QUESTIONS

1. In what ways does Canada's history and geography complement its literature?
2. Discuss the stages that mark Canada's literary enterprise.
3. Comment on the various forms of conscious encouragement given to Canada's literary endeavour by the state and its institutions.

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