

“You’ll just have to do something about it”: Re-Reading Female Desire, Sexuality and Agency in Contemporary Atlantic Canadian Literature

By

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Abstract

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This study seeks to examine representations of female sexuality in contemporary Atlantic Canadian literature from 1995 – 2015. Although it could be argued that a new wave of female writers have come to dominate the fictional landscape of the region, there has been no sustained analysis of female sexuality in the region's literature. This study positions itself in the middle of this absence and attempts to bridge the gap by offering a re-reading of Lisa Moore's early short fiction, Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*, Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven*, and George Elliott Clarke's *The Motorcyclist*. Representations of embodied female experiences will be foregrounded in this analysis in order to come to a better understanding of the complexities of female sexuality and desire. Each chapter will look at a different aspect of female sexual experiences in order to give women a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between body and self.

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Introduction

Women writers, more than men, are still stuck writing two sex-and-women clichés: that sexual activity has negative consequences (think Baby’s drug addiction in *Lullabies*) or sex is for the sole purpose of procreating (think Dorrie Rare’s obsession with getting pregnant in *The Birth House*). [...] In our fiction, sex is still bad (i.e., ruinous or at best a means to an end), while social displays of female sexual confidence are verboten. [...] The fact that CanLit women don’t write about sex, or only write about the negative or maternal consequences of sex, proves that our CanLit does not properly represent the women it claims to. (Nicole Dixon, “The Other F-Word: The Disappearance of Feminism from Our Fiction”)

In her momentous 2010 essay, “The Other F-Word: The Disappearance of Feminism from our Fiction,” Nicole Dixon effectively demonstrates that “In our fiction, sex is still bad.” Dixon’s critique emphasizes how women writers and their female characters are “stuck” in feminine clichés that locate only the negative implications of female sexuality and desire. She further highlights how sex and desire continue to be constructed by patriarchal ideals of sexuality, describing sex as a domain that is occupied unproblematically by and for men. As this thesis will demonstrate, though Dixon’s essay is more than seven years old, her argument still applies: Sex in Canadian fiction is still bad, but in part, this is because women continue to experience the negative implications of sexuality and desire that remain coded as negative in patriarchal society. For female writers to only write the positive alternatives, as Dixon calls for, would negate a lived set of experiences that are not positive at all, and are still certainly part of women’s social reality. Rape culture and slut shaming,¹ for example, are both realistic aspects of the female experience that continue to be relevant and under-explored.

¹ See Laina Bay-Cheng’s, “The Agency Line: A Neoliberal Metric for Appraising Young Women’s Sexuality,” for a more in-depth analysis.

Since the late 1990s, there has been a resurgence in Atlantic Canadian literature that includes more writing by women, and more nuanced representations of women's experiences that challenge traditional depictions of femininity. It could be argued, in fact, that representations of female sexuality, desire, and agency dominate the contemporary literature of Atlantic Canada, yet there has been no sustained critical analysis of female sexuality in contemporary literary criticism. This perplexing absence has been the motivating force behind this study that offers a strategic re-reading of Lisa Moore's early short fiction, Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*, Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven*, and George Elliott Clarke's *The Motorcyclist*. The act of re-reading is essential to this study, as each writers' work has been included in contemporary critical studies of Atlantic Canadian fiction. None of these studies, however, offer an analysis that sufficiently explores women's embodied experiences. Missing from these studies are analyses that focus explicitly on the representations of female sexuality, desire, agency in the texts, and analyses that explore the complex relationship between body and self that continues to be reflected in contemporary society. This study seeks to call attention to this gap, and to at least partially close it, by taking up the works of Moore, MacDonald, Coady, and Clarke by offering a more critical reading of their representations of female sexuality. Moreover, this thesis seeks to demonstrate why such an analysis continues to be relevant in the current state of our society.

Since the publication of Dixon's article, women have certainly made gains in terms of reaching a freer sexual code, but patriarchal ideals continue to underlie this (perceived) freedom. As consumers, we are constantly bombarded with images that show sexually confident and in control women, but these images are constructed by

patriarchally-driven ideals of sexuality and desire.² Mass media and popular culture have coopted feminism for commercial and capital gain, insisting that women are in control of their sexuality while simultaneously promoting stereotypically sexist constructions of female sexuality. bell hooks outlines how versions of feminism promoted by pop culture icons like Beyoncé, who has become a feminist icon in recent years, “cannot be trusted”:

Her (Beyonce’s) vision of feminism does not call for an end to patriarchal domination. It’s all about insisting on equal rights for men and women. In the world of fantasy feminism, there are no class, sex, and race hierarchies that breakdown simplified categories of women and men, no call to challenge and change systems of domination, no emphasis on intersectionality. In such a simplified worldview, women gaining the freedom to be like men can be seen as powerful. But it is a false construction of power[.] (“Moving Beyond the Pain”)

hooks nicely demonstrates how sex, particularly female sexuality, is still “bad,” as it continues to be driven by patriarchal ideals that privilege the male gaze. This is not to say that women who consider themselves to be “sexually free” are not: different things empower different people, but it becomes problematic when our contemporary society perpetuates a narrow definition of female sexuality that is informed by patriarchal ideals of femininity and sexuality.

² Popular culture and mass media are perfect examples of this. Pop culture icons like Beyoncé, Kim Kardashian, Ariana Grande (“Side to Side”) and Fergie (“MILF\$”) continue to exploit patriarchally driven ideals that have been repackaged in the name of feminism. See: bell hooks’ essay, “Moving Beyond the Pain,” for a more nuanced discussion.

Challenging the systems in place that perpetuate patriarchal values is essential to this analysis. hooks' essay underscores how patriarchy continues to inform feminist discourses by highlighting how our society continues to be socialized through patriarchal ideologies. Our socialization is essential to how we understand and interact with our surroundings, and thus it is closely connected to how we read texts. Gender, femininity, and sexuality are still read and interpreted from a patriarchally conditioned lens. This is most persuasively argued by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, where they criticize Harold Bloom's model of literary history, *The Anxiety of Influence*. Gilbert and Gubar assert that his model "is intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal" (1928), leaving little room for female authors and the feminine subculture of literature. Gilbert and Gubar state that we live in "a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority, as we have seen, are both overtly and covertly patriarchal" (1926-27). This has conditioned readers to read from patriarchal perspectives that essentialize, if not completely negate, women's experiences. This forces female readers and writers to "struggle against the effects of socialization" (1929), and work to "redefine the terms of her socialization" (1929-30) in order to shift the perspective and to validate, and highlight the realities of women's lived experiences.

Gilbert and Gubar argue that under patriarchal socialization, women and women writers experience "'alternative' (second sex) psychology of women under patriarchy" (1930). Their second sex philosophy is influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's feminist text, *The Second Sex*, which seeks to analyze women's position in society as secondary, or "Other" (Simone de Beauvoir 1266). de Beauvoir argues that "the categories in which men think of the world are established *from their point of view, as absolute*" (1268). This perspective not only socializes both men and women to view the world from a

masculinist perspective, it creates an essentialist definition of what it means to be a woman:

In men's eyes – and for the legion of women who see through men's eyes – it is not enough to have a woman's body nor to assume the female function as mistress or mother in order to be a 'true woman.' In sexuality and maternity woman as subject can claim autonomy; but in order to be a 'true woman' she must accept herself as the Other. (1272)

In patriarchal society, women's experiences are thought of as the "other," and the myths of women and femininity are created as a result. de Beauvoir argues that within patriarchy, "it is not reality that dictates to society or to individuals their choice between the two opposed basic categories; in every period, in each case, society and the individual decide in accordance with their needs. Very often they project into the myth adopted by the institutions and values to which they adhere" (1267). Within a patriarchal society, then, the experiences of women, and women themselves, are regarded as secondary, or "the inessential" (1272).

Stereotyped ideas of femininity are fundamental to what characterizes women's experiences under patriarchy. It is understood to be intrinsic to women's identities and has proven to be advantageous for men, as it "permits an easy explanation of all that appears inexplicable" about women (de Beauvoir 1268). This is what de Beauvoir calls the "feminine 'mystery'" (1268); men and women who are conditioned to see from a patriarchal lens give credit to the "feminine mystery" by perpetuating stereotyped lines of femininity.³

³ An interesting example of how the feminine mystery is used as scapegoat in patriarchal society was seen throughout the 2016 American election. Comedy Network's *The Daily*

de Beauvoir further argues that “[few] myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorizes their abuse. Men need not bother themselves with alleviating the pains and the burdens that psychologically are women’s lot, since these are ‘intended by nature’” (1267). The idea that women are inferior by nature gives a false justification for masculine superiority. This is directly reflected in the sexual relationship between men and women, and women’s sexual experiences as a whole. In the foreword of the newest addition of Kate Millett’s 1970 analysis of sexual politics in literature (*Sexual Politics*), Catherine MacKinnon argues that “the sexualization of power is the basis of oppression,” (IX) and “[social] roles, gender-based temperaments, and sexual scripts produce and reproduce the sexual domination of men over women and other men” (X). The basis that women are inferior to men based on nature allows for the continued “conformity to social norms that are widely but falsely believed to be based male and female autonomy” (X). What Millett’s study seeks to do, is to analyze and deconstruct the “sexual double standard” (7) and power imbalance between women and men.

Throughout *Sexual Politics*, Millett outlines the theory of sexual politics, the history of sexual politics and the ideologies that have acted as the foundation of the power imbalance between men and women. Although Millett only critiques male authors in her study, her work has been instrumental in the feminist literary criticism movement, and the movement towards a freer sexual code for women. Millett’s work builds from de

Show attended several Trump rallies asking questions to Trump supporters to gain insight into their worldviews and why they supported TV-star Donald Trump over the much more qualified Hilary Clinton. Both male and female respondents argued that a woman was not fit to be president of the United States of America because of the “hormones” associated with the menstrual cycle. (cite)

Beauvoir's work, and Hannah Arendt's "Speculations on Violence" (26) to deconstruct this sexual power imbalance, arguing:

Sexual politics obtains consent through the 'socialization' of both sexes to patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role, and status. As to status, a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees a superior status in the male, inferior in the female. The first item, temperament, involves the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category ('masculine' and 'feminine'), based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates. (26).

This translates to women's subordination in sex due to (perceived) inherent femininity. Millett argues that the convenient qualities associated with femininity are "passivity, ignorance, docility, 'virtue,' and ineffectuality" (26), which reflects de Beauvoir's characterization of the feminine mystery.

Following de Beauvoir and Millett's texts, Judith Butler's 1990, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*,⁴ further deconstructs how ideals of femininity, masculinity, and the concept of gender, are cultural constructs: "gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real. [...] Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex?" (Butler 2541). Butler uses drag and the dramatization of stereotypical

⁴ Although there were many influential feminist scholars to come between and during the publications by de Beauvoir, Millett, and Butler; Virginia Woolf, Annette Kolodony, Helen Cixous, Eve Sedgwick, and Adrienne Rich, to name a few, the narrow focus of this study limits which feminist scholars work I draw from.

gestures that signify and establish gender and femininity to show that “the binary of sex, gender, and the body – can be shown as productions that create the effect of the [‘natural’]” (2541).

Butler argues that “gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. To be more precise, it is a production which, in effect – that is, in its effect – postures and imitation” (2550). Gender, and the attributes associated with each sex, aligns with the values of a given society. This “construction ‘compels’ our beliefs in its necessity and naturalness” (2551-52). Within a society that adheres to a patriarchal value system, then, we can see that femininity and the traits associated with it affect how, and what governs women’s sexuality. This calls attention to the consequences women face for not adhering to the cultural guidelines that are associated with being a woman. Butler writes that “we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (2551). This brings us back to Dixon’s argument that for women, “sex is still bad”. We consistently see women, whether it be through day to day experiences, the media, or through our literature, punished for failing to do “their gender right” (Butler 2251).

The works of Moore, MacDonald, and Coady emphasize the complex realities of women’s experiences explored by Gilbert and Gubar, de Beauvoir, Millett, and Butler, but from a more contemporary lens that gives insight into regional experiences and politics. Their work also underscores how women have access to a freer sexual code that disrupts male sexual entitlement, despite representations that continue to show how women experience the punishment that Butler first addressed in *Gender Trouble*. Laina Bay-Cheng offers an updated version of how we conceptualize female sexuality in contemporary society, arguing, “young women’s sexuality is now measured – whether by

specific individuals, in the rhetoric of popular media, or from the broader perspective of the generalized other – not only in moralist terms of abstinence and promiscuity, but also in neoliberal ones related to individual agency and personal responsibility” (279). The existing virgin/whore dichotomy that marks traditional discourses of female sexuality, and “an emerging *Agency Line* marking [women’s] supposed sexual agency, intersect with one another, creating a multi-dimensional matrix that young women must now navigate” (Bay-Cheng 280). Bay-Cheng demonstrates that neoliberal discourses have added a new dimension to female sexuality that insists “individuals should be free to make any sexual decisions they wished as long as they accept responsibility for any consequences” (282). Words like “slut” and “whore” are still used to describe women’s perceived sexual indiscretions and/or inadequacy, but “it’s meaning appears to be shifting such that it [signifies] being sexually out of control, not simply being sexually active” (Bay-Cheng 282). In this way, women still have to contend with patriarchally driven ideals that label and police their sexual actions in terms that mirror the virgin/whore dichotomy of traditional discourses.

Despite having access to sexual freedoms originally only accessible to men, traditionally gendered discourses underlie contemporary constructions of female sexuality. Femininity (and the traits that define it) is still practiced and widely understood to be pervasive. In criticism dedicated to Canadian literature, scholars have long occupied interrogative processes that explore questions of gender, femininity, and (less-so) sexuality in Canadian fiction. In *Practicing Femininity: Domestic Realism and the Performance of Gender in Early Canadian Fiction*, Misao Dean analyzes early (central) Canadian fiction by “interrogating historical texts within their historical contexts to suggest how they function ideologically to produce and naturalize femininity” (6). Dean’s

analysis of early Canadian literature is a valuable resource in terms of understanding how femininity is constructed and practiced in a patriarchal society, and how it continues to reflect what informs ideas of femininity and female sexuality in contemporary society. Female desire and sexuality, however, are not actively included as part of that analysis. This is reflective of the ideological constraints placed on the female authors chosen by Dean to study, while simultaneously demonstrating how we still read female sexuality from a patriarchally conditioned lens. Dean's analysis further highlights how contemporary discourses outlined by Bay-Cheng, continue to be informed by traditional ideals of gender and femininity, despite reaching a freer sexual code for women.

The lack of inclusion of female sexuality is also apparent in criticism that focuses on western and maritime fiction in Canada. In *History, Literature and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies*, just one chapter is focused on femininity and the female sub-culture of that literature. Similar to Dean's analysis, "The 'Precarious Perch' of the 'Decent Woman': The Spatial (De)Constructions of Gender in Women's Prairie Memoirs," analyzes how "Victorian attitudes and values had solidified and [became] the norm" (S. Leigh Matthews 144); while also highlighting how female authors, similar to those being focused on in this study, "[challenged] conventional constructions of the female body and the work the female body is able to perform" (143). But is sexuality not part of the conventional construction of the female body? Both texts imply that it is, but fail to deconstruct how and why it is.

This is a similar trend seen in the criticism of Atlantic Canadian Fiction. In *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction*, Janice Kulyk Keefer offers an analysis of maritime regionalism, but again, only allows one chapter to focus primarily on writing by women and the construction of gender and femininity in maritime fiction.

Although Keefer is transparent in her analysis and highlights that she has only written “briefly on the way in which the relationship between words and women in the maritimes has traditionally been perceived,” (258) she leaves room for a more nuanced analysis of writing by and about women, and the construction of gender, femininity, and female sexuality in contemporary writing, and in contemporary society.

Contemporary criticism of Atlantic Canadian literature similarly focuses on regionalism and the various stereotypes associated with the region that authors and critics alike are challenging. Essentialized and romanticized assumptions that characterize perceptions of life in Atlantic Canada have successfully been deconstructed by critics like Ian McKay (*Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia*), Herb Wyile (*Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic Canadian Literature*), and David Creelman (*Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction*). Female sexuality, however, is largely absent in that criticism. Gender and femininity are always referred to,⁵ but the fiction is still being analyzed from a specific gaze. I hesitate to say “patriarchal” because that does an incredible disservice to McKay, Wyile, and Creelman; their studies have been hugely influential in their fields and even to this study, but the absence of female sexuality serves as a glaring blind spot that perpetuates traditional discourses that Other women’s experiences. I will instead argue that the gaze, in terms of how female desire and sexuality continues to be read, has not shifted enough to satisfy the needs of contemporary feminism.

⁵ McKay, Creelman, and Wyile all have sections of their texts dedicated to gender in Atlantic Canadian fiction. Their analyses, although influential, are not satisfactory representations of women’s experiences.

Danielle Fuller is, however, one scholar whose work attempts to shift that gaze.

Her book-length study *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada*, “[demonstrates] the heterogeneity of Atlantic culture; arguing that [the author's] texts speak to the ways in which class, race, sexuality, and physical ability inform the experiences of women on Canada's eastern most edge” (4). Fuller's emphasis on women's experiences and values force readers to analyze texts from a different perspective that decentralizes the patriarchal lens that we have been conditioned to read through.

