

A Comparative Study on *A Jest of God* and *April Rain Tree*

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Abstract

Canadian Literature encompasses a large number of literary contexts because of the country's unique multicultural tradition. Although Canadian writers have multiple choices to focus on, the prominent writers choose the most sensitive issues and try to give a solution to it. The most sensitive issues are nothing but the cultural conflicts, survival pursuit, liberation, colonialism, racism, poverty, identity crisis, inequality, women suppression, etc. Hence, the most works of Canadian writings articulate on the above mentioned issues directly or indirectly that favors a chance for comparatists to trace similar and dissimilar context among Canadian literatures. Hence a proper comparative study will facilitate scholars to devise a comprehensive method to approach various-Canadian texts. Thus the present paper compares and analyzes two different texts *April Raintree* and *A Jest of God* by two Canadian authors namely *Beatrice Mosionier* and *Margret Lawrence* respectively. The study attempts in bringing out feminism present in both the works. Moreover, the paper studies both the protagonists' act of survival amidst the domination, loss, power struggle, social pressure etc. in spite of racial discrimination and Colonialism.

Keywords: Canadian Literature, Feminism, Self-Empowerment, Racism

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Introduction

Comparative Literature is a vast field of study that can encompass topics from various disciplines and fields. And by doing that, it can facilitate a link between works of different regional literature, national literature or literature of different language, culture and time. Matthew Arnold says, "Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration". By his statement, comparative literature tries to find possible ties between various works of art. Moreover the comparatist can be anyone from any discipline. Susan Bassnett has once said, "Anyone who has an interest in books embarks on the road towards comparative literature". According to her view, the comparatists need not be limiting themselves to a particular domain, whereas they can venture into different domains of their interest. However, in this paper, two works of different authors of Canadian soil have been taken for the study to expound not only the authors' different perspective on feminism but also the different impacts created by the work itself. Margaret Lawrence's *A Jest of God* and Beatrice Mosionier's *April Raintree* have been compared mainly to identify the different feministic approach employed by the authors as well as to decode the character's response to all the social oppressions.

Margret Lawrence, the most notable writer of 1960s, has set new facets for the new generation readers. She was courageous to articulate on the Canada's multicultural issues and was one among the early writers who wrote on multiculturalism. She has even voiced for women suppression before the women's rights moment soar to peak. Notably, she takes the side of minorities and underprivileged people.

And this was explicit when she expressed her uneasiness towards Africans in her novels. Though she is a wife of Colonist, she wanted people to identify herself as Canadian who has no colonial attitude. This attitude has also been revealed in many of her works when portraying Metis and First Nation characters with more sympathy. Most importantly, her works showcase different women character with different character traits having strong feministic spirit. And she is celebrated for creating many unique women characters too. She is known for her Manawaka series of novels which has earned her the name as regional writer. Notably the women protagonist in each of the Manawaka novels are remarkable for their peculiar nature and realistic depiction.

On the other hand, Beatrice Moisionier has established herself as one among the notable writers of Canada after the publication of her first novel in the year 1983. She belongs to two decades later to Margret Laurence. Descending from a Metis family, Beatrice has strongly voiced for women like her who belong to the deprived sections facing suppressions of all kind. She herself is a victim of racism and so she is able to give a true picture of racial issues which she has been experiencing in the Canadian soil. She was born in 1949 in St. Boniface, Manitoba in a poor family where her parents are alcoholic and so she is raised in several foster homes along with her brother and two sisters. Her two sisters committed suicide and all these incidents have forced her to writing. She wants her readers to identify herself as a Metis Writer which explicates her attitude towards her ancestry.

There is a vast difference in the attitudes of both the writers in terms of their racial views. Laurence who doesn't belong to the Metis community has expressed her sympathy for Metis women during the time when no one was ready to show their concern for them. Hence, she is the earliest one to voice for them even before Alice Munro and other popular writer articulate on the issues of Metis women at least in a lighter sense. Laurence has pictured the Canadian Prairies in her works beautifully showing them as courageous survivors. She has said in one of her notable essay, 'Man of Our People,' in Heart of a Stranger, "The whole tragic area of Canadian history

which encompasses the struggles, against great odds, of the prairie Indian and Metis peoples in the 1800's is on which has long concerned and troubled me". Her concern for Metis is also felt in the Manawaka series of novels. On the other hand, Beatrice Culleton Mosionier like Maria Campbell makes a closer look into the affairs of these minorities through her novel than Laurence. It is because Beatrice is representing the problems of these underprivileged directly from the victimary place. In a way, she has tried to resist the racial stereotypes led up on her people by the imperialistic power. Maria Campbell has stated this "What it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country". Like Maria, Beatrice has tired to reconstruct the status of her people.