Fuller demonstrates that stereotypical and essentializing gender structures of patriarchal society are being broken down by women's writing within the region, redefining the traditionally limiting home space that a patriarchal value system not only perpetuates, but requires. Fuller argues:

Contemporary women's writing from the Atlantic provinces creates a sense of place through the mapping of social relations. This mapping frequently begins with the family, the most intimate space in which social difference, especially gender difference, is experienced. [...] Atlantic women's writing challenges the conservative and exclusive notion of home place that has traditionally been associated with Maritime literary culture. [...] Within these examples of contemporary Atlantic writing by women, home is the site of complex social and psychological relationships as well as an area situated within wider economic and political relations that impact directly on the activities that take place there. (31-33)

Fuller's assertion that the home-space is a "site of complex social and psychological relationships" (33) locates the home as a space that is not always safe, positive, or fulfilling for women in the way that patriarchally driven systems write it to be (33).⁶

Since Fuller's *Writing the Everyday*, dissertations and theses at the PhD and Masters levels have explored how feminism and Atlantic Canadian literature intersect. Such studies have offered a more comprehensive discussion of women's experience in the region than what was first discussed by scholars like McKay, Creelman, and Wyile. Catherine Campbell, who completed her MA in Atlantic Canada Studies in 2008, wrote her thesis, *Reading the Waves: Fluid Regionalism in Twentieth-Century Maritime Literature*, on three different "waves" of Maritime literature throughout the twentieth-century. Campbell argues that First Wave literature, namely works by Lucy Maud Montgomery, Thomas H. Raddall, and Ernest Buckler, "view the Maritimes, at least partially, under an idyllic or pastoral lens," and "Maritimers are depicted following the Folk ideology" (9-10); Second Wave writing, "such as that of Richards, Alistair MacLeod, Sheldon Currie, and Ann-Marie MacDonald, creates the Maritimes as a world primarily dominated by rural labourers and masculinity" (11). Campbell further argues that Second Wave writing often problematized femininity and leaves little voice for women's experiences (11);⁷ Third Wave writing, Campbell argues, signifies the emergence of "regional resistance" by women writers like Lynn Coady, "Christy Ann

⁶ McKay's outline of the Folk stereotype as "highly gendered," with men and women occupying traditional roles that are associated with men and women: women's spaces are situated within the home, while men, the family patriarchs, are granted the ability to occupy all spaces outside of the home.

⁷ Second Wave literature, as Campbell describes it, privileges masculine discourses and perpetuates Folk ideologies that situate women's experiences almost exclusively within the home.

Conlin, Lesley Crewe, and Stephanie Domet,” who “expand the definition of home by voicing silent stories: Crewe creates upper-middle-class rural families that are removed from Second Wave portraits of industrial labour and the climate of poverty; Domet produces an inhabitable urban landscape and describes the kinds of lifestyle that may exist in this setting” (11). Campbell demonstrates that Third Wave writing sees the emergence of female experiences that highlight the essentializing role First and Second Wave writing played in depicting women’s experiences that are not reflective of women’s realities in our contemporary, globalized society.

Similar to Campbell’s study, Susanne Marshall’s 2009 dissertation, “*We Are Most Ourselves When We Are Changing*”: *Michael Winter, Lynn Coady, Lisa Moore, and the Literary Reconfiguration of Atlantic Canadian Regionalism*, also focuses on female writers’ work to highlight how writing by women has changed the landscape of literary regionalism. Marshall’s dissertation explores “dominant understandings of regionalism and Atlantic Canada,” and how the works of Winter, Coady, and Moore “question the deployment of a unified space or history as the basis of regional belonging” (V). Marshall further considers “the ways that selected Atlantic Canadian writers engage with their place, in their time” (2), and through this analysis, she explores how female writers like Moore and Coady redefine female experiences in global, modern terms.⁸ Although Marshall’s analysis is focused on regionalism that stems from the work of McKay, Creelman, and Wyile, her analyses of Moore’s early short fiction, and Coady’s work that

⁸ Marshall’s dissertation includes analyses of stories from Moore’s *Degrees of Nakedness* and *Open*, implicitly referencing the varied nature of the experiences of Moore’s women. A major component of her analysis on Moore focuses on how her women’s experiences are shaped by the global, modern forces that shape contemporary St. Johns. Marshall also includes an analysis on *Strange Heaven* – namely how Bridget’s experiences reflect a contemporary rural existence that challenges essentializing Folk stereotypes.

includes *Strange Heaven*, offers insight into women's experiences that are absent from the work of her predecessors.

Female sexuality is largely absent from both Campbell's and Marshall's work despite writing previously unwritten perspectives of women's experiences. Fuller, Campbell, and Marshall's texts have all been invaluable resources to this project in terms of understanding how female writers have challenged traditional, essentializing depictions of women's experiences. Addressing how writers depict female sexuality is the natural progression to understanding how women, both in and outside of the region, experience and engage with desire, agency, and their sexuality; this study explores how the works of Lisa Moore, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Lynn Coady, and George Elliott Clarke represent female sexuality, desire, and agency. The writers included in this study are recognized as part of the Atlantic literary canon. Their works have been widely studied, critically and commercially successful, and have greatly influenced the literary landscape of the region; because they are a part of the Atlantic literary canon, the act of re-reading is critical to this study, as their works have dominated academic discussions about literary regionalism, yet have not been part of an analysis that explores female sexuality in either Canadian, or Atlantic Canadian fiction.

Working from a chronological time-line, I commence this study with the early short fiction of Lisa Moore; two stories from *Degrees of Nakedness*: "Granular," and "Carmen has Gonorrhoea"; and two stories from *Open*: "Melody," and "Grace," will work together to show how white, upper-middle-class women engage with their sexuality. Moore's women highlight an array of sexual experiences that are dominated by the privileges afforded to them based on their race and class status. Moore has been criticized

for her representations of women's realities,⁹ yet she writes a realistic set of experiences that certainly do not account for all women, but they do account for many experiences representative of white, upper-middle-class women.

Due to their class status, Moore's women often appear anti-feminist.¹⁰ Passivity marks many of their sexual experiences and day-to-day lives, but I will work to show how their experiences are common of women in their positions in contemporary patriarchal society. Moore's women underscore how interpretations of feminism are narrow in our contemporary society, as their experiences are often excluded from feminist discourses because of their appearances as "anti-feminist" (Dixon).¹¹

Upon close reading, however, Moore's women demonstrate a spectrum of female sexuality that is essential to how I frame my analysis of her short stories. "Granular" depicts a sexually in control woman who engages in explicit sex acts with her partner, uses inanimate objects during their sex, and films a sex tape. "Carmen has Gonorrhoea" explores how women experience the negative social implications of being in control of their sexuality through being shamed and alienated at the hands of their community.

⁹ Moore has been criticized as a "feminized" not feminist author (Dixon, "The Other F-Word: The Disappearance of Feminism from Our Fiction") for her representations of women's experiences. In Barbara Kay's review of *February* (2009) for *The National Post*, Kay critiques how "Moore deflects attention from the tragedy and its male victims to hover solicitously over a surrogate victim, her protagonist, 31-year-old widowed Helen, 'a creation rooted in the lives of Moore's own mother and herself.'" Although Moore's own experiences with grief and loss may not be connected to the Ocean Ranger tragedy, they are applicable, and demonstrate how grief and loss impact women's lives.

¹⁰ Nicole Dixon's "The Other F-Word" outlines why much of Moore's fiction, and as a result, women, appear anti-feminist. In the chapter that follows, I will demonstrate why her women are not anti-feminist, and I instead locate their passivity as one of the privileges their class status affords them.

¹¹ Dixon uses clichéd images of "sockless ballet flats" and "army boots" ("The Other F-Word") to represent feminized versus feminist; insinuating that women who claim femininity cannot be feminists in the way that "riot grrrls" of third wave feminism were.

“Grace” demonstrates how female passivity becomes an engrained trait in patriarchal society that influences how women engage with their sexuality and relationships. The final story I analyze is “Melody,” where Moore explores how female agency and passivity intersect, showing two women who embody how agency is exerted in patriarchal society, and how passivity is a conditioned trait of white, upper-middle-class women. The chosen stories work together to underscore how such women engage with their sexuality; the privileges, as well as the restrictions that patriarchal society creates.

The way in which Moore’s women experience sexuality is clearly not representative of all women’s experiences. Moving from Moore’s texts, my second section examines how Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees* offers a perspective of female sexuality that is unquestionably absent from the experiences of Moore’s women. For MacDonald’s women, overtly patriarchal ideals govern their selves and bodies. Racism and their lower-class status means they do not experience the same privileges afforded to Moore’s women, and incest, rape, and physical abuse underlie their early interactions with sex and sexuality. Throughout the novel, the relationship between power, rape, and female agency is depicted through Materia, Kathleen, and Frances Piper. The purpose of this chapter is to explore how horrific sexual experiences are a part of women’s experiences in patriarchal society.

Materia, Kathleen, and Frances Piper each experience patriarchal domination at the hands of James Piper, the family patriarch, who uses his sex as a means to exploit his superiority and dominance over his wife and daughters. Throughout this chapter, I will analyze how class systems in patriarchy influence female sexuality, and in turn female agency, further exploring how sex, namely acts of rape, are used a means to control

women.¹² In analyzing acts of rape, I will outline how the Piper women navigate the overtly patriarchal obstacles that James Piper represents to their agency, highlighting how the female characters actively seek to secure self control in a household where it is policed, if not completely restricted by patriarchal forces.

MacDonald's women also underscore how patriarchy and racialized systems intersect. Being of Lebanese heritage, the Piper women, namely Materia, experience acts of racism that are, again, absent from the experiences of Moore's women. Through Materia, MacDonald highlights the exoticism and sexualization she faces due to her skin colour and gender, and later how her race becomes a scapegoat for her perceived mental incapacities that are outcomes of the limitations that James' patriarchal assumptions impose on her self and body. Through the experiences of Materia, Kathleen, and Frances, MacDonald offers readers insight into coping mechanisms¹³ that underscore the gravity of the horrific experiences that characterize their interactions with sexuality, desire, and agency.

MacDonald's Piper women offer readers a previously unrepresented glimpse into methods of female agency that I further explore in Lynn Coady's *Strange Heaven*. Where the Piper women represent a delve into the horrific aspects associated with female sexuality, Coady's Bridget Murphy offers readers a way out of patriarchal domination, as

¹² Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* nicely demonstrates how men and women of a lower-class status are subjected to patriarchal ideals differently, often more explicitly and dangerously than upper-middle-class women and men, as sex becomes the only way in which men are able to assert their dominance over women. See, "Introduction" of *Sexual Politics* for an in-depth discussion of the relationship between patriarchal class systems.

¹³ Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight*, which explores mental disorders primarily associated with women – hysteria, agoraphobia, and anorexia – is used throughout this chapter as a means of conceptualizing how the Piper women develop subconscious, but nonetheless effective and powerful, means of gaining control of their selves and bodies in control of their patriarchal surroundings.

she emphasizes how acts of female agency work to challenge and overcome the dominant patriarchal forces of her environments. Similar to the Piper women, Bridget's working class background and patriarchal surroundings limit and restrict her agency. Bridget's experiences, however, are situated both in and outside of her home, locating the values of not only her immediate community, but those of the psychiatric ward where readers first meet Bridget, as being restrictive to her agency too. Essential to my analysis of *Strange Heaven* is how Coady's text locates a new perspective in Atlantic Canadian fiction that centralizes a female voice that overcomes the pervasive ideological forces that work to limit and restrict her agency.

The experience of Bridget, along with several other female characters throughout the novel, namely those of her fellow inpatients during her stay at the psychiatric ward, underscore how her experiences are not isolated; Maria, Kelly, and Mona, all characters who are largely absent from previous analyses of *Strange Heaven*,¹⁴ work to show how patriarchal ideologies police and govern women who refuse to comply with patriarchal norms that dictate proper and improper modes of femininity. Each of the female characters, and particularly Bridget, represent how essentializing depictions of women's experiences are not reflective of women's lived realities, while Bridget represents a new hero in Atlantic Canadian literature that gives a new voice to women's experiences in our contemporary society.

The experiences of Coady's Bridget Murphy effectively call into question the experiences of the women included in the fourth and final section of this study. My thesis

¹⁴ *Strange Heaven* is undoubtedly part of the Atlantic literary canon, and it is the subject of several book-length studies. The supporting female characters, Maria, Kelly, and Mona, however, are mostly absent from any in-depth analyses. Their function within the text, however, is essential to how I analyze Bridget's experiences, and the text as a whole.

concludes with a focused re-reading and a forceful reappraisal of George Elliott Clarke's 2015 novel *The Motorcyclist*. This novel, which is in part based on Clarke's father's diaries from the late 1950s,¹⁵ follows Carl Black – a CNR railway worker, artist, and serial womanizer, as he navigates his way through a racially and class divided Halifax. Carl's relationships with several supporting female characters makes up the bulk of the text's plot, despite the title that alludes to Carl's identity as a motorcyclist. His motorcycle, I argue, serves as a tangible representation of the agency that is afforded to Carl, and not extended to the female characters. Readers are introduced to Muriel Dixon, Marina White, Laura 'Blue Roses' States, Averil Beauchamps, and Liz Publicover as the women who occupy his love life. Carl creates a hierarchal categorization of the women based on race, class, gender, and their ability (or inability) to define what he sees as desirable femininity.

Over the course of the novel, Clarke provides brief insight into female agency and sexuality, but ultimately dismantles it by writing the women's outcomes to reflect what can only be perceived as feminine failure in patriarchal society. Carl treats each of the women as sexual objects, and when they challenge this position through various acts of female agency, Carl reclassifies them to protect what he sees as his superior masculine identity. Clarke eventually renders the female characters incapable of redemption based on patriarchal values that do not accurately reflect women's experiences. Instead, the female characters appear as one dimensional, feminized archetypes and are given little

¹⁵ Clarke writes that *The Motorcyclist* "is neither biography nor history, but it does sketch the he-said, she-said, *black* comedies of coupling and their *personal* consequences. All open to *Interpretation*. As usual..." (x). This study serves as my interpretation of the novel.

room to grow outside of the traditional discourses of ‘good verses bad’ femininity;¹⁶ discourses that the works of Moore, MacDonald and Coady actively work to dismantle.

The female characters written by Moore, MacDonald, and Coady demonstrate the complexity of female sexuality and desire, the horrifying extent of patriarchal control, and the necessity of female agency and control over one’s self and body. Each of their texts offer insights into previously unrepresented women’s experiences that reflect the embodied experiences of women, and challenge the essentializing depictions of femininity seen in traditional Atlantic Canadian literature. Though their texts were all published between the mid to late 1990s, their relevance persists. My fourth chapter that analyzes *The Motorcyclist*, argues that Clarke’s novel serves as a text that represents why the early works of Moore, MacDonald, and Coady are still relevant; demonstrating why we need a more comprehensive analysis of female sexuality, desire, and agency – particularly the experiences of Bridget Murphy – to emphasize the pervasiveness of patriarchal ideals that continue to perpetuate women’s status as secondary members of society. The experiences of Clarke’s women locate the values of patriarchal society as being the defining forces that characterize femininity, female sexuality, desire, and agency. Although I greatly respect Clarke as both a writer and academic,¹⁷ his representation of women’s experiences throughout *The Motorcyclist* demonstrate why a study like the one I am presenting is necessary.

In analyzing the works of Moore, MacDonald, Coady, and Clarke, intersectionality becomes essential to how I frame this study of female sexuality, desire,

¹⁶ See, Laina Bay-Cheng’s “The Agency Line,” for a more in depth interpretation.

¹⁷ Clarke, both a writer and scholar, is the only writer included in this study whose works contribute to the Atlantic Literary Canon, and whose academic publications contribute to the criticism on Canadian/Atlantic Canadian literature.

and agency in our contemporary patriarchal society. Linda Gordon writes that “the very basic concept [of intersectionality] – that multiple forms of domination interact and even fuse into new forms –” (340), “calls for recognizing and respecting a broader array of identities and causes” (354). This study seeks to analyze how the multifaceted nature of our contemporary patriarchal society intersect to create varied, complex, and multidimensional experiences of female sexuality, desire, and agency based on class, race, and gender. This study is also about refusal;¹⁸ it is about refusing the patriarchal forces that undermine feminism; it is about refusing the effects of our socialization; and it is about addressing the gap in criticism that ignores the complex reality of women’s embodied experiences in our contemporary society.

¹⁸ Erin Wunker describes the importance of feminist refusal to patriarchal ideologies throughout *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy* that has been hugely influential to this study.

Chapter 1

“He seems to go through girls pretty quickly and I want to be gone through”:
Surveying the Spectrum of Embodied Female Sexuality in Lisa Moore’s Short Fiction

Over a career that now spans more than 20 years, Newfoundland short-story writer and novelist, Lisa Moore, has risen to international success and is widely recognized as one of Canada’s, and specifically Atlantic Canada’s essential voices in literary fiction. Since the publication of her first short-story collection, *Degrees of Nakedness* (1995), Moore has experienced both critical and commercial success. She has been named a finalist three times for the prestigious Giller Prize (*Open*, 2002, *Alligator*, 2005, and *Caught*, 2013); *Alligator* won the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize: Best Book Award; *February* (2009) was long-listed for the 2010 Man Booker Prize and won *CBC Canada Reads: Turf Wars* in 2013; *Caught* is currently being adapted into a television series; and her most recent novel, *Flannery* (2016), her first delve into young adult fiction, has proven to be successful with readers of all ages. Before becoming one of Canada’s most well-known writers, Moore studied visual arts at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design prior to studying Creative Writing at Memorial University. While at Memorial, Moore and several of her classmates formed The Burning Rock Collective¹⁹ under the influence of writer and English professor, Larry Matthews. The Burning Rock, made up of nationally and internationally acclaimed writers like Moore, Michael Winter and Jessica Grant, among others, continues to expand, meet, and publish works that capture a contemporary, urbanized Newfoundland.

¹⁹ A Newfoundland writing group formed in the 1990s by Moore and several other of her Creative Writing classmates. The Burning Rock Collective has been instrumental in the resurgence of Newfoundland writers whose work portrays an urbanized, globalized community.

Similar to her Burning Rock contemporaries, Moore's work deconstructs stereotypical assumptions of life in Newfoundland. Her characters, and the Newfoundland they inhabit, are multifaceted and modernized, reflecting the urbanization of the region, and the complexities of the lived experiences of the provinces' inhabitants. Moore's work challenges preconceived notions of regionalism as it "subverts attempts by advertisers to invent a branded Newfoundland cultural identity, highlighting instead the malaise and discontent of a globalized capitalist society" (Parsons 5). Moore's work has been forefront in academic discussions on regionalism and notions of place as scholars continue to highlight how her fiction "provides a good example not only of the increasingly cosmopolitan sensibility of the literature of Newfoundland and Labrador, but also its incisive understanding of the political and economic tensions of the province's position in a neoliberal, globalized economic order" (Wyile 56).²⁰

Moore's fiction, although certainly representative of a cosmopolitan Newfoundland and regional politics, also depicts a variety of female narrators and protagonists who reflect the realities of women's embodied experiences in patriarchal society. Tracy Whalen argues that Lisa Moore "has not attracted the close scholarly attention her work warrants" (2), and this is especially true in criticism dedicated to feminism in Canadian and Atlantic Canadian literature. In her essay critiquing the state of feminism in Canadian literature, Nicole Dixon argues that in *February*,²¹ Moore

²⁰ For more on regionalism in Moore, see: Herb Wyile, *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Re-shaping of Atlantic Canadian Literature*; Paul Chafe, "'Only an Artist Can Measure Up to Such a Place': Place and Identity in Contemporary Newfoundland Fiction" (Diss.); Susanne Marshall, "'We Are Most Ourselves When We Are Changing': Michael Winter, Lynn Coady, Lisa Moore, and the Literary Reconfiguration of Atlantic Canadian Regionalism" (Diss.).

²¹ At the time of Dixon's 2010 publication of "The Other F-Word: The Disappearance of Feminism from our Fiction," *February* was Moore's most recent novel.

establishes herself as a “feminized, not feminist” author. Dixon suggests that “Since writing *Open*, Moore has ‘forgotten how to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives.’ For Dixon, Moore has “forgotten” how to present women who fall outside of the stereotyped, feminized caricatures that are often present in Canadian Literature.²² She further argues that “*February* celebrates female passivity, shows no alternatives to ‘mother’ or ‘wife’ when such alternatives are innumerable, and in championing passivity and old-fashioned gender roles, Moore, along with the women who champion her, twists feminism into its inverse” (Dixon). Dixon’s argument here is clear and purposeful, and very useful, but it also overstates the case. Moore’s work covers a wide spectrum of female experiences, and instead of critiquing *February* as a feminized not feminist novel, it needs to be articulated that the text is primarily an exploration of grief from a woman’s perspective. This woman just happens to be a widow and a mother (like innumerable other women), and someone who actively participates in (and sincerely enjoys) the “feminine clichés” (like sewing) that Dixon disparages. Dixon’s argument that situates the novel as a whole as being “anti-feminist” negates a lived set of experiences that are part of many women’s realities. In doing so, Dixon simply perpetuates a new, narrower definition of what essential feminism is, or what it “should” be. This is exactly what feminism aims not to do: to label and tell women what they should and should not be.²³

²² See Danielle Fuller, *Writing the Everyday: Women’s Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada*, for more information on how female writing in the region has disrupted traditional, simplified depictions of the female experience.

²³ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s, *We Should All Be Feminists* (Anchor Books, 2014), and Erin Wunker’s, *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy: Essays on Everyday Life* (Book Thug, 2016), both effectively demonstrate positive representations of feminism that refuse to label the movement under specific, stereotypical guidelines. Roxanne Gay’s *Bad Feminist* (Harper Collins 2014) also critiques the guidelines of feminism and the connotations the word holds.

Dixon concludes her criticism of *February* by comparing it to one of Moore's earlier publications, the short story collection, *Open*. *Open*, Moore's second book, was published in 2002 to much critical acclaim. Dixon argues that *Open* is an example of true feminist literature, while *February* embodies its inverse: feminized writing. There are, however, several stories in *Open* that, according to Dixon's model of feminism, should be seen as "anti-feminist" ("Grace," for example). Moore's aim as a writer is to create stories that realistically reflect the complexities and realities of women's everyday lives; including the feminist, and what can be seen as "anti-feminist" or feminized.²⁴

In his review of *Open*, David Creelman suggests that "At their core the volume's ten stories function as realist texts; the narratives draw close to the inner psyche of the central protagonists and create the illusion that they are faithful records of the character's inner experiences" (1). Moore's stories often range from dealing with feelings of jealousy and inferiority, to the ups and downs of motherhood and marriage; she writes about women being cheated on, and women cheating. Feelings of regret, lust and love, sadness, anger and happiness permeate the lives of Moore's characters. This multifaceted perspective is what makes her fiction a realistic representation of women's experiences.

Moore's versatility as a writer and emphasis on realistic, embodied experiences allows the complexity of women's experiences to be foregrounded in her fiction. In an interview with Herb Wyile, Moore asserts that she "wanted to write about what it felt like to be jealous, what it felt like to be in love, what it felt like to lose your virginity, what it felt like to have a child" (110). As a result, Moore's truthful representation of a particular kind of the everyday is permeated with female sexuality. Dixon's observation that "sex

²⁴ See interview: Wyile, Herb. "All Over the Canvas: An Interview with Lisa Moore." *Antigonish Review*, 1 January 2008.

in our fiction is still bad” (Dixon), still applies here in interesting ways, but Moore’s fiction is also filled with fascinating portrayals of sex-positive, or sexually in control women who show different perspectives of female sexuality, and importantly, how women experience the negative consequences of embodied sexuality.²⁵ Moore moves away from the conventional angle of the home-sphere that is prevalent in traditional literature, and gives women back a complicated self and body. She writes about women who engage in and enjoy sex, but also about women who are shamed for having an abortion; women who are shamed for embodying hyper-sexualized images of femininity, and women who are subject to misogynistic representations of sex at a young age.²⁶ Unfortunately, these representations are direct mimetic reflections of the realities of sex and female sexuality in our contemporary society. By highlighting the complexities, Moore creates a dialogue and an understanding of how misogyny is often invisible and woven into the fabric of our everyday lives. To show a representation of sex that is only positive and empowering for women would be to deny the reality of female sexuality in contemporary patriarchal society.

In her 1992 MA thesis, “Female Sexuality in Alice Munro’s Fiction,” Mavis Assad explores how “sexuality occupies a central position” in Munro’s work (Assad 1). She argues that “Munro expresses the realities of women’s lives in their encounters with the complexities of sexuality. Never simplifying, struggling always for the exact shading,

²⁵ Dixon calls for more writers to include sex-positive, and positive interpretations of female sexuality in Canadian literature, but women still experience negativity associated with sexuality, realized in acts of misogyny, “slut-shaming” and stereotyping that will be explored in this chapter.

²⁶ Moore’s stories, “Grace,” and “The Stylist,” both from *Open*, include elements of women’s early experiences, and representations of sex; both include depictions that show power imbalances in sex between men and women in patriarchal society.

she manages to illuminate the double hook of sexuality for women, both its darkness and its glory” (12-13). Moore’s fiction, like Munro’s, explores both the positive and negative implications of female sexuality. In applying Assad’s framework to Moore’s short stories, I will analyze how the women in her fiction embody and navigate the complexities of the divisive binary of female sexuality that creates a wide spectrum of experiences, and complicates traditional depictions of femininity. I will start my analysis by focusing on two stories from *Degrees of Nakedness* (1995): “Granular,” and “Carmen has Gonorrhoea;” and then shift my focus to *Open* (2003), where I will analyze “Melody,” and “Grace.” Each of the women in these chosen stories occupies a different social position and provides a different perspective on female sexuality in comparison to not only each other, but also to the different novels that will be focused on in the chapters to come.

Overwhelmingly, Moore’s women embody a conceptualization of female sexuality that is representative of their white, middle-class racial and socioeconomic positions, and this is instrumental in how they experience sex. Often these characters engage in sex both passively and ambivalently. Where Dixon critiques this passivity as being profoundly “anti-feminist” (Dixon), Moore’s writing stresses how many women experience this ambivalence and passivity in sex through conditioning of a patriarchal society. As Millet argues: “[i]t is in the area of class that the caste-like status of the female within patriarchy is most liable to confusion, for sexual status often operates in a superficially confusing way within the variable of class” (36). For middle class white women, passivity and ambivalence in sex are often the result of their socioeconomic position in patriarchal society that affords them a false sense of security and power where passivity as a feminine trait is favoured.

Although many of Moore's women engage passively in their sexuality, there are other women who are afforded an ability to be overtly sexual thanks in part to their romantic relationships. Again, Millet is correct in her observation that "[t]he concept of romantic love affords a means of emotional manipulation which the male is free to exploit, since love is the only circumstance in which the female is (ideologically) pardoned for sexual activity" (37). The explicit sex scenes in Moore's fiction can be analyzed in two ways: first, through Millet's interpretation of how acceptable female sexuality is constructed in patriarchal society; and, secondly, how such sex scenes represent a sex-positive interpretation of female sexuality that is often absent from traditional discourses on this matter. In her analysis of Moore's short fiction, Whalen argues that "One can trace in Moore's narratives feminine alternatives to a traditionally masculine discourse" (10), where women play the role of the passive object of male desire. Showing how both interpretations engage with each other is important in our understanding of how female sexuality is multi-dimensional.

In Moore's story, "Granular," (*Degrees*) readers are shown a very active sex life between the female narrator, Ellen, and her partner Rob. They use inanimate objects as sex-props, film a sex-tape, and readers are shown female orgasms administered by herself and her partner: "Then you put your mouth back on my clitoris and I come in long shudders [...]. I reach down and rub my clitoris; my gold rings clink together, a tiny sound between our wet bellies, digging my heels, I'm coming again" (100). This depiction of sex between Ellen and Rob embodies the positive representation of female sexuality that Whalen argues offers feminine alternatives to traditional discourses. This sex, at least in this scene, is actually good, and it represents exactly what Dixon argues is absent from Canadian literature. Ellen is enjoying this shared experience of sex, and

unlike in traditionally masculine discourses about sex, Ellen's sexual pleasure is emphasized throughout the passage. Women do enjoy sex, and showcasing a sex-positive woman like Ellen experiencing a self-induced orgasm is often omitted from fictional representations of sex.

Although Moore's emphasis on a realistic sexual relationship between partners highlights a sex-positive woman, it still reflects how these relationships are constructed from a patriarchal perspective. As discussed in relation to Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Ellen's sexual freedom is celebrated through the context of her romantic relationship. Millett further argues that "convictions of romantic love are convenient to both parties since this is often the only condition in which the female power can overcome the far more powerful conditioning she has received toward sexual inhibition" (37). Women are trained from an early age to behave in a certain manner that is cohesive with patriarchal ideas that dictate how women should behave. Millett suggests that "stereotyped lines of sex category ('masculine' and 'feminine') based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates," are what characterize the nature of sexuality. For women, this favours "passivity, ignorance, docility, 'virtue,' and ineffectuality" (26). For women like Ellen, participation in a romantic relationship automatically makes her sexual behavior acceptable.

In traditional discourses, acceptable sexuality is also closely related to motherhood. Ellen is a mother to one daughter, Sally, and as the reader comes to know, she has decided that she does not want more children. Over the course of the story, however, readers see Ellen's view on having more children shift: "I think of having another baby. [...] I think [,] in the future I'll regret not having another child. I will not

understand whatever crooked path of thought led me to deciding I didn't want another one" (Moore 106). Ellen's partnership, her role as a mother, and her desire to have another child, further make her sexuality acceptable in patriarchal society. Motherhood is deemed, "the pinnacle of feminine ambition" (Shari Thurer 82), so it follows that through motherhood, women are excused of sexual discrepancies that might be regarded as unacceptable under different circumstances.

As Ellen emphasizes how motherhood is a realistic part of the feminine experience, as is her initial decision to not have more children; her shift to wanting to have another child, does not necessarily make her a conditioned subject of patriarchal society, as Dixon would be inclined to argue.²⁷ Ellen's experience exemplifies how female sexuality and motherhood cannot be defined as something strictly positive or negative; instead, women's experiences are complex and cover a wide spectrum of sometimes inconsistent and conflicting values. Readers see Ellen think about having another child only after Rob accuses her of putting his sperm inside of her after he ejaculates on her stomach: "Ellen, you weren't putting my sperm inside you, were you? / Jesus, Rob. / Were you? / No. I wasn't. What a thing to accuse me of. / Then I'm thinking about if I had" (101). Ellen's thinking about motherhood again comes in response to Rob's accusations, where his desire for her not to have another child is apparent.

Rob's patriarchal nature further becomes apparent in Moore's descriptions of their sex:

²⁷ See Nicole Dixon's, "The Other F-Word: The Disappearance of Feminism from our Fiction," for her full characterization of motherhood. Dixon codes motherhood as a feminine cliché and connects it to patriarchal systems, which negates many women's experiences as mothers.

“You shift so your penis hangs in my face; [...] I have to lift my head off the bed to take your penis in my mouth. You stop licking me just as I’m about to come, my spine arching stiff as a bridge, each vertebra locking like a keystone. You don’t let me come. You push the cucumber inside me, shocking cold.” (100).

Here, we can see that although Ellen is an active participant in their sex, Rob’s control over their sex is evident, too. Despite representing a sex-positive woman, Ellen’s passivity in sex, regardless of the fact that we see her engage actively later in the passage, is evident. Ellen still confronts the same patriarchal conditioning that is frequently represented and experienced in female sexuality. Her experience of sex in “Granular” is representative of how even through a positive representation of female sexuality, patriarchal undertones are still present. In “The Other F-Word,” Dixon argues that, “If third-wave feminism got anything partially right, it was encouraging women to reclaim their sexuality.” Even through this reclaiming of sexuality, patriarchally constructed ideals are still at large, and they still influence how women engage with and experience sex.

Patriarchal undertones are present throughout Moore’s fiction because they are relevant to how women experience sexuality and various aspects of their everyday lives. In her story, “Carmen has Gonorrhoea,” Moore explores how women, unlike Ellen in “Granular,” face shaming and backlash from other women for engaging with their sexuality (and even capitalizing on it) outside of relationships where such engagement is celebrated. “Carmen has Gonorrhoea” opens with the narrator explaining that she’s “wishing for Carmen to get hit by a cement truck” (65). Carmen was previously married to the narrator’s current husband, Eddie, but she left the marriage in order to pursue her

career as an entertainer. In one of the early descriptions of Carmen while she's performing on fetish night at one of the local bars, readers see the narrator cement Carmen's identity in her sexuality:

Carmen sings Bossa Nova. She says she had to leave Eddie to pursue her rising star. She wears a Spanish dress made of embossed leather and a black feather boa that she weasels over the paunches of the front row. [...]

Carmen has the whole bar filled with black bulls in heat. Every one of those slack-jowled husbands searches for himself in the smoky, gold-flecked mirror behind her. He's searching for his own pasty face, but what he finds looking back is a matador. (66)

Carmen embraces and even capitalizes on her sexuality by performing for groups of men, as she embodies the sexualized ideal of femininity that is constructed by the male gaze. The narrator, along with other women in St. John's, find this threatening, and so they isolate Carmen and publicly shame her. It is important to highlight that Carmen is shamed not just for embracing the feminized, sexualized ideal that is created by patriarchal culture, but more curiously, because other women are jealous of her for the male attention she receives. Millett argues that "[o]ne of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another, in the past creating a lively antagonism between whore and matron, and in the present between career woman and housewife" (38). Although Carmen and the narrator do not explicitly represent the career woman versus housewife paradigm, they do exemplify the whore versus matron dichotomy.

The narrator demonstrates her jealousy of, and inferiority to Carmen by trying to sabotage her show, lamenting that, "Every night they chant, 'Carmen, Carmen, Carmen.' I can hear them from my bed" (67). The narrator justifies her actions and the hatred she

feels toward Carmen, stating: “Lots of women hate Carmen, so I’m not alone” (68). The readers come to learn that the narrator, along with the other women in her community, “banned [Carmen] from the spiritual healing retreat. [...] Half the women were healing a wound that Carmen caused. [...] Carmen has caused more than half of the spiritual carnage downtown” (70). All of the blame is placed on Carmen for their husband’s, father’s, or brother’s perceived infidelity while the men remain blameless. Carmen’s role as a seductress and her embracing of the sexualized ideal make her an unacceptable representation of female sexuality.

The pinnacle of Carmen’s unacceptable sexuality is represented in the title of the story, “Carmen has Gonorrhoea.” When the narrator is trying to solidify herself as superior to Carmen by commenting on her (in)ability to (appropriately) make a living, she states: “I’ll tell you how Carmen makes her money. Admirers. She must have had every disease on the go, believe me. Who do you think went down to the alley outside Bar Baric and spray painted ‘Carmen has Gonorrhoea’? Fluorescent orange. Ha” (70). In order for the narrator to assert her superiority over Carmen, she publicly shames her for her inability to engage with her sexuality in a manner that is deemed socially acceptable for women. Unlike Ellen in, “Granular,” Carmen’s sexuality lies outside of a romantic relationship, so she is held to a different standard when it comes to her sexuality. As a result, other women, like the narrator, are threatened, even repulsed by Carmen’s perceived sexual indiscretions.

Under patriarchy, Carmen is the perfect woman because she reflects the male Self back. The narrator, conversely, is the subversive, yet scrawling a slur on the wall about Carmen depicts a desperate and pathetic act that emphasizes how little power she has. The threat that Carmen poses, and the inferiority and insecurity felt by the narrator

impacts every part of her life, from her marriage with Eddie, to her relationship with her extended family. The reader learns that Eddie's family "likes Carmen a lot better than [they] like [her]" (68), despite Carmen's sexualized image. This is best emphasized when the narrator describes a St. Patrick's Day dinner with his family: "I tried to show a little creativity with the potato salad, a little food colouring, and for desert, little jelly shamrocks. Did anybody mention those special touches? No, it's all Carmen, Carmen, Carmen" (68). She further suggests that Eddie's family would "all like to see [her] fail," because, "there isn't another man as wonderful as the baby, Eddie, and there's nobody good enough for him, either. Except, of course, Carmen" (69). The narrator asserts that these sentiments are held especially by Eddie's sisters. The narrator, however, places herself in a superior position to them, which is reflective of how Millett argues class functions in patriarchy: "One might also recognize subsidiary status categories among women: not only is virtue class, but beauty and age as well" (38). For the narrator, she occupies a superior class position in part due to her position at work:

Eddie's sisters work on the grill in the Woolco café. They'd do anything to have my position, head cash. The jealousy makes them spiteful. I can't blame them, working under those heat lamps all day with the grease from the deep fryers. There's nothing less attractive than a hair net under a paper hat, and neither of them are married. (69)

Here, the narrator places herself in the superior position for a number of reasons: first, she sees herself as holding a superior position at the café as head cash; second, she sees them

as being less valuable based on their appearance; and third, they are not married, which gives her the biggest advantage of all.²⁸

What is ironic about this passage is the narrator's remarks of Eddie's sister's feelings of jealousy toward her for the above reasons. She states that the "jealousy makes them spiteful" (70), which echoes the narrator's own feelings towards Carmen. The gravity of the narrator's jealousy and spite is reflected through her plotting of Carmen's death. Although she believes that she holds a higher social position in comparison to Eddie's sisters, she sees herself as being below Carmen because Carmen is desired by men, including her husband. Being desired by men is equated to value in patriarchal culture; value that patriarchy conditions women to want, and even need.

At the end of the story, readers see the narrator's plan to have Carmen killed by cement trucks almost come to fruition, even if it is just in her fantasies:

They are charging, charging cement trucks. [...] The sounds of one hundred cement trucks screeching their breaks. It is the sound of those same cement trucks stopping inches away from Carmen's long legs. After a moment, the trucks roll over. They lie on their backs at Carmen's feet, like playful puppies. (71)

Even in her fantasy, Carmen is still an object of desire. This acts as a metaphor for the threatening nature of Carmen's desirability and the power that she holds over men. Being desirable by men is one of the chief ways that women gain (perceived) power in patriarchal society, as "The female is continually obliged to seek survival or advancement

²⁸ In patriarchal culture, women are conditioned to associate achievement, fulfillment, and value with and through marriage. See Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* for a more sustained analysis.

through the approval of males as those who hold power” (Millett 54). For the narrator, Carmen’s sexuality and desirability are a threat to her own value and power. Because of this power that Carmen holds, she is shamed and alienated by the narrator and women in her community for embracing the sexualized image that she subscribes to: an image that other women are conditioned to find threatening to their own status, regardless of the fact that she is celebrated by men for catering to their desires.

Carmen’s case proves interesting and hypocritical under patriarchal logic where women are shamed by other women for engaging actively with their sexuality, but are celebrated by men for catering to their desires. Carmen is loved by the men in her community for submitting to ideals that patriarchal ideology has equated with being attractive, but hated by the women for the very same reason. Where women find power in the approval of men, engaging with the characteristics that outline femininity in patriarchal terms becomes necessary for that approval. Similar to fulfilling a sexualized role that patriarchy deems desirable, passivity is another of such characteristics. It is not a characteristic that is desired exclusively outside of romantic relationships when women engage in their sexuality; instead, it is a trait that becomes normalized and engrained into women’s psyche at early stages of socialization. Millett suggests that “The aspects of patriarchy [...] have each an effect upon the psychology of both sexes. Their principle result is the interiorization of patriarchal ideology. Status, temperament, and role are all value systems with endless psychological ramifications for each sex” (54). Passivity becomes normalized to the point that it is a reflexive reaction. This reflexive passivity and how it manifests itself as a normalized, feminine trait, affecting not just sexuality, but relationships and other aspects of women’s everyday lives, is a common theme represented through many of Moore’s female characters.

The short story, “Grace,” from *Open*, offers such a representation. Throughout the story, readers see Eleanor, the female protagonist, dealing with her husband Philip who wants an open marriage, and “might” be leaving her. The story takes place at Eleanor’s friend’s wedding reception where both Eleanor and Philip are guests, but Philip’s mistress, Amelia Kirby, is also present. Readers come to see the life that Eleanor gave up in marrying Philip, and how the effects of patriarchy affect her marriage, the decisions she makes both inside and outside of her marriage, and her interactions with other women, especially Amelia.

Eleanor exemplifies how patriarchal ideals become normalized and affect every aspect of women’s lives. One of the most predominant values that patriarchy insists women embody, as suggested in the title, is the state of grace and how to achieve such a state. “Grace,” as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, means, “attractiveness, esp. in elegance of proportion or manner or movement; gracefulness” (*Oxford Canadian Dictionary*). Not included in the definition is how it is regarded as a quality that constitutes desirable femininity in patriarchal society. Christian Theological interpretations of “Grace” insist that Grace is the basis of human identity and worthiness: “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 1:10).²⁹ On several occasions throughout the story, both the narrator and Eleanor state that “if she were to attain grace” (153) or, “if she were visited by a moment of grace” (153), perhaps her current situation with Philip would not be him contemplating leaving her and “falling in love with someone else” (153-4).

²⁹ See, <http://www.christianity.com/theology/what-is-grace.html>, for more on “Grace.”

To deal with the uncomfortable situation of seeing Philip interact with his mistress, Amelia, Eleanor's friend and confidant, Constance, advises her to "behave with grace" (160) as a means of asserting her superiority over both Amelia and Philip. Readers see Eleanor's insecurity and inferiority to other women, and how if she had been able to fulfill the role of desired femininity that includes stereotypically feminine traits in patriarchal society, Philip would not want to leave her: "Maybe if I'd learned to cook, Eleanor said vaguely, snapping the pages of the magazine. She stopped at a perfume ad, a crystal decanter stopper trailing down a woman's throat her pouty lips parted. / Or wore perfume" (159). Here, the reader understands that Eleanor believes if she learned how to cook, or wore perfume, Philip would be less inclined to leave her, as she sees these stereotypically feminine traits as making her more desirable and, more attractive to men.

Eleanor's biggest inferiority complex stems from Amelia's presence at the party where Philip spends a majority of his time flirting with her. Eleanor notes Amelia's glamorous appearance, her playful interactions with Philip, her accomplishments in academia studying "Canadian ecofeminist novels" (Moore 174), and her spontaneous personality. In contrast, Eleanor is described as someone who "doesn't have a haircut" (163), whose husband wants to leave her, whose career has been suffering, and as someone who gave up an entirely different life of travelling and adventure for a life of domesticity. Eleanor feels intense shame in the failure of her marriage and her inability, as she understands it, to stay attractive to Philip, which translates to her failure as a woman: "Eleanor thinks, I'm such a *dupe*. The shame she feels is so overpowering, [...]. I'll go to China. No one there will know Philip has left me" (182-83). Eleanor blames herself for her failed marriage and it directly influences her confidence and self-worth.

The only way she can escape is by going somewhere, like China, where no one will know that she has ‘failed.’

Readers see Eleanor’s confidence and value waver from low and inferior to Amelia, to feeling empowered and superior to Amelia on several occasions throughout the story. Eleanor’s feelings of empowerment and value become apparent when she sees herself as someone who is desired by men other than Philip. At the beginning of the story, readers learn that Eleanor and Philip now have “an understanding” (154), meaning an open marriage; and readers see Eleanor attempt to engage actively with her sexuality with a man outside of her relationship with Philip: “What she has decided: She will sleep with Glenn Marshall” (154). For Eleanor, Glenn Marshall finding her attractive and wanting to sleep with her makes her feel valuable. She looks back on previous interactions with Glenn when he “put his hand on the small of her back,” and told her that she was, “dangerous,” and has “beautiful legs” (154-55). When Eleanor sees Philip interacting with Amelia, she takes comfort in Glenn’s flirtations with her: “Glenn leaned back and rested his arm over her chair. [...] The nearness of his arm made her blush. / She thought: and Philip wants to leave me” (157). Here we see that although Philip wants to leave her, Glenn appears to want Eleanor and this seems to give her a sense of value and power. Although readers see Eleanor wanting to sleep with Glenn, she never does. Eleanor is even unable to tell Glenn that she remembers their sexually-charged interactions - and that she is wondering if he remembers them too - but again, she never actually asks him about these past encounters (179). This highlights Eleanor’s passivity in engaging with her sexuality, which readers later learn is reflected in many of her sexual experiences.

When Eleanor is reflecting on her life, primarily her past sexual experiences, readers see how much of herself is rooted in these interactions:

Remember who you are, says Sadie. / [...] Clem Barker tearing the condom wrapper with his teeth. Paul Comerford, between the rolls of unlaid carpet, leaving the impression of his bum in a pile of sawdust. Eli Park kissed the back of her neck, and led her to his back seat, his finger and thumb circling her wrist loosely, but it might as well have been a handcuff, because she couldn't have said no if she tried. Then on a plaid blanket covered with cat hair. Eleanor is all of this. (207-08)

From the above descriptions we can see that Eleanor is the passive participant in sex, but these experiences that show she is desired give her value and power. Remembering these instances gives Eleanor her confidence back and she “feels no match” to Amelia (212): “And then, snarling like a dog, Eleanor chews the tough meat of Amelia’s heart. She wipes her mouth with the back of her hand” (213). Although Eleanor feels intense anger towards both Philip and Amelia, she never confronts him in the way that she confronts his mistress. True to patriarchal conditioning, Amelia is blamed and faulted for Philip’s indiscretions while he remains blameless.

Such an emphasis on passivity and female-blaming makes “Grace” seem like an anti-feminist story. Eleanor is constantly waiting for Philip to make up his mind in terms of their marriage and whether he is leaving her or not; she wants to, but does not sleep with Glenn Marshall; she admits she has “given up being who she was to love Philip” (169); and she never confronts Philip regarding his infidelities, and instead faults Amelia for his actions. Eleanor’s experiences throughout “Grace,” however, reflect a reality of women’s experiences that are shaped by patriarchal ideals and values. Millett argues that “the large quantity of guilt attached to sexuality in patriarchy is overwhelmingly placed upon the female, who is, culturally speaking, held to be the culpable or the more culpable

party in nearly any sexual liaison, whatever the extenuating circumstances” (54). Being the more culpable party regardless of the circumstances, then, not only leads back to an engrained passivity in sex for women, but also reinforces the desire to blame women for men’s sexual indiscretions.

Where Eleanor represents how passivity and other patriarchal values manifest themselves as normal, even reflexive, Moore’s story, “Melody,” shows how women are able to engage actively in their sexuality and the ramifications of such actions. “Melody” follows an unnamed female narrator through flashbacks of her past at university and her present as a widow about to remarry. When readers are first introduced to Melody, she is shown along with the narrator hitch-hiking to a medical clinic in Corner Brook, Newfoundland in hopes of getting a referral for an abortion. “The trip will take as long as it takes, she says” (1), indicating that she is confident in her decision to seek an abortion. At the clinic, however, Melody is required to have a parent or guardian authorize the procedure, which Melody says she is unable to acquire because her family would not agree with the procedure: “She wouldn’t sign, Melody says. [...] My mother had fourteen children, Melody says” (9). Although Melody is confident in her decision to have an abortion, it is hinted that she comes from a different class and a different cultural/religious background from the narrator and other women in Moore’s fiction. And perhaps because of these differences, Melody does not appear to have the same luxury to interact quite so passively with her sexuality.

Melody’s story demonstrates exactly how sexual agency is closely related to class systems in patriarchy. Millett suggests that “(t)he function of class and ethnic mores in patriarchy is largely a matter of how overtly displayed or how loudly enunciated the general ethic of masculine supremacy allows itself to become” (36). She further argues

that lower-class men are more likely to rely on their sex alone to assert their dominance over women: “in the lower social strata, the male is more likely to claim authority on the strength of his sex rank alone, he is actually obliged more often to share power with the women of his class who are economically productive” (36). Claiming dominance on sex alone is commonly tied to values that are rooted in religious ideology that assert men are superior to women based on biology and on creation stories that situate women as being responsible for humanity’s downfall.³⁰ These values are reflected in Melody’s inability to obtain her parent’s signature to have an abortion, as abortion politics are closely connected to religious ideology. Melody explicitly says that her mother had fourteen children, indicating that she and her husband most likely did not have access to, or, for religious reasons, did not believe in various methods of contraception, and do not support abortion practices.

Although Melody’s class background is ambiguous, her active agency and her unambiguous desire to assert complete control over her own body indicate that she does not have the privilege, nor the desire, to interact passively with her surroundings. Readers see Melody execute her agency on a number of occasions while the narrator’s passivity becomes more and more apparent. Besides seeking an abortion, Melody and the narrator share a kiss to the narrator’s dismay: “I realized that I had never initiated anything in my life. Melody acted; I was acted upon. I’m not like that, I say, gay or anything. She smiles, No big deal” (5). This indicates that Melody’s decisions come from her ability to confidently exert her agency without outside societal pressures when the narrator

³⁰ See: Genesis 3:1-6. Eve is tempted by the serpent to eat the forbidden fruit, which results in the downfall of humanity, and informs religious understandings of the difference between men and women.

struggles to do so are based in large part on values that have been shaped by patriarchal ideals. The narrator's passivity is further seen when she thinks about her crush, Brian Fiander, after their first sexual encounter that leaves her thinking: "I have been celebrated" (2). Moore writes: "If he still wants me, he can have me. I will do whatever Brian Fiander wants and if he wants to dump me after, as he has Brenda Parsons, he can go right ahead. He seems to go through girls pretty quickly and I want to be gone through" (10). On these two occasions, Moore's language shows the narrator as being subordinate to Brian Fiander, which represents her position in a male-dominated society, and how patriarchal conditioning has taught her to be the passive partner in sex.

Although Melody stands in stark contrast to the narrator and goes through with the abortion unapologetically, insisting that "[sometimes] you just have to do things," (11), readers see that she faces the stigma and stereotypes that emerge from patriarchal ideals that define what constitutes acceptable female sexuality. After the procedure, the narrator and Melody appear to no longer be friends. The narrator tells us: "I don't spend much time with Melody; time together is exhausting. [...] Six floors below, Melody is crossing the dark parking lot. [...] She's the one had the abortion for Hank Mercer, Wavy says" (11). This is an important passage because readers see the judgment that Melody is subjected to after the abortion, highlighting her inability to stay within the proper definition of appropriate female sexuality that is constructed by patriarchal worldviews. It is also crucial to note that Melody's abortion is viewed as being done "for Hank Mercer" (11), who she had the one-time sexual partner, instead of being done for herself.

Melody's active self and the narrator's passivity are perhaps best demonstrated at the end of the story when after many years, Melody visits the narrator who remarks that "[she's] messed up" by marrying again (24). Melody advises her: "You'll just have to do

something about it” (24), indicating to the narrator that she needs to engage actively with her life as Melody has. Melody shows up at the narrator’s home with a daughter and a husband emerging from a mini van. This family tableau demonstrates to the narrator and to the reader that it is possible to willingly enter into a seemingly traditional domestic relationship. All that is required is agency and free choice. The narrator understands that Melody got married and had a baby on her own time, when she decided. While the narrator is paralyzed, continually asserting that she’s “never initiated anything in [her] life,” (23), we see Melody continually initiating, always charting a new course for her embodied sexuality. The narrator’s lack of agency represents how passivity becomes engrained through socialization in patriarchal society.

As Millett demonstrates, socialization that “takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents’, the peers’, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression” (31). Moore’s women reflect how socialization in patriarchal society creates complex experiences for women, especially when engaging with their sexuality. To write a strictly sex-positive representation of female sexuality – the kind that Dixon so passionately calls for – would actually negate the lived realities of how many women experience desire, sexuality and sex in general. Female sexuality is not always positive, and is instead complex and often ambiguous and contradictory with different women experiencing sex differently for various reasons, including their familial background, their socioeconomic status, and their relationship status. Passivity, ambivalence, stereotyping, and shaming are all realistic aspects of female sexuality that women experience in engaging with their sexuality. Although many of Moore’s women’s experiences appear anti-feminist, her writing actually provides a realistic representation

that, as Whalen states, offers “feminine alternatives to a traditionally masculine discourse” (10). Providing this realistic representation, one that is outside of traditional discourses, is the first step in changing the way female sexuality is interpreted and constructed in patriarchal society. Millett suggests that “(b)ecause of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their experiences are utterly different – and this is crucial” (31). Patriarchal society has created complex and often hypocritical guidelines that affect how women experience their sexuality, and Moore’s fiction explores how these guidelines become socially engrained and are fundamental to how we interpret female sexuality.

Chapter 2

“Not you, sweetie... He doesn't get after good little girls.”: Representing Power, Rape, and Agency in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*

Moore's early short fiction clearly demonstrates both the versatility and complexity of female sexuality. Her women experience a spectrum of sexual experiences that are informed by their middle-class socioeconomic positions, and the privileges (and restrictions) this affords them. This results in many of Moore's women appearing anti-feminist,³¹ as their middle-class backgrounds grant a false sense of security and power in a system that favours passivity as a feminine trait.³² This passivity is reflective of the privilege they experience as white, upper-middle class women, unlike women whose experiences are informed by racial discourses, and/or are part of a lower-class strata where sex becomes the chief way for men to exert their dominance and superiority.³³ For women of a lower-class, then, passivity in sex underscores their status as inferior to men, while women of a higher-class system can experience sexual passivity without it threatening their perception of power, or the power dynamics between men and women.

Ann-Marie MacDonald's 1996 novel, *Fall on Your Knees*, offers insight into the sexual politics informed by a racialized discourse and lower socioeconomic position that is absent from the experiences of Moore's women. *Fall on Your Knees* traces four generations of the working-class Piper family in New Waterford, Cape Breton at the turn of the twentieth century. Unlike Moore's women, MacDonald's Piper women develop a

³¹ See: previous chapter; Nicole Dixon, “The Other F-Word: The Disappearance of Feminism from Our Fiction”

³² Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*: “Introduction”

³³ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*: “Introduction”

horrific and fraught relationship with sex that is characterized by abuse, paedophilia, rape and incest experienced at the hands of James Piper, the family patriarch. MacDonald uses Gothic conventions to tell the story of the Piper women, with the “sublime” backdrop of Cape Breton Island that further serves as a tool that emphasizes the “Gothic atmosphere” (Gabrielle Parro 172) of the novel as a whole.

The Cape Breton setting also “asks that readers consider how regionalism interacts with other ideologies” (Carrie Dawson 106) that characterize regional politics. Although MacDonald resides in Toronto, and her other works including, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1988), *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003) and *Adult Onset* (2014), are both set outside of the region, she has nonetheless experienced recognition as a regional writer. *Fall on Your Knees* has been the focus of several critical analyses dedicated to Atlantic Canadian regionalism,³⁴ but unlike other writers whose texts are situated within Atlantic Canada, MacDonald has evaded the (often limiting) classification that is associated with regional writing.³⁵ Despite her ambiguous position in terms of regional writing, *FYOK* is to date her only novel to utilize an Atlantic Canadian backdrop, and it remains her most critically acclaimed work with academic publications that span globally, verifying the far reaching success of the text.³⁶

³⁴ See: David Creelman, *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction*; Carrie Dawson, “‘What’s the difference, It’s an island, ain’t it?’: Regionalism in Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*”; Catherine Campbell, “Reading the Waves: Fluid Regionalism in Twentieth-Century Maritime Literature.”

³⁵ Herb Wylie, “Introduction,” *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic Canadian Literature*

³⁶ In researching criticism of *Fall on Your Knees*, I discovered criticism spans globally, with publications from as far as the University of Madrid, Spain (Pilar Somacarrera “A Madwoman in a Cape Breton Attic: *Jane Eyre* in Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*), California State University (Atef Laouyene “Race, gender, and the exotic in Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*), University of British Columbia (Laura Robinson “Remodeling an Old-Fashioned Girl: Troubling Girlhood in Ann-Marie

The criticism that reflects the international success of the text emphasizes how MacDonald has not been pigeonholed into writing exclusively about regional politics. The novel continues to be framed in terms of miscegenation, race relations, feminist discourses, and Gothic conventions, “such as excess, containment, and the transgressive nature of female sexuality” (Parro 178). Regional scholar David Creelman further cites MacDonald’s use of literary techniques, including realism, magic realism, and the Gothic, to develop “its critique of the region’s patriarchal structures,” and, the “experiences of the few figures who dare to challenge those dominant powers” (195). MacDonald’s use of realism and Gothic conventions create an enticing plot that challenges traditional codes of race relations, gender roles, and the patriarchal structures that govern them.³⁷

By challenging institutionalized androcentric ideologies, MacDonald’s novel reflects how patriarchal rule and violence intersect. MacDonald rewrites traditionally feminine experiences that perpetuate stereotyped lines of femininity to embody the negative and violent implications of patriarchal control. In doing so, MacDonald’s women underscore how female desire and agency are restricted by patriarchal depictions of “normal” femininity that pressure women to conform to unrealistic, limiting and undesirable standards. Readers see the Piper women develop mechanisms that act as representations of agency under patriarchal domination, giving a voice to underrepresented female experiences in patriarchal society. In her essay, “Remodeling an

MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*); not to mention that *FOYK* rose to international best-seller lists after being featured as one of Oprah’s Book Club picks in 2002 (Danielle Fuller “Crest of the Waves, Reading the Success Story of Bestsellers”).

³⁷ See: Danielle Fuller, *Writing the Everyday: Women’s Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada*; Herb Wyile, *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic Canadian Literature*; David Creelman, *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction*

Old-Fashioned Girl: Troubling Girlhood in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*," Laura Robinson writes that MacDonald "locates new scripts for articulating that which has been typically eluded in girls' stories: abuse, incest, and racism" (2). I expand that characterization to include an analysis of the relationship between power and rape, and how rape is used as a means to exert dominance over "disobedient" women who refuse to conform to patriarchal power.

Fall on Your Knees follows four generations of the Piper family from New Waterford, Cape Breton, who hide family secrets of racism, incest, rape, and suicide. Through the experiences of the Piper women, MacDonald highlights the consequences of how patriarchal prejudices and values inform actions and impact the construction of femininity and girlhood as a whole. Readers see the Piper women make sense of traditional depictions of girlhood and femininity that locate Victorian values of domesticity, passivity, and motherhood as being totalizing, fulfilling and normal for women. Susan Bordo locates the Victorian "lady" or girl, as "idealized in terms of delicacy and dreaminess, sexual passivity, and a charmingly labile and capricious emotionality" (2243). MacDonald's female characters, however, emphasize the essentializing nature of such roles by navigating a darker experience of girlhood and femininity.

James Piper, MacDonald's antagonist, serves as the epitome of patriarchal domination in the novel. James controls his wife, Materia, and their daughters, Kathleen, Mercedes, and Frances, as well as his youngest daughter Lily, whom he shares with Kathleen through raping her. James responds violently to the Piper women, most notably Materia, Kathleen, and Frances when they do not behave in a manner that is consistent with his traditional Victorian ideals regarding femininity, and how women and young

girls should behave. Materia, Kathleen, and Frances each respond differently to James's violence: readers see Materia gradually become insular, losing her sense of self and identity; Kathleen ceases to speak after James rapes her; and Frances, who is also raped by James, characterizes the pinnacle of patriarchal disobedience in *Fall on Your Knees* by continuing to disobey and provoke his rage.

James serves as an embodied patriarchal obstacle that the Piper women must navigate in order to gain control of their selves and bodies. The circumstances under which Materia, Kathleen and Frances experience emotional abuse, physical abuse, and rape, serve as representations of how violence and sexualized violence is used as a means to assert dominance and control over women. Materia, Kathleen and Frances fail to fulfill the desired role of proper femininity that patriarchy, and James' requires, and as a result, they are beaten and/or raped by James. This chapter seeks to analyze James's abuse and sexualized violence as an assertion of patriarchal control over the Piper women, highlighting how his domination serves as an obstacle to the female characters, which they protest and work to overcome on individual bases. The analysis will first focus on James's control over Materia and how she responds to his abusive nature, then move to the circumstances under which James rapes Kathleen and then Frances. This will work to show the progression of James's violence, locating rape as the paramount of patriarchal domination. I will also detail how the various forms of protest exhibited by the Piper women act as representations of female agency and attempts at taking back control.

Readers become accustomed to James's patriarchal nature early on in the novel through his relationship with Materia. Materia is the daughter of a wealthy Lebanese merchant, Ibrahim Mahmoud, and she and James elope against his wishes when she is just thirteen years old. Mahmoud, who embodies the traditional patriarchal father-figure,

forces Materia and James to legitimize their marriage within the Catholic church. He then considers Materia dead within the family for her disobedience: “Materia never saw her family again. Her father forbade it. [...] She was dead to them all from that day forth” (18). As Pilar Somacarrera argues in “A Madwoman in a Cape Breton Attic: Jane Eyre in Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees*,” James and Mahmoud serve as “the two patriarchal figures who had rejected Materia” and, “Materia [represents] all that lies below acceptable femininity” (71). Both Mahmoud and James reject Materia for her inability to fulfill their ideals of what defines femininity and proper girl/womanhood. When the Mahmoud family first arrive in Cape Breton from Lebanon, “her father said, ‘Look. This is the New World. Anything is possible here.’ She’d been too young to realize that he was talking to her brothers” (14). This signals that Materia’s future is predetermined based on her sex as female. Readers learn that she had already been betrothed to another man by her father since the age of four, and Mahmoud’s rage is provoked when Materia runs away with James: “It was that [James] had come like a thief in the night and stolen another man’s property. [...] There was no taking her back, she was ruined” (17). In this context, the word “daughter,” becomes synonymous with “property,” and Materia is regarded as Mahmoud’s property before being thought of as a person. When Materia disobeys Mahmoud, she is stripped of her identity and her family, and she goes from being Mahmoud’s property as his daughter to James’s property as his wife.

In “Feminist, Postmodern, Postcolonial: Margaret Atwood and Ann-Marie MacDonald Respond to the Gothic,” Donna Heiland argues that “Materia initially believes to be trading a patriarchal home in which she has been quite literally trapped [...] for a desirable alternative; [...] we understand that this new residence is not an alternative

to that which she leaves behind, but another version of it” (171). In the beginning of their relationship, James is enchanted by Materia, but he slowly sees how ill-equipped she is to fulfil the role of housewife that he desires and sees as what defines femininity and womanhood. As a result, readers see James become more controlling and violent in attempts to impose the role of housewife upon Materia. The first incident detailing James’s anger occurs when Materia is pregnant with their first daughter, Kathleen, and James arrives home to find Materia sitting in the kitchen having eaten an entire bowl of uncooked cookie dough: “Her first attempt at cooking. He even gave her a kiss to show just how pleased he was, but when he went to dip a finger in the dough the bowl had been licked clean. [...] He hurled the bowl at her feet and it broke” (25). Until that point in the novel, James had taken over the domestic duties in hopes that Materia would soon adjust to housewifery and take on the responsibilities herself. When she fails to do so, James’s patriarchal nature becomes apparent:

He swept the floor and scrubbed it too. He got a lot of work done that evening, not to mention some clear thinking. He locked the piano and pocketed the key. Then he said, ‘I’m not cooking any more and I’m not cleaning. You do your job, missus, ‘cause Lord knows I’m doing mine.’ She looked so sad and dumpy. He had a pang of pity. Did all women get this ugly? (25)

James’ locking and pocketing the key to the piano indicates his control over Materia. When she fails to fulfill her role as housewife, he begins to see her as inadequate, and his need to assert his position as dominant becomes evident. Materia’s inadequacy as a wife leads to his realization that she is no longer attractive to him, signalling that she fails to

achieve desired femininity and womanhood that patriarchy posits not only as normal, but required in patriarchal society.

Readers further see Materia struggle in motherhood. She had hoped to give birth to a boy as that would help reunite her with her estranged family (MacDonald 31), but she gave birth to Kathleen instead. Materia struggles to form a connection with, and nurse her newborn daughter, so Mrs. Luvovitz, Materia's friend and Jewish neighbor, takes care of her and Materia, further inciting James's anger:

James arrived home in the middle of the day to find Mrs. Luvovitz in the kitchen feeding the baby with a dropper. 'Where's my wife?' 'She's sleeping.' He took the stairs two at a time and dragged her up by an arm. Herded her down to the kitchen, whinging and whining every step of the way. 'Thank you, missus, my wife'll take over now.' [...] James plunked his wife onto the chair and put the screeching baby into her arms. 'Now feed her.' But the mother just blubbered and blabbed. [...] He slapped her. 'If she doesn't eat, you don't eat. Understood?' Materia nodded. He unbuttoned her blouse. James allowed Mrs. Luvovitz over that evening when Materia hadn't produced a drop and the baby was fit to be tied. (33)

James uses violence in order to force Materia into traditionally feminine roles of housewife and mother when she fails to adjust to such roles on her own. Materia's experience represents how the roles of wife and mother are not inherently natural for all women, highlighting how patriarchal ideology constructs feminine domesticity and motherhood as natural and fulfilling. When James realizes the extent to which Materia does not fit his ideal of "wife," he ponders, "How had [I] been ensnared by a child? There was something not right about Materia" (34).

James's traditional values leave him seeing Materia as "queer. Sick, even" (34), for her inability to fit his construction of femininity. True to patriarchal socialization, James does not consider his own actions within their relationship, and he instead sees his own superiority, and Materia's subordination, as natural. When James enlists during World War I, however, "Materia comes to life" (8). She "prays he'll be killed quickly and painlessly in Flanders" (85), indicating that James's control and limiting definition of "wife" impact her in a way that is not part of traditional depictions of womanhood and motherhood. As a result, Materia develops coping mechanisms that indicate a personal protest to James's patriarchal nature. The earliest suggestion of Materia's dissent is through the hope chest that James builds for her. Materia leaves the chest in the attic and "empty on purpose, so that nothing could come between her and the magical smell that beckoned her into memory" (25). The smell of the chest reminds her of her Lebanese heritage, "the dark elixir of her language," (26) and her family, particularly her mother. The hope chest reaffirms Materia's identity outside of marriage and motherhood, so she escapes to the attic – and to the hope chest – to escape from her restrictive life as wife and mother under James's control.

Materia's Lebanese heritage and Arabic language serve as the second way she learns to defy James. When they first meet, James is intrigued by Materia's "exotic" background, and as Somacarrera suggests, even seeing her, "as white until he becomes sexually and romantically disenchanted with her" (61). When James begins to recognize Materia's darkness, he begins to question her sanity, which he connects to her race: "Materia was dark. He tried not to see it, but it was one of those things that was always before his eyes, now that the scales had fallen from them" (37). James does not want Kathleen to grow up "stigmatized" (37) because of Materia's dark skin and Lebanese

heritage, so he tries to limit Materia's interactions with their community. Materia, however, refuses to fully speak English as a means to defy James, communicating instead in a hybrid of English and Arabic: "Kathleen, Mercedes and Frances share the impression that their mother doesn't speak much English. This didn't used to be true, but it has come to somewhat pass simply because Materia doesn't speak English much" (86). MacDonald further writes that Materia speaks plenty with Mercedes and Frances – although she lost some of her mother tongue through disuse, she and her two youngest daughters speak "the Arabic of children – of food, endearments and story-telling" (86-87). Materia's resistance to speak in English leads to the eventual loss of both languages, and this represents her resistance in giving in to James's control. This, although empowering, simultaneously emphasizes the dissolution of her identity even though she tries to maintain it through fragmented versions of herself.

In attempting to hold on to her identity and defy James, Materia develops obsessive compulsive habits that manifest themselves as coping mechanisms. First, Materia begins to embody the ideal housewife that James desires through cooking and cleaning. The cooking that Materia does is rooted significantly in Lebanese and Jewish culture, further indicating her resistance to James's power, while continuing to maintain her Lebanese identity. In this way, Materia manipulates the traditional role of housewife that James forces on her in order to gain control of her person. Readers also see her clean the family house obsessively, and the confines of the domestic space become something of a prison for her that further serves as a means for her to cope with the restrictions of housewifery. This is best exemplified in the final days and night leading to Materia's suicide, "during which she cleans obsessively" (138).

Materia commits suicide two days after Kathleen's death in childbirth where she kills Kathleen out of compassion for her. Materia confesses: "the real reason I let my daughter die is because I knew she was better off that way. I didn't know her well, but I knew she didn't want to live any more" (138). Materia's guilt, though knowing she had done what she believed to be what Kathleen wanted, is what leads to her suicide. In the two days of wrestling her conscience, Materia abandons her other children and Kathleen's newborn daughter, Lily, and cleans to help her cope: "Where's Mumma? What with a freezing child in one bedroom and a burning hot infant in another? She's downstairs cleaning. The house is spotless" (150). When Frances goes to the kitchen to get flour to create her rendition of blancmange, "Materia sweeps up the thin white trail behind Frances without a word, without looking up, without following it beyond the border of the kitchen linoleum" (151). Materia's inadvertent refusal to sweep past the border of the kitchen represents how the domestic sphere has become both a means of coping and control for her.

Heiland argues that Materia's suicide represents how she became "[g]radually overwhelmed by the sense of her own 'badness' (p. 58), [and] responds to the pressures on her by first letting her 'mind ebb away' (p 59), and finally by dying with her head in an oven, after the particularly acute crisis provoked by the circumstances of her daughter Kathleen's death" (172). I argue, however, that Materia's suicide is her final act of defiance towards James's control, and an attempt at gaining control of her own life. Materia spent her life living under patriarchal domination, suffering extreme violence, control, and unrealistic standards and expectations that inform her understanding of femininity, womanhood and motherhood. On the night of Kathleen's death when she is forced to make the decision in terms of Kathleen's life, James beats her in an act of rage,

blaming her for Kathleen's death. Materia, however, "is awake now, after a nineteen-year slumber. She will kill [James] if she can" (145). Although unable to overpower him physically, Materia's suicide reflects her overcoming his control by taking her own life; her life where she was first controlled by her father and then James. Even on the mass card at her funeral, however, Materia's name is written in brackets after James's, indicating his overall control and ownership over her.

Materia's suicide and Kathleen's death both serve as means of escape from their patriarchal surroundings, and a means of gaining back control. Materia's obsessive compulsive habits further represent the extent to which she is pressured to conform to patriarchal norms that define wife and mother, and how such standards became literally imposed upon her person. In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Susan Bordo chronicles how mental illnesses that are predominantly associated with women, such as hysteria, agoraphobia, and anorexia, become self-evident in their actions and on their bodies, so that the body "may be viewed as a surface on which conventional constructions of femininity are exposed starkly to view, through inscription in extreme or hyperliteral form" (2247). Bordo suggests that each of the illnesses reflect "an exaggeration of typically feminine traits" (2243), which is mirrored in the obsessive compulsive cleaning habits that readers see exhibited by Materia. Bordo argues that "(i)t is as though these bodies are speaking to us of the pathology and violence that lurks around the corner, waiting at the horizon of 'normal' femininity," and that such disorders "are that of embodied *protest* – unconscious, inchoate, and counterproductive protest without an effective language, voice, or politics, but protest nonetheless" (2247). Materia's cleaning habits and refusal to speak in English reflect the necessity of protest under patriarchal control, while her suicide and mercy-killing Kathleen represent the

extent to which living under such conditions is no longer feasible. For Materia and Kathleen, being dead is better than living, and killing oneself is the ultimate act of agency and comment on the oppressive state that patriarchal power imposes on women.

In comparison to Materia, Kathleen's life in the Piper household was initially very different. Readers see Materia bullied, controlled and beaten for failing to meet James's expectations of wife and mother, while Kathleen is molded by James from birth in order to fit his construction of femininity. MacDonald writes that "James named the baby Kathleen, after his late mother," (31) insinuating that Kathleen would grow to emulate his mother, whom James sees as embodying ideal womanhood. James was adamant in having Kathleen "grow up a lady. She'd have accomplishments." Where readers see James restrict Materia's communication with their community, "He took Kathleen everywhere. They went on long walks – in the beautiful English pram at first, and then hand in hand" (38). James also purchases all of Kathleen's clothes from England, "Nothing showy, all quality, like a real-life princess" (38), further indicating his desire to mold her into his idealized version of traditional femininity.

As Kathleen grows, she embodies James's ideal woman, which is reflected in her collection of traditional girls' stories: "Kathleen's room is a temple of sophistication. Its shelves are lined with every girls' book you could ever think of, from *Little Women* to *Anne of Green Gables*" (100). Robinson argues that "the sheer number of books mentioned in *Fall on Your knees* is a testament to the importance of inherited cultural scripts" (2). Robinson further suggests that "in creating the four Piper girls who read and imitate girls' stories, MacDonald's novel shows how girls inevitably revise the cultural scripts which they inherit. The Piper girls necessarily revise their own circumstances through the models of girlhood available to them" (2). In the models of girlhood available

to Kathleen, then, she is shown what characterizes “normal” femininity and what girls should be like. Such scripts act as models of appropriate girlhood for Kathleen and her sisters to help build and make sense of their own identities.

Readers begin to see Kathleen as oppressed, however, when she moves to New York City to study at a prestigious music academy. In the chapter aptly titled, “Lady Liberty,” that chronicles Kathleen’s arrival in New York City, MacDonald writes:

Kathleen is truly and utterly and completely Kathleen in New York. That’s what the city does to you if it’s meant for you. She’s got plenty of personality and no history, and she has never breathed so much air in her life. She comes from an Atlantic island surrounded by nothing but sea air, yet in the man-made outdoor corridors of this fantastic city she can finally breathe. (122)

Kathleen’s realization of self identity in New York represents how through leaving Cape Breton Island, and her father, she is liberated from his controlling patriarchal nature and the obstacle he poses to her sense of self. While in New York, Kathleen is under the supervision of Giles, a retiree who counters James’s traditional values by holding a more liberal worldview, which makes her “a pretty poor chaperone for a young champion like Kathleen” (124). While living under Giles’s relaxed supervision, Kathleen is able to construct her own identity outside of traditional modes of femininity, and she falls in love with Rose; a black female pianist.

Kathleen recounts her experiences in New York and her lesbian relationship with Rose through an old Holy Angels notebook that acts as her diary. Kathleen writes: “I have no shame in front of you, Diary, for you are me. You won’t squirm, you can’t be shocked, you know that nothing in love is nasty so I will try to be as free with you as I am

in my own thoughts” (279). Kathleen’s need to write about the shame associated with her love affair with a black woman reflects the traditional values that have informed her ideas of femininity and womanhood. She can feel such things privately, but to acknowledge them publicly goes against societal values that determine appropriate relationships and behavior. Kathleen further writes: “If daddy knew what a lackadaisical gatekeeper [Giles] is he would be down here in a second to board me with the nuns” (279); locating her father as an obstacle to her sense of self, and acknowledging that her relationship with Rose goes against his traditional worldview.

Kathleen’s choice of diary is in itself an interesting medium for her to express what James later refers to as her “perversity” (359). Kathleen uses “a fresh new Holy Angels notebook” as her diary (124); Holy Angels being the girls’ school in Sydney, Cape Breton, that she attends prior to leaving for New York City. MacDonald writes that James chose Holy Angels for Kathleen’s education because “The Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame were in the business of educating the whole girl. [...] James was going to wait a few years, till Kathleen turned twelve and he’d saved enough for tuition, but there was no help for it, she’d be tarnished by then” (41). Readers see James work to mold Kathleen into his idealized version of femininity and to make sure she would not be a “tarnished” version of it that we see embodied by Matera. Kathleen, however, exemplifies how traditional values of femininity that patriarchy posits as valuable and normal are constructed to fit that particular worldview, and are not reflective of women’s embodied experiences. Kathleen uses her Holy Angels diary to express realities of the “whole girl” that are not represented in traditional writings of femininity and girl/womanhood.

Giles's open-minded supervision allows Kathleen to explore and forge her own identity until James is made aware of her indiscretions by "An Anonymous Well-Wisher," who we later find out to be Rose's conservative, yet drug-addicted mother. When James gets the letter, he leaves that night to find Kathleen in New York and bring her back to Cape Breton. What he finds at Giles's apartment is no Giles, and instead, Kathleen and Rose making love. James initially plans on killing Kathleen's lover who he assumed was a man, "but no, [he would] never kill a woman" (549). Instead, James beats her out of rage, and throws her out of Giles's apartment like "a mummy-sack of bones" (549). He then proceeds to beat Kathleen, and after beating her, he rapes her.

At this point in the novel, readers are already aware of James's sexual attraction to Kathleen. When Kathleen is just twelve years old, James becomes sexually aroused by her for the first time when he is tuning the family piano, and Kathleen, "steals over to the piano and strikes a chord. James springs up and around, though the hammers barely winged him, belts her with an open hand then a closed fist before he realizes who it is" (60). When James sees what he has done to Kathleen, he soothes her, then, "he shocks himself. He lets her go and draws back abruptly so she will not notice what has happened to him" (61). James's sexual attraction may be read as his lust for Kathleen as she fits his desired characterization of femininity, and he has become disenchanted by Materia as she does not fit this ideal. From that point in the novel, James's sexual attraction to Kathleen is labeled as his "demon" (63), which he outruns on several occasions when he is confronted with his attraction to her. Similarly, when James uses violence to control Materia, he uses violence when he is angered by Kathleen. Unlike his interactions with Materia, however, readers only see James become aggressive with Kathleen on one other occasion, and that is when he beats and then rapes her after he finds her in bed with Rose.

In the first instance of James's rage towards Kathleen, he is angered when she interferes with his work; in the second instance where readers see Kathleen raped and impregnated by James, he is provoked when he finds her in bed with her black female lover. In both of the occurrences, James's anger is triggered when Kathleen does not fit into his traditional, docile version of femininity. Proper femininity requires passivity, and appropriate relationships between men and women, and certainly not active sexual agency and interracial relationships between women. To remedy her defiance, James uses violence to assert his dominance over Kathleen in both situations. In the latter, however, James uses sexualized violence as a supplementary assertion of his position of power.

Although readers recognize James's sexual attraction to Kathleen from a young age, he never acts on his desires until she fails to fulfil the appropriate definition of femininity. This indicates that James uses sexualized violence as a means to control Kathleen and assert not only his dominance over her, but his ownership. Kate Millett argues that "Patriarchal force also relies on a form of violence particularly sexual in character and realized most completely in the act of rape" (44). Through rape, "the emotions of aggression, hatred, contempt, and the desire to break or violate personality, take a form consummately appropriate to sexual politics" (Millett 44). By violating Kathleen in such a way, James is overpowering her, and exerting his totalizing dominance and power over her self and body.

After the assault, James brings Kathleen home to Cape Breton where she ceases to speak and is confined to the attic until she dies nine months later in childbirth. Kathleen's refusal to speak signals her loss of identity after being violated by James. Millett argues that in rape, "the interest is not in the physical pain inflicted but in the damage done to will and spirit, the human claim or dignity of the victim" (288). In raping Kathleen, James

breaks her newfound identity outside of patriarchal power, and reaffirms his position of power over her, thus reinserting himself as an obstacle that Kathleen had evaded by leaving for New York. Kathleen's refusal to speak after the rape also similarly mirrors Materia's refusal to speak only English to her children in protest of James patriarchal nature, and as a means of gaining control over her situation. Kathleen's silence, "signifies what social conditions make it impossible to state linguistically," (Bordo 2247) and she is asserting agency by not speaking at all.

Kathleen's death is where readers further see her redemption and becoming finally freed from James's control. While dying, Kathleen sees:

Between agony and release, she saw – framed in the door which is thumping like a heart attack – Pete. With his head off *Hello little girl*. This time he's not behind her in the mirror. He is out in the open. It's safe for him now. [...] And when he has looked his fill, he politely nods his stump of neck and leaves. She whimpers briefly. There is the blissful release from pain. (137)

Earlier in the novel, readers learn that Pete is the scarecrow James builds for their front garden, and Kathleen is terrified of him after she comes to associate him with the devil.

Kathleen also uses Pete as a means to scare her sisters:

'If you come in here again I'll tell Pete to get after you,' says Kathleen. [...] 'Who's Pete?' asks Frances. 'He's the *bodechean* and he's going to drag you to hell!' Frances laughs. Mercedes's eyes grow round as saucers and she says, 'That's not nice.' 'Not you, sweetie.' Kathleen holds out her arms and Mercedes approaches. Kathleen pops her onto her knee. 'He doesn't get after good little girls.' (98)

In this context, Pete comes to symbolize James and his incestuous demon, which foreshadows events still to come. Parro writes that “Kathleen’s nightmares of Pete reveal a subconscious awareness of her father’s ‘demon.’ Pete’s departure from Kathleen symbolizes her release from her father’s demon” (186). When Kathleen sees Pete at the thumping doorway during her death, which in reality is James thumping at the door, readers understand Pete to be a metaphor for James’s abusive and incestuous nature. James, like Pete in Kathleen’s explanation to Mercedes and Frances, “‘doesn’t get after good little girls’” (98), and Kathleen is finally released from his control through her death.

In Kathleen’s foreshadowing of Pete as James’s demon, and how he only “goes after” badly behaved girls, readers note that Frances, Kathleen’s youngest sister, laughs at this suggestion. Frances’s laughter foreshadows how she will experience and challenge James’s demon, and his abusive nature and patriarchal control throughout the novel. Unlike Kathleen who is molded by James to fit his ideals of femininity, Frances is regarded as the “bad daughter” (260) because of her refusal to be controlled by James. Frances’s active and challenging nature sees her be abused by James from an extremely young age. Although MacDonald’s writing of the extent of the abuse Frances endures is ambiguous at times, readers first see Frances molested by James when she is just six years old. The abuse occurs on the night of Kathleen’s funeral, but Frances’s “bad” behaviour occurs on the night of Kathleen’s death. Frances is awoken by the commotion in the attic during Kathleen’s traumatic birth, and James beating Maria, and so she heads to the attic to investigate: “Based on her upbringing, and from what she has heard and seen tonight, one thing is clear: the babies up there must be baptized. But she has to be careful. She has to hurry. She mustn’t get caught” (145). Frances sees Kathleen’s

mutilated body and the twin babies, “squirring slightly and mewling between Kathleen’s legs where they have been wedged for safe-keeping” (146). Frances then takes the babies to the creek in order to baptize them, knowing that in an emergency any Catholic can perform a baptism. While performing the baptisms, however, Frances accidentally drops both of the babies into the creek; first she drops Lily, whom she is able to save, but when she is baptizing Ambrose, James catches her and drags her out of the creek and Ambrose is left to drown, while Lily contracts Polio.

Although readers know that Frances is trying to baptize the babies based on what she understands to be a necessity, James does not know this. MacDonald writes that “James has no idea that the infant has already been baptized. He doesn’t know that’s what Frances was doing out there in the creek, he just knows she’s bad” (169). On the night of Kathleen’s death, Frances encounters Pete the scarecrow on her way to the creek with the babies: “There is one scary thing: the scarecrow in the centre of the garden on the other side of the creek. [...] Frances avoids looking at it. ‘It’s just a thing.’ But she doesn’t want to offend it” (147). Frances’s encounter with Pete foreshadows her upcoming encounter with James’s demon when he molests her the following night after Kathleen’s funeral.

On the night of the funeral, Mercedes, Materia’s second daughter, awakens to see Frances not in bed. Mercedes “knows that whenever she loses track of Frances, bad things happen” (168). Mercedes goes to look for Frances after witnessing her in the creek the night of Kathleen’s death, and what she finds is Frances downstairs in the rocking chair with James where she hears, “a little sound like a puppy. [...] Frances is alive alive-o. She is in the rocking chair with daddy. [...] As they walk upstairs hand in hand Frances says, ‘It doesn’t hurt’” (167-68). Although Mercedes does not register what she has

witnessed until later in life, attributing her vomiting to the smell of cooking kidneys (168), readers know, and learn when Mercedes recounts what happens as an adult, that James was molesting and then raping a six-year-old Frances (375). As an adult, Mercedes again recalls that, “Bad things happen when Frances gets out of bed,” (375) and on the night of Kathleen’s funeral, James relives the traumatic experience of Kathleen’s death and what he perceives as Frances’s “bad” behavior. James is outraged with Frances the night Kathleen dies and what he thinks she is doing. This leads to him sexually abusing her, which manifests itself as a form of punishment and control over Frances for not being able to behave according to traditional definitions of girlhood.

Frances’s inappropriate behaviour is directly countered with Mercedes’s appropriate behaviour. After both Kathleen and Materia die, Mercedes is awarded with an Old-Fashioned Girl doll, “For being such a good grown-up girl” (175). After the passing of Materia, Mercedes takes on the role of the mother, and she grows up to embody James’s ideal construction of femininity in domesticity and motherhood, while Frances grows up to constantly disobey and challenge him. Frances’s constant disobedience provokes James, and readers see him react violently towards her on numerous occasions. Frances, however, takes pleasure in his violence as a form of protest to his anger by being able to control it through her own actions. After readers see Frances incite his anger by dressing her cat, Trixie, in the family baptismal gown and bonnet (212), James beats her, and “Mercedes looks away. She can’t stand it when Frances grins with a bloody lip” (212).

In this context, Frances’s ability to provoke James’s rage is essential to how she copes with being raped, his violence, and his control. MacDonald writes that James’s beatings, “[make] her feel restful. It’s a lovely feeling she hardly ever gets” (263). In one

passage, readers see Frances purposefully takes the blame for Mercedes's wrong-doing when she leaves Kathleen's picture on the piano. When James sees the picture, Frances asks "[w]as she a slut?" [...] in a helpful tone of voice. Ahhh, that's just right. Look at him, all lit up like an Easter candle" (261). To this, James asks Mercedes to take Lily out of the house so he can appropriately punish Frances. James beats her mercilessly and demands, "'who's the slut, tell me who's the slut!' [...] Frances gets through this part by pretending to herself she's actually Raggedy-Lily-of-the-Valley, which makes her laugh and provokes his second verse, 'I don't want to hear you speak her name,' [...] 'Do – You – Under – Stand – Me?' [...] Frances folds over till she's on the floor" (262-63). This is one of MacDonald's more ambiguous scenes, as readers are unsure if James is beating Frances, or if he is sexually assaulting her as a means to further assert his dominance over her. MacDonald's use of spacing between words mirrors James's behavior when he first rapes Kathleen, and again when he rapes Frances after Kathleen's funeral. Nevertheless, Frances takes pleasure from James's violence, asserting that it is a way for her to punish him: "'Besides, it lets me get back at him.' 'For what?' Frances looks at Mercedes and smiles slightly, which makes the fresh seam in her lower lip gleam. 'For the thing you don't know. And what you don't know won't hurt you'" (264).

Another way Frances provokes James and challenges his definitions of femininity is through the use of her own sexuality in order to manipulate those around her. Frances does this on several occasions in order to get the desired outcome she hopes for from various situations. When Frances wants to get kicked out of school, she takes her friend, Puss-Eye, into one of the outhouses where she molests him so she can be expelled (291); she begins working at speakeasy in the coke ovens as a "Dive-Diva" (342) where she strips and prostitutes herself while wearing her old girl-guides uniform in order to make

money so she can start an escape fund for Lily (288); and finally, Frances seduces Kathleen's African Canadian driver, Leo Ginger Taylor, and becomes pregnant with his child. This is seen as Frances's final mission in disobeying and challenging her traditional, patriarchal, and racist father by getting pregnant out of wedlock, and giving birth to an interracial baby.

Frances's dominance over James's values and control is at last signalled through her pregnancy, which is the final act of Frances's disobedience towards him. In pregnancy, a new Frances is born: "New Frances says thank you; is careful of her health, looks forward to being a mother" (417), and, she "has recently revealed a natural talent in the kitchen. She cooks and cooks" (429). Readers also see Frances and James repair their damaged relationship, most notably after James "has had his first stroke" (417) and he can no longer assert his dominance over his daughters; instead, he must rely on them to help him live. In this context, Mercedes and Frances are free from living under James's control. Robinson argues that through Frances, "MacDonald clearly revises the ideology of girlhood" (7), and "rewrites the girls' story tradition, educating a new generation of readers about the strength and survival of girls in the face of almost unspeakable, but finally spoken, abuse" (8). Frances's constant challenging of her fathers' traditional values and construction of femininity locates a new embodiment of girlhood and femininity that is not commonly represented in traditional girls' stories like *Little Women*, *Anne of Green Gables*, and, *Jane Eyre*, which we see the Piper girls' read in order to make sense of their own identities and experiences.

For all of the Piper women, James patriarchal nature presents an obstacle to their control of their selves and bodies. While Mercedes willingly fits into the role of traditional girlhood and eventually fills the desired role of mother figure after Maria's

death, Materia, Kathleen, and Frances work throughout the novel to challenge that control. Their experiences highlight how patriarchy imposes guidelines that create unrealistic and unfulfilling roles that are not natural and restrict women's agency. Through the Piper women, MacDonald emphasizes how women navigate the obstacles imposed by patriarchy, realized through depictions of control, violence, and rape. She also demonstrates how these obstacles are challenged through various forms of protest that work to reaffirm identity, and ultimately act as representations of agency, even when the acts of agency require outcomes as dire as death.

By highlighting the experiences of Materia, Kathleen and Frances Piper, who “are the product of true Gothic horrors – rape, incest, terrifying violence – “(Heiland 179), MacDonald emphasizes how male dominance, violence and sexualized violence intersect and impact women's experiences in patriarchal society. MacDonald rewrites the traditional experiences of girl and womanhood by emphasizing the limiting definitions of femininity, girlhood, and motherhood that patriarchal power imposes upon women. Materia, Kathleen and Frances exemplify how patriarchal ideals oppress and control women through violence, particularly sexualized violence realized through acts of rape, in order to assert dominance over women who fail to achieve ideals of traditional femininity. Throughout the novel, “Female identity, effaced by patriarchy and reemerging, is [...] one of the main issues” (Somacarrera 71) that readers see Materia, Kathleen and Frances navigate through James's violence. In this way, MacDonald rewrites patriarchal definitions of femininity that are defined as natural in order to show the violence that women experience when they threaten and challenge patriarchal rule. As a result, MacDonald reinvents the “whole girl” (41), that patriarchal ideology works hard to define

as subordinate and passive, and instead inserts a tradition that works to break down and challenge limiting definitions of femininity and patriarchal violence.

Chapter 3

“It was like a science fiction or horror movie, being controlled and not knowing it, not until it was too late”: Emerging Female Agency and the Policing of Women’s Bodies in Lynn Coady’s *Strange Heaven*

As we have seen, Ann-Marie MacDonald’s *Fall on Your Knees* offers its readers an introduction to some of the most dramatic representations of female agency in the contemporary literature of Atlantic Canada. Although many of these representations are violent and ultimately even self-destructive, when we re-read and re-interpret the Piper women’s actions of protest as embodied, or even “unconscious” activism, we can better appreciate the way the novel explores the desperation these women feel as they try to take control of their individual selves and their individual bodies while living under the forces of patriarchal domination (Bordo 2247). MacDonald’s exploration of female agency uses Gothic conventions so dramatically because they mirror the actual horrors experienced by the Piper women. Building from MacDonald’s representation of female agency, the next novel I want to consider, Lynn Coady’s *Strange Heaven* (1998), offers a much deeper and more detailed exploration of agency through her protagonist, Bridget Murphy. Similar to MacDonald’s Piper women, Bridget does not have access to the kind of upper-middle class privileges that Moore’s women negotiate in chapter one.³⁸ Though, like Moore’s characters, passivity and ambivalence certainly do characterize Bridget’s responses as she attempts to navigate the patriarchal assumptions of her small Cape Breton community, her actions and/or inactions only confirm her place as inferior, and even defective, in patriarchal society. Through Bridget, Coady offers a realistic interpretation of agency and

³⁸ See chapter 1 on Moore’s early short-fiction. Moore’s women experience privileges based on their white, upper-middle-class backgrounds that grant them a false sense of security and power.

activism, and provides Atlantic Canadian literature with a new voice to speak up for a female experience that complicates the idea of the home place in traditional maritime literature,³⁹ challenges patriarchal structures, and demands that we pay attention to the damaging outcomes of patriarchal governance.

Over the last two decades, Lynn Coady has established herself as one of Canada's most well-respected writers. She graduated from Carleton University in 1993 with a Bachelor's Degree in English and Philosophy before completing her Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia. *Strange Heaven* was her first book, built out of her MA thesis, and it immediately went on to be shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award. Later in her career, her two most recent publications, *The Antagonist* (2011), and *Hell Going* (2013), were both named as finalists for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, and *Hell Going* actually won the award which was presented at a nationally televised gala.

Much of Coady's early fiction challenges ideas of place and questions the romanticized depictions of East Coast communities that dominate perceptions of the region.⁴⁰ In an interview with *The Globe and Mail*, Coady states that, before she started writing, she had "never seen [Cape Breton] depicted in a way that was satisfying to [her]," and that she had "never related to [the stories] because they were set in olden

³⁹ See: Ian McKay, *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia*; Danielle Fuller, *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada*; Herb Wyile, *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic Canadian Literature*. Building from McKay's text that analyzes Folk stereotypes, Fuller and Wyile, among others, assert that more recent Atlantic Canadian writing subverts Folk archetypes that locate the home-place as fulfilling for women.

⁴⁰ *Hell Going* depicts a number of stories that take place outside of the region, for example.

times and rural and from a male perspective” (Dafoe). Through works like *Strange Heaven*, *Saints of Big Harbour*, *Mean Boy*, *The Antagonist* and *Hell Going*, Coady shows us that the Folk-oriented images that oversimplify life in the region are not reflective of all lived realities experienced by the region’s inhabitants. Instead, readers of her fiction are more likely to find real Atlantic Canadian teenagers binge-watching “the entire third season of Buffy the Vampire the Slayer” (Coady, *Victory Meat* 3), or drinking rum and cokes in their parent’s basements, or participating in hard-core S&M.⁴¹ Against pastoral clichés, Coady’s writing explores ostensibly dysfunctional families immersed in their own melodramatic tendencies.

For an author of Coady’s stature, and a writer who covers so much territory, there is little scholarly attention given to her work and far less than it warrants.⁴² Although recognized as a regional writer, Coady has distinguished herself from the (predominately male) writers who make up the traditional Atlantic Canadian literary canon by “resisting the sentimentalizing and idealizing tendencies frequently associated with regional writing” (Iverson 1). Since its publication, *Strange Heaven* has garnered both critical and commercial success for its realistic portrayal of small-town life in Cape Breton, particularly what has been dubbed Coady’s use of “strategic regionalism” (Fuller 38). Danielle Fuller’s concept, later adopted by Herb Wyile, situates Coady’s novel as one that “challenges essentialist constructions of the East and dramatizes the patriarchal strictures

⁴¹ Coady’s short story “An Otherworld” (*Hell Going*, Astoria 2013) depicts a couple who have an entire basement secretly dedicated to S&M.

⁴² Although *Strange Heaven* is the subject of several critical analyses (Wyile, Creelman, Fuller, Marshall, among others), there are no critical studies dedicated to the range of her work, despite numerous publications that are worthy of attention. Coady’s work also tends to be categorized as regional writing that focuses on regional politics, which limits how her texts are viewed.

that complicate the image of the home place as a nurturing environment for women” (Wyile 88). *Strange Heaven* successfully addresses the gap⁴³ outlined by Coady through Bridget Murphy, who suffers from postpartum depression after the birth and subsequent adoption of her unwanted baby. Although *Strange Heaven* is a work of fiction, “it was drawn from [Coady’s] own experiences” (Dafoe), and it reflects, and is critical of, the patriarchal ideologies that restrict and police female agency and sexuality.

Similar to the depictions we have seen in the works of Lisa Moore and Anne-Marie MacDonald, *Strange Heaven* revises the traditional way women experience girlhood, womanhood, femininity and sexuality. Such writing breaks down conventional definitions of what encompasses the female experience to instead reflect the frustrations and realities of women’s embodied experiences. As we have seen, women in patriarchal society experience unequal degrees of agency based on sex, class and race. These determinants combine, then, to affect how individual women experience femininity, sexuality and overall agency.⁴⁴ The revisionary process seen through the works of Moore and MacDonald is essential to the framing of this study, and Coady’s work is no exception. Accordingly, the female characters in each of the texts under analysis experience their lived realities very differently: Moore’s women, who are white and upper-middle class, experience sexuality, passivity, and agency differently than the racially and economically marginalized Piper women. Coady’s work adds a new dimension through Bridget, whose agency is restricted because of her age, working-class background, and the socially engrained gender roles that are imposed upon her.⁴⁵

⁴³ See Dafoe interview with Coady for the *Globe and Mail*.

⁴⁴ See Herb Wyile, *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic Canadian Literature*.

⁴⁵ See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1990).

Bridget's experience is essential to how female agency and activism are realized through actions that emphasize the severity of patriarchal ideologies that govern women's selves, bodies, and dictate what encompasses the ideal female experience. The policing of women's bodies is not readily addressed in traditional depictions of femininity, but female authors work to highlight how policing women and their bodies becomes standard practice in order to regulate models of ideal femininity. The process of navigating these strictures centralized first in *Fall on Your Knees* is reflected in Coady's *Strange Heaven*, where Bridget confronts similar restrictions that the Piper women face. Unlike the Piper women, however, Bridget's experiences are situated both in and outside of her home, locating the values of not only her family, most notably her father, but those of her wider community as being restrictive to her agency. In this chapter, I will analyze how Coady represents female agency and activism through Bridget and several other female characters throughout the novel, detailing how their agency is realized through actions that work to protest the patriarchal institutions that govern them.

When readers are first introduced to Bridget she is eighteen years old and an inpatient on the psychiatric ward at the IWK Children's Hospital in Halifax, Nova Scotia, after being admitted with postpartum depression. Unlike the other inpatients who are admitted for various mental health issues, Bridget "exhibited no signs" of an illness (Coady 20). Instead, she is seen as pathologically silent, passive, and ambivalent to her diagnosis and surroundings. Readers first see Bridget as an inpatient at the IWK, and then return home to her dysfunctional family and insular community in Port Hawkesbury, Cape Breton, throughout the second part of the novel. In hospital and at home, Bridget consistently deals with obstacles that inhibit her agency, both internally and externally. In this way, the psychiatric ward serves as a secondary setting that mirrors the values of her

traditional community that seeks to monitor and control her actions. The parallel between the psychiatric ward and the values of Bridget's family and community serves as one of the novel's "central motifs" (Wylie 131-32). This indicates the pervasiveness of patriarchal ideologies that inhibit her agency, and fuel the passivity and ambivalence that characterizes her illness and baseline approach to traditional female experiences. Similar to MacDonald's framing of James Piper, Coady presents Bridget's father, Robert, as the household patriarchal figure who imposes specific values onto Bridget that determine appropriate modes of girlhood and femininity. These values are further shared by her other family members, friends, and her neurotic ex-boyfriend, Mark, who all thrive on nonsensical drama and frivolities like parties and proms that define the teenage experience. Bridget is bored and frustrated by her surroundings, insisting that "if she had been a boy it would have been more fun" (Coady 158). Similar to MacDonald's Piper women, Bridget does not have the ability to properly articulate the extent of her unhappiness and frustrations, and as a result, readers see her attempt to make sense of her frustration, and the restrictions to her agency. Through Bridget, Coady's framing of femininity and how women respond to the unrealistic ideals that patriarchy places upon them provides insight into how omnipresent patriarchy is, and how women work to insure their agency, even under circumstances that require self-harm and actions that classify them as being 'mentally unstable' for their failure to live up to acceptable societal standards.

Bridget's time as an inpatient on the psychiatric ward provides insight into the damaging affects of patriarchy. While she did not appear physically unwell, there were several other female inpatients who did. Readers are introduced to two anorexic teens: Kelly, "who walked around looking pained at everything" (63), and Maria, who

“resembled a Holocaust victim” (63), as inpatients whose mental illness are inscribed upon their physical bodies. Coady also introduces Mona, who is admitted to the ward by her father under pretenses of a psychotic break-down. Bridget initially dismisses both Maria and Kelly as “just girls wanting to get on the cover of *Glamour*” (85). As the novel progresses, however, she begins to see anorexia as more than a desire to be thin, and she learns to interpret Maria, in particular, as a strong character: “Maria would never feel sorry for those who had made her life difficult...Maria would always win out...Maria had the strength of the invisible” (134-35). Maria was a patient on the psychiatric ward much longer than any other patient due to her commitment to anorexia, an “aspiring cadaver,” as Bridget describes her (127). Maria’s commitment to her disease begins to be seen as embodied strength when Bridget realizes that regardless of the circumstances, she will not be controlled by those around her.

For Bridget, Maria is the first person she meets “for whom she knew that death was imminent” (63). Maria had already been on the ward for over four years at the age of fifteen, and “she couldn’t tell you” why she wouldn’t eat (63); “All [she] knew was that she was sticking to her guns, non-consumption was her *raison d’etre*” (63). Readers see Maria and Kelly strike up an alliance due to “their mutual antagonism towards consumption” (85). Even in the hospital, both Maria and Kelly are able to maintain some control over their bodies. Due to the psychiatric ward’s emphasis on rehabilitation and regimented routine, they are able to manipulate it so that this routine works in their favour instead of in favour of the institution’s mandate. This allows them to exercise control over the regulation that the staff imposes on them: “The ward’s emphasis on routine, on the rigorous scheduling of every meal and activity, worked against them where anorexics were concerned. Kelly and Maria loved routine...it helped them to consolidate their own

schedules” (86). Coady’s emphasis on control reflects Maria’s and Kelly’s needs to gain control of their persons and bodies in a culture that limits their agency. Readers see Materia and Kathleen Piper exhibit similar acts of agency in *Fall on Your Knees* through Materia’s refusal to speak English, and Kathleen’s refusal to speak at all. Maria’s and Kelly’s ability to maintain control of their bodies while inpatients on the ward reflects how the institution serves as a setting that embodies the values of patriarchal society that seeks to limit and control their agency, but is not successfully able to. Maintaining control, then, becomes paramount to their stay as inpatients, regardless of their ability to articulate why it is important for them to do so.

Their rogue exercising of agency and control sees hospital staff attempt to further regulate their actions. Maria and Kelly are force-fed through a tube and placed on mandatory bedrest whenever they refuse to eat, or are under a certain weight. Bridget is even forced to bake an angel food cake for Kelly, which she thinks is “a sadistic gesture because Kelly was a scarcely recovered anorexic” (45). Bridget does not understand Kelly, and particularly Maria, until she is discharged from the hospital. Over the Christmas holiday, Bridget receives an illiterate letter from Maria explaining that she too was sent home for the holidays, but only for the holidays, unlike Kelly, who was permanently discharged. In the letter, Maria is unable to spell even simple words, and she remarks that she will “never do it;” she will never follow the meal plan that would be a requirement for her successful, permanent discharge (126). Although she had to meet certain criteria to be allowed to go home for the holidays, Maria obliged only because she knew this was the only way she would be able to get home. This further reflects her ability to manipulate the institution and the care she receives at will by allowing them to think that they have control. Maria remarks that she does not have to worry about being

controlled at home, though, because, as she puts it: “My family don't try to make me eat because they know I won't anyway” (126). Maria's illiteracy speaks volumes about the gravity of her condition, highlighting her inability to communicate on even a basic level, as well as her need to maintain control of her self and body. Anorexia, then, becomes the tool which Maria uses to activate her own sense of agency, even if its outcomes lead to starvation and possibly her own death.

Maria's illiteracy leaves a profound impression on Bridget, and it is after receiving her letter that she begins to see strength in Maria's actions: “Braced against the inexorable will of mankind, of God and of nature, Maria comes out on top. Disintegration on her own terms” (135). Maria might be killing herself, but at least she has control over her own death. In this passage, Bridget is thinking about Maria, Kelly, and Mona; Mona who she thought “was the powerful one, but that was just because [she] was big and loud” (135). Mona had inserted herself into Bridget's life while the two of them were inpatients on the ward together. Prior to Bridget's epiphany in terms of Maria's strength, Mona served as the antithesis to Bridget. Unlike Bridget's performed passivity, and Maria's and Kelly's silent exertion of self-destructive agency, Mona is loud, unapologetic, and active. She becomes an inpatient on the psychiatric ward after being admitted by her father following an incident where, “At sixteen, in the middle of the school year, Mona had jumped into her white jeep and driven to Florida all by herself, without telling anybody. She stayed there for five months, making friends and doing coke” (14). After “getting the living shit beaten out of her,” Florida police officers sent her home to her father, who then sent her to the psychiatric ward in Halifax (14).

Mona is described as having an extremely toxic relationship with her father, whom she describes as “the devil or at least really, really, really evil. Like, an Evil Force”

(30). For Mona, every act of disobedience is aimed at him. When Bridget tries to inquire as to what it was her father did, Mona replies: “It’s control. And it’s, like, the great almighty sanctified privilege of being an asshole. And treating people like shit!” (30) Mona’s father represents the patriarchal force that drives her deviant behaviour, which is the only basis for her categorization as ‘mentally ill’. Mona’s perceived mental illness and her stay in the psychiatric ward additionally signals her ineptitude as a woman in patriarchal society. Mona, like Materia in *Fall on Your Knees*, fails to fit into the standard ideal of femininity and is labeled as mentally unstable when her actions abandon all means of normalcy. Her anger and frustration with being forced into a space that restricts or denies her agency and sense of self, is realized through her own form of self-destructive behaviour. Mona’s enforced hospitalization, then, serves as the paramount of her failure as a woman.

Unlike Maria and Kelly who channel their frustration into silent control and self-destruction, Mona is outwardly hostile, loud, and aggressive, giving the impression that she is the one who possesses control over her self and surroundings. Bridget initially sees Mona’s dominant façade as powerful, too, especially in comparison to her own passivity. In almost all of their interactions throughout the novel, Bridget serves as the passive participant while Mona serves as the active agent. Mona relishes in Bridget’s passivity because it gives her the chance to articulate her own displeasure with her environment, most notably her controlling father. It appears to Bridget that Mona is “obsessed,” as she “only talks about her father,” and Bridget just sits there and listens (30). Mona would say, ““(y)ou’re fucking great, you know that? ... You just sit there and you never say anything”” (30). Although Mona appears outwardly dominant, Bridget sees a more complex side to her that emphasizes her vulnerability: “Recently Mona had taken to

coming into Bridget's room at around midnight and crawling to her bed and shaking her, even though Bridget was always awake. And when Bridget asked what was wrong, Mona only knelt there with her freckled face all squashed and red, making choking noises" (30). Mona's vulnerability highlights her need for a space that validates her frustration and does not restrict her agency. Moreover, her inability to breathe reflects how she is literally being choked by the values of the society she lives in.

Mona's need for such a space is similar to Maria and Kelly's desire to maintain control of their own bodies. Unlike Maria and Kelly, however, Mona is not able to manipulate her environment to her own advantage despite attempting to do so. Prior to Bridget's discharge, Mona disappears from the ward after being given the privilege to access the Teen Lounge unaccompanied by hospital staff. Mona "had come back on her own and did not have to be hauled from the streets by the police" (59) after disappearing for a day and half without anyone knowing where she was or had been. She proceeded to tell Bridget "she had gone to the punk bars and met millions of fucking awesome people. She had gotten toasted with the band and had sex with a guitarist who has hair down to his bum. She was still high, as a matter of fact" (59). Mona's exertion of agency is reflected in her actions that disregard rules imposed by figures of authority. When her father is unable to control her, he sends her to the psychiatric ward, and likewise when the hospital staff is unable to control Mona, they alert her father. Mona is enraged by this, and "Like a backed-up sewer, her mouth [explodes] with filth. [...] The shouting seemed to go on forever, even after Mona was left to collect herself in the quiet room and there was no one there to shout at. It just went on and on, inarticulate" (61). Mona's inarticulate rage, even when no one is on the receiving end of it, suggests her deep-seeded dissatisfaction and anger with her surroundings. For Mona, the hospital's mirroring of her

home environment creates a cycle of patriarchal control that leaves her angry, unsatisfied, vulnerable, and unable to articulate her frustration in a way that is not manifested in anger and outbursts that characterize her as ‘mentally ill’. When her father arrives on the ward to discuss her behavior, Bridget describes him as embodying the “lyrics of Ike Turner, rendered in a wealthy, German-descended teenager’s approximation of Tina” (61). And just like that, Mona was gone:

It was remarkable, the swiftness with which Mona’s father, Mr. Mona, descended and took her away. [...] He had bawled out Dr. Solomon, in the first place. [...] What kind of facility was it, he wanted to know, that allowed its inmates to walk out the front door whenever they saw fit? This had to be the worst facility he’d ever put his daughter in. (66)

Here, readers see how little agency Mona is granted by her father, as she is referenced first as an inmate, and then as his daughter, but never as Mona or a person with agency. Even Bridget’s false name for her father reflects his dominance and ownership over her. In this context, Mona, like Materia in *Fall on Your Knees*, is regarded as her father’s property before being thought of as a person. It also becomes clear that the Halifax psychiatric ward is not the first “facility” that her father has placed her in, further indicating her lack of control over her own person. Unlike Maria’s manipulation and maintaining control of her own body, Mona is both unwillingly placed and removed from the ward by her father. This indicates that even though Mona appears to be active and in control, she really “just [has] bluster. Mona blustered and blew until her German father had enough of her and picked her up and plunked her down again elsewhere” (135). For Mona, then, patriarchal control persists and she never has the ability to maintain control and exert her agency in the way

that Maria is able to. Understanding this allows Bridget to reframe Mona and Maria under these pretenses, which helps her to construct a better understanding of her own agency, and the all-encompassing threats of patriarchal control. Even when an individual, like Maria, tries to escape, it seems that damage itself is essentially inescapable.

Although Coady's third person narrative gives the reader intimate insight into Bridget's thoughts and motivations, this privileged interior access can also leave the impression that Bridget is more active in the early stage of the novel than she actually is. In fact, as the novel progresses, Bridget's passivity becomes increasingly evident only as she develops the ability to self-reflect and to accurately see and understand her full social context. Unlike Maria, Kelly, and Mona whose mental illnesses are more overt, Bridget's diagnosis of postpartum depression after the birth of her baby makes her appear seemingly fine. Bridget, however, is passive in her day-to-day interactions and "apathetic" to the pregnancy and birth, which she refers to as "her body's betrayal" (51, 21). When asked about her apathy by her primary care provider, Dr. Solomon, Bridget remarks that, "[i]t struck me that, for an event that everybody claims is so natural, the most natural thing in the world, it didn't seem natural at all" (51). Instead, Bridget compares her pregnancy to either *Rosemary's Baby* or *Aliens*: "It was like a science fiction or horror movie, being controlled and not knowing it, not until it was too late" (22, 51). Here, readers see Bridget explicitly reject the ideologies that are imposed on her through traditional femininity that sees motherhood as a natural experience to be welcomed by all women. When Babs the social worker brings her pictures of the baby, "Bridget supposed she was obliged to want them" (21), but in reality she wanted nothing to do with them. Coady's framing of Bridget's experience of childbirth and motherhood reworks traditional tropes of femininity

and the home-sphere that write motherhood as fulfilling, desirable, and the pinnacle of femininity.

For Bridget, pregnancy, child birth, and motherhood emphasize only the lack of control she has over her self and body. As readers learn about her family life and upbringing, they come to understand that she is granted very little external agency by both her family and wider community. Bridget's pregnancy further emphasizes the lack of control she possesses. She thinks: "Her body was part of life and life was life and always took you along for the ride and you never had any say" (54). In order to have some say in her pregnancy, she engages in acts of self-harm: "she remembered lying on her bed, sweating, systematically punching herself in the stomach. Thinking it would make her feel better, but it didn't. It didn't even have the gratification of pain" (90). Here readers see Bridget attempt to reclaim her body, but "(h)er body thwarted her at every turn. Always" (90). No matter how Bridget tries to regain control over her body she is consistently unable to. She even recalls not being able to something as simple as brushing her hair "because, she remembered, every time she brushed it, it simply came out" (52). Her hair loss further signals the lack of control she has over her body, as it continues to respond to her environment in ways that she cannot control, or even understand.

Bridget's lack of internal agency is emphasized by the responses her body has to childbirth, and specifically what happens to her body afterwards. After giving birth, she is sent from the adult hospital to the children's hospital for her preliminary admission interview that Dr. Solomon recorded without Bridget's knowledge. When she watches the tape of the interview prior to her discharge, she does not recognize herself, and she cannot hear own voice even with the volume on the television is turned all the way up in order to capture her "sparse responses" (53). Coady writes:

What Bridget remembered about this whole thing was guilt. She felt bad.

She was in a room with two adults asking her questions. She had done something wrong. She hadn't washed for a couple of days. She was seventeen years old. She had been bleeding into a nice, thick hospital napkin which had to be changed every hour. It was not like a period. She was bleeding and bleeding and bleeding and bleeding. Steady, for days. Blood had to be the guiltiest thing there was. It came out and it kept coming. It was like *The Birth*. 'I'm sorry,' were her first words she had said after that. And that's what her body had said too, and was still saying. (54)

Here, readers see Bridget equate her bleeding with guilt, and she emphasizes the discrepancy between the control she has over her self and her body. By verbally saying 'sorry,' and associating the continual bleeding with her body's own way of saying sorry, she highlights the lack of agency she possesses internally, and her guilt for failing to fit into her construction of ideal, or 'good' femininity.

Like Mona, Bridget's stay on the psychiatric ward signals her failure to live up to societal standards of normal femininity, and the hospital serves as a space that attempts to rehabilitate her into normalcy. Unlike Mona's outrage, however, Bridget's passivity is what the hospital staff seek to change. Although she is conditioned into passivity by the traditional values of her family and community, her pregnancy serves as a tangible representation of her place in society as a young woman with little control over her self and body. Bridget's passivity and apathy are exasperated, and this categorizes her as suffering from postpartum depression. While in hospital, readers see Bridget begin to stand up for herself, specifically to Byron; a fellow inpatient on the psychiatric ward whose diagnosis is ambiguous, but related to his arrogance, narcissism and superiority complex. Byron is

constantly trying to kiss Bridget or Mona, insisting that they are “are such incredible teases” (47), based simply on the fact that they are women and in his vicinity. He even tries “to touch what Mona liked to call her taco,” and when she punched him in the nose for violating her, she “got all her privileges taken away for two weeks” (47). When Byron tries to engage with Bridget in this way, she does not use physical violence, but instead chooses to remove herself from the situation. When Bridget is forced to make the angel food cake for Kelly, however, she lashes out at Byron “with violent truths about the way he looked, acted and thought” (48). Although she comes to the conclusion that Byron is revelling in the attention she and Mona give him by insulting him, Bridget’s outburst is viewed as “progress” (49).

Both Mona and the hospital staff see Bridget’s out-pouring of anger towards Byron as a step in the right direction: “Mona decided she liked it. She said Bridget was showing progress. [...] ‘Doesn’t say a word for two months,’ she kept saying, ‘and then crucifies some poor schmuck in the kitchen’” (49). For Mona and Dr. Solomon, Bridget’s outburst shows progress away from her passivity and apathy that characterizes her illness. Dr. Solomon questions if Byron reminds her of her boyfriend, which Bridget disagrees with. Although she might deny any connection between Byron and Mark or her community, her outburst reflects how she is beginning to find the ability to articulate her frustration with her surroundings; frustration that she was previously unable to voice.

Although Bridget’s outburst is seen as a positive step by Dr. Solomon, her medication is changed after the altercation. During her stay on the psychiatric ward, Bridget is prescribed a cocktail of medication to aid in her rehabilitation and the side-effects of these medications include insomnia and constipation: “Bridget was lucky that she was not anorexic, because pretty much all of her spare time was spent in the bathroom

waiting to not be constipated anymore” (45). Even when she asks for other medication to help deal with her constipation, she is consistently denied by the hospital staff. She does not understand why she is not allowed anything to help with her discomfort, and she further does not understand why her medication would change after an outburst that everyone sees as positive for her. Since switching it, “[Bridget] felt even stupider than before” (67), on top of continuing to be constipated. She asks staff for Epsom salts once again, and is once again denied; and when she asks “What *does* [the medication] do?” (68), she is not given an answer.

Bridget’s ongoing constipation and problems with how she responds to the medication further reflect how the hospital serves as secondary setting that mirrors her community that inhibits her agency. Regardless of her attempts to gain control of her self and body, there are obstacles that continue to restrict her, even if it appears that positive steps are being made. Unlike Maria, Bridget, like Mona, is unable to manipulate the hospital setting for her benefit, and she is instead forced to live with the results of whatever they prescribe her. Bridget is left feeling like “the ward and its methods were as arbitrary as the days were long” (46) for their refusal to give her Epsom salts and explain what it is her medication is supposed to do. Her constipation is only momentarily relieved when she goes on a weekend pass to her aunt Bernadette’s and uncle Albert’s. While on pass, Bridget experiences what she calls, “the Tit Fiasco” (36), after being denied medication for her lactating breasts. Bridget recalls that she went to the pharmacy to beg for a refill of her medication, as “the doctor had assured [her] that he would let her have one more round, but now that the pharmacist was calling, he suddenly changed his mind” (37). So, Bridget is left with no control over her body and is denied any control by an outside source who currently holds more power over her own body than she does. When she returns to her aunt

and uncle's, Bernadette, who is a retired nurse, "wrapped bandages tightly around [her] upper body until she looked like a burn victim. Then she made Bridget drink down a glass of apple juice and Epsom slats [...]. She slept for half an hour and then had diarrhea" (37). Although momentarily relieved from the constipation, this scene, coupled with Bridget's inability to refill her medication, underscores the lack of agency she holds both internally and externally.

In this way, Bridget stands in stark contrast to Maria, who, regardless of the circumstances is able to exert her agency and maintain control of her own body. Bridget's bodily functions (or lack thereof), reflect the lack of agency she has both in hospital, and back home and in her community. When Bridget returns home from the hospital at Christmas, she returns to the same "cuckoo's nest" (133) she left, so that "(a) lot of the time, she felt as if she were still on the ward" (105). Unlike in the hospital where Bridget dealt with constant constipation, at home, she suffers from a long bout of Epsom salt-induced diarrhea. Her fluctuating bowels that are either constipated or diarrheic serves as a metaphor throughout the novel for the lack of control she possesses over both her body and her environment. The psychiatric ward serves as a setting that imposes strict and regimented routine onto Bridget, consequently restricting her agency and is reflected in her constant state of constipation. Her home environment similarly serves as a setting that limits her agency, but the restrictions that Bridget faces at home are not as overt as on the psychiatric ward. Instead, Bridget essentially has free reign to do as she pleases, so the restrictions she faces are primarily ideological – hence, her constant battling with diarrhea. In both settings, Bridget's body, more specifically, her bowels, respond by reflecting the state of the environment in which she inhabits, subsequently shifting between a state of complete restriction, to a state of no restriction that is equally as damaging.

Similar to the Piper women in *Fall on Your Knees*, Bridget's father, Robert, serves as the dominant patriarchal force who imposes traditional ideological restrictions onto Bridget and her brother Gerard. For Robert, men and women hold specific and different spaces in the world, and "he had this idea that girls liked Mary and boys liked Jesus just as girls liked Barbies and boys liked G.I. Joes" (117). When Bridget and Gerard were young, "[he] always made sure there were one or two religious pictures hanging on both their walls, and Bridget always got the Virgin, the Baby, or the Virgin with the Baby, whereas Gerard always got a grown up Jesus doing stuff" (117). The religious iconography serves as one of the ways in which she inherits her ideas of ideal and appropriate femininity. These models prove to be limiting for Bridget, even as an adult, as she continues to be held to the same restrictive notion of femininity that traditional values impose upon her. Her failure to achieve the feminine ideal is further highlighted through the disparity between ideal models of girlhood available to Bridget, and her lived experience of sexuality, teen-pregnancy, and childbirth that marks the pinnacle of her failure as a woman. Although Bridget's pregnancy is supposed to be seen as 'natural', it instead marks her deviance and failure in contemporary Cape Breton society due to her age and unmarried status, which codes her pregnancy as negative because it is outside of heteronormative constructions of the family and marriage.

When Bridget returns home from the hospital, her failure as a female is highlighted through her relationship with her father, who does most of his communicating with her through her mother, or through talking to "the air" (102). Robert even "want[s] her to go and live with the nuns" (145), when Bridget continues to fail to live up to his construction of what he defines as proper femininity. Robert's values are further reflected in her brother, Gerard, who, frequently impresses upon her the ideologies that define acceptable models of

femininity. Before Bridget's admission to the psychiatric ward, Gerard was always telling her what guys do and do not like, insinuating that Bridget should at least attempt to mold herself to appear somewhat desirable to men: "I hope you're aware," he said, "of how important it is for a girl to remain a virgin, at least until she's ready to get married" (23). Coady writes that "Gerard thought of himself as the moral centre of the family and didn't like to be called on it" (113), so when Bridget calls him on his hypocritical notion of what constitutes a "tramp" (113), and how she easily fits his criteria, he argues that, "maybe, once, [she] could have been called that. But not anymore" (113). For Gerard, Bridget's stint in the psychiatric ward signals her redemption: "'You're better now. You've, like. Learned your lesson,' he said" (113). Bridget is fascinated by his logic, as "(i)t was not something that had ever occurred to her before, that redemption could be the result of the whole blood-soaked business" (113). Where Bridget saw guilt in her hospital admission and continual bleeding, Gerard, and presumably other members of her family and community who share his worldview, saw Bridget's diagnosis and admission in the psychiatric ward as redemptive – the ultimate form of rehabilitation into normalcy and ideal femininity.

As Bridget's time at home progresses, she sees the limitations of the values held by her father and Gerard, and she comes to understand that these entrenched community values are at least in part to blame for her destructive friendships and the behaviours that helped to define her failure as a woman. Bridget sees her chaotic home life with her hypocritical brother, her traditional father, her emotional mother, and mentally challenged uncle Rollie, and her demented grandmother Margaret P. as being too much for her to handle:

This was what it was, she remembered, this was what made her like loud music so much, this was what sent her to her room to listen to loud, loud music, this was what her calling Mark at three in the morning asking to meet her, this was why she put up with Chantal and the stuffed animals, telling stories of the girls she had tortured. Happily, Bridget did it happily, thinking she was making herself free. (144)

Similar to Maria's, Kelly's and Mona's inability to properly articulate their frustration and dissatisfaction with their environments and the ideologies and pressures that are placed upon them, Bridget is unable to do so, too. She copes with, and tries to navigate her dissatisfaction through deviant behaviour and passivity, thinking it would make her free and grant her the agency she craves.

Bridget remembers "wanting to be herself" (144), as one of the main reasons for escaping from her chaotic household to be with her friends. When she is confronted with the realization that her family is trying to plan her life out for her, and her mother is crying asking, "(d)on't you even think about him?" in reference to her unwanted baby, she responds that she "can't stay if it's going to be like this" (148). Readers see her get up and leave, as "she was able to do this, now, and her father and Gerard didn't like it" (149). Here, Bridget exerts her first act of agency in challenging her family's control, and the ideologies that they impose upon her.

Her family is not the only obstacle that Bridget faces in exercising her agency, however. Although no longer dating Mark, it becomes evident that he is still monitoring her and attempting to police her actions. Prior to her admission to the hospital, Bridget cuts ties with Mark for his controlling nature, remarking that "the phone started ringing at three or four in the morning, or sometimes she'd be on her way to bed and have almost all the

lights turned out when she'd spot the double reflection of his glasses outside the front door" (44). Mark stalking Bridget emphasizes how he, like her father and Gerard, does not like when Bridget positions herself as dominant. His pathological behaviour continues once she is home from the hospital, however, and Bridget starts receiving phone calls from him once again. During their phone calls, Bridget's diarrhea returns: "'What are you up to now?' he said. [...] Breathe, breathe. Bridget had to go to the bathroom again. Her bowels twisted" (133). The re-emergence of Bridget's diarrhea during her conversations with Mark reflect his patriarchal nature, and the chaos and control that he inflicts onto her self and body.

Besides the phone calls and her acute awareness that Mark is monitoring her from a distance, Bridget has not had any direct contact with him until the final passages of the novel. Until this point, their mutual friends had been trying to get them to talk and meet up, arguing that they "need to talk" (70), or discuss "'what's fair...for him'" (192). Bridget reluctantly agrees to talk to him in person, and "All he could do was speak" (193), while Bridget listened. From Mark's patriarchal perspective, Bridget had been the selfish one: "(d)id she have any idea what he'd been going through? [...] Did she think she was the only one having a hard time? [...] Mark's mother said she would take care of [the baby], and his grandmother. She'd never even considered those options, had she?" (193). Throughout their interaction, Mark labels the baby as his son who had been taken away from him: "He had been wronged. He was a wronged father, the social worker said. His rights had been trampled" (194). In giving up the unwanted baby, after the pregnancy that she did not want in the first place, Bridget had exerted her agency over her own body, subsequently bypassing what Mark sees as his "right." Bridget's actions had wounded his masculinity, and his only goal in their interaction was to restore the power imbalance that

would continue to exist between the two of them. Mark further lets Bridget know her place in society, stating, “if [she] thought she could live in the same town with him and do whatever she pleased and fuck around with the likes of Dan the big fat fairy Sutherland and Troy fucking Bezanson she was fucking crazy” (194). Bridget tires of Mark’s patriarchal assumptions and she feels “suddenly benevolent and saint-like” (194). Bridget’s kindly attitude toward Mark, however, is short-lived, as he makes it clear that “The bottom line was that [he] had a son. And Bridget had taken him away from him” (195). This statement enrages Bridget, and she tells Mark to “‘Eat [his] own shit.’ [...] she felt that it was the most powerful thing she could say” (195). Although this marks Bridget’s taking back control and ultimate exertion of agency over one of the patriarchal forces that actively sought to control and police her self and body, she pukes almost immediately after, inadvertently shifting some of the power back to Mark: “When she straightened up, Mark was happy. [...] He wanted to be friends now. It had all been about winning. It had all been about making the woman puke” (196). Like Bridget’s uncontrollable constipation and diarrhea, her vomiting again references her lack of control. Although she is able to stand up to Mark and let him know that he does not have control over her self and or body, she does, however, still have to contend with other patriarchal forces that are present both in her home and in her community. Readers then see Bridget return home to her father, who insists that “maybe he didn’t understand the world, but there were certain ways and certain traditions and certain modes of conduct that it seemed to him the average human being was supposed to act in accordance with” (196). In this way, Bridget’s success over Mark signals another patriarchal obstacle to navigate, and the obstacles yet to come.

Through Bridget’s experiences of passivity, ambivalence, perceived feminine failure and female agency, Coady works to reframe traditional understandings of

girlhood, womanhood, femininity and sexuality. Bridget's experiences work against traditional depictions to instead reflect how patriarchal constructions of femininity are, in reality, damaging, oppressive, and restrictive to young women's sense of self. Bridget, along with Mona, Kelly, and Maria, highlight how patriarchal ideologies limit women's agency and their ability to articulate even on basic levels their frustration and dissatisfaction with the limitations that patriarchal culture impresses upon them. Through the writing of Moore, MacDonald and Coady, depictions of femininity are changing to include how women experience different degrees of agency based on sex, race, and class that affect how they are able to experience agency both internally and externally. Readers see Bridget confront the patriarchal forces that work to police and restrict her agency and body. Her puking, however, reinforces the fact that patriarchal assumptions persist, but have the ability to be overpowered. Through Coady's characterization of the various female characters in *Strange Heaven*, she highlights how women work to secure their agency, even if the outcome demands self-destruction or death. Bridget's experiences offer a previously unheard voice that emphasizes female agency and deconstructs the patriarchal forces that deny it.

Chapter 4

“All Cunt and No *Conscience*.”: Examining Female Sexuality and Representations of Misogyny in George Elliott Clarke’s *The Motorcyclist*

The emergence of the active female presence portrayed first in *Fall on Your Knees*, and then more powerfully through Coady’s Bridget Murphy, indicates a shift in Atlantic Canadian (female) writing that creates new scripts for women to conceptualize female experiences. In 2017, women continue to face the barriers that *Strange Heaven*’s Bridget Murphy was actively working to overcome, as her experiences are still representative of patriarchal ideologies that oppress, govern, and deny female agency, sexuality and desire. Although there have been several Atlantic Canadian writers who have joined the likes of Moore, MacDonald and Coady (Christy Ann Conlin, Sarah Mian, Amy Jones, Sara Tilley, to name a few)⁴⁶ in writing stories that revise traditional depictions of girl/womanhood, there are others that continue to perpetuate the patriarchal ideals the above writers work so hard to challenge. George Elliott Clarke’s most recent novel, *The Motorcyclist* (2016), is an example of this perpetuation. Where