While comparing the women characters in both the novels, the novel *A Jest of God* just centers on a single woman character Rachel the protagonist. However, Rachel's mother and her sister are negatively shown as victimizing Rachel for their personal benefit. Whereas in *April Raintree*, though it centers on April the protagonist, the other women characters such as Cheryl and their mother are equally gaining attention as and when it is looked upon through the feministic dimension. Cheryl and their mother are shown as self-sacrificing natured women. Notably all these characters are modeled as the examples of different feministic attitudes of Canadian women of the time. Beatrice reveals the character of April as a strong one who struggles to finding her a strong identity and also having the quest to find meaning to her life. Hence, she can be compared with Eve who first radiated the prototypic nature of being ambitious. April determines not to meet with failure in her life. She is influenced by the white culture and their superior attitude. As her skin color gives her white's appearance she happily embraces white culture first as she has internalized the social stereotypes of the time. She feels proud being a white. She even marries a White European. It reveals her ambitious nature. She says,

"It seemed to me that what I'd heard that Metis and Indians were inclined to be alcoholics. That's because they were a weak people. Oh, they were put down more than anyone else, but then, didn't they deserve it? Anyway, I could pass for a pure white person. I could say I was part French and part Irish."

Contrarily, Beatrice projects Cheryl as an easy going and a positive natured woman who seems to be proud of her origin. In an occasion, Cheryl defends her ancestry culture to her teacher as something great. She says, “How come their food supplies were wiped out? Lies! Lies! Lies! Your history books don’t say how the white people destroyed the Indian way of life. That’s all you white people can do is teach a bunch of lies to cover your own tracks!”. This shows her positive attitude towards her people and race.

While witnessing the two women characters in the novel April Raintree having opposing nature, Rachel Cameron in *A Jest of God* having the two opposing nature within herself. She embodies the nature of being submissive, coyness and meek at the beginning and becoming independent and courageous at the climax. This also suggests, Rachel and April are dynamic characters having changed their attitudes towards life for a positive outcome. Initially, Rachel has been a girl of little words and used to ruminates in her through than verbally with others. But such a girl has transformed herself to be a very positive and vibrant woman who could face challenges of her life. She says,

“Something must be the matter with my way of viewing things. I have no middle view. Either I fix on a detail and see it as though it were magnified – a leaf with all its veins perceived, the fine hairs on the back of a man’s hands – or else the world recedes and becomes blurred, artificial, indefinite, an abstract painting of a word.”

Similarly, April transforms from being self-centered, and ambitious into a woman of sacrificial nature. She feels contented and satisfied being a Metis and in nursing her sister’s son. The following lines suggest April’s change in her attitude.

“...that was probably how it had felt on those long-ago buffalo hunts. I was impressed by all the sights and sounds. I went deeper than just hearing and seeing. I felt good. I felt alive.... I felt as if all of that was part of me, as if I was part of it.”

While comparing the issues faced by both these characters, April has suffered the most because the problems which she has faced are both internal and external. Strikingly, she is a victim of Racism, imperialism, and male domination that lead

her to suffer pain physically and psychologically. Whereas, Rachel suffers internal conflicts most of her life and very few external factors such as male domination, poverty, and family condition have added to her distressed state. Shame is strikingly seen in both the works that has curbed the liberation of the two women characters. April initially had felt ashamed for being brought from a Metis Alcoholic family. She had internalized that being a white is pride and prestigious. And this shows she suffers internal conflict. Also, she is persistently hiding her Metis identity. She is made to internalize her identity as shameful. It is because she has witnessed white’s discriminating natives in many occasions. She has experienced in her school when white children resist to play with them. Moreover, April’s internal conflict intensified while seeing her sister Cheryl’s pathetic condition after being raped by racial and patriarchal forces. Also, her broken relationship with her husband makes her to understand male domination and racial discrimination more clearly. Thus, her social condition is the reason for her internal conflict and external conflicts. On the other hand, Rachel’s internal struggle is primarily mooted by her family condition as well as her relationship with her boyfriends. She always feels alienated from her childhood days onwards. And, when her boyfriend leaves her knowing her pregnancy, she feels a complete alienation. She becomes guilt stricken. She assumes giving birth to a baby without a wedlock is shameful. Hence, shame is the major reason for her state of alienation.

While comparing the feministic spirit in both the characters, April Raintree’s feministic spirit is quiet visible continuously from the beginning till the end. From her childhood days onwards, she has been exhibiting an over powering nature. In fact, she longs for the company of the white children who are seen as superior by the society. She feels that if she associated herself with the whites, she would be regarded as noble and superior. And she thinks it would give her pride. In a way, she treats whites as a kind of ornament. Eventually, she marries a white man. But the marriage life ended up in separation. However, her true feministic spirit is revealed when she embraces Metis identity as her pride. In the life of Rachel, at the beginning, she lacks feministic

spirit that she exhibits herself as submissive and meek person but the bitter experience with Nick has taught her to be bold and courageous. Her feminist spirit is kindled by that incident. Consequently, she has resolved the inner conflicts by means of her feminist spirit to get empowered and develops a strong identity for her.

While comparing the external factors in the character's development from a powerless state to an empowered state, many external factors have played role in moulding these characters. Especially, April's mental development and maturity comes despite the social conditions, environment and her family situation. Like the Newton's third law, "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." Similarly in the life of April, all the social pressures such as racial forces, and patriarchal forces have completely changed her attitude towards life. It has kindled her spirit of victory over the dominants. In the life of Rachel, external factors like social stigmas about women on their roles and responsibilities and Nick's merciless behavior and decision have made her to take new good resolutions of her life that has transformed herself completely.

While Comparing the journey in both the novels, April's journey is circular one whereas Rachel's is a forward journey. April's journey starts at departing from her father's house, being separated from her sister Cheryl, staying in different foster cares, getting married to a white man, getting separated, losing trust in white supremacy and finally ends with rejoining with her sister Cheryl that seems to be like a roller-coaster ride that she comes back where she started. Through her physical journey, she encounters various issues such as discrimination, racism and patriarchal issues which have strengthened her. Moreover, a psychological journey has been taken place within her that she could travel back to her ancestry and come back knowing their richness. Hence, both the physical and psychological journey have brought up a great change in her. On the other hand, Rachel's psychological journey has pushed her to do a physical journey. At the end of the novel, she leaves her mother and settles in Vancouver. To understand more about Rachel's journey, she always thinks of her past life. That, she does a psychological journey to go backward to her past. This is because, she

is reminded of her childhood days quite often by the ambiance of her school where she works as it is the same school in which she studied. Her friendship with Nick alone has given her a taste of hope which has ignited her to have a futuristic journey. She says,

"Something must be the matter with my way of viewing things. I have no middle view. Either I fix on a detail and see it as though it were magnified – a leaf with all its veins perceived, the fine hairs on the back of a man's hands – or else the world recedes and becomes blurred, artificial, indefinite, an abstract painting of a word."

However, her hopes have been shattered by Nick at a point when he avoids her knowing the pregnancy. At the end, the disappointment with Nick, and the misunderstood pregnancy have given a psychological transformation in her. She learns about the selfish human nature present in both her mother and Nick. This has resulted in having a shift that she makes a physical journey for Vancouver to have a new beginning to her life.

While comparing the solutions given by both the novelist, the end result of the two novels are quite convincing and also helps the women readers to illuminate positivity and hope in them. In fact, both the novelists would have opened the lid of ignorance in the readers by the resolution of their protagonists that they are physically and psychologically liberated. Rachel's and Angel's life from their childhood have been surrounded by a lot of miserable events and they have remained passive and ignorant. Feminists argue that women coming out from their passivity and ignorance is itself a mark of empowerment. Hence, Rachel and April are triggered by the unpleasant event happened in their life and have become psychologically strong. Rachel is ignorant in not knowing she is used by her family and Nick. And April's passivity and ignorance is being unaware of her heritage and culture. Once when she learns through her sister Cheryl, she has become active and has changed her attitude towards her community.

To conclude, comparing both the novels has imparted multiple of glimpses into the issues of women who are under the clutches of various social, personal and familial customs and norms. Rachel and April who belong to different period of time frame facing different social pressures but have

same feministic spirit of empowerment. Moreover, the nature of the two protagonists are completely different such as ambitious and boring, superior and submissive, jubilant and docile etc. but when they come out from their ignorance, they feel liberated and witness a revolutionary change.

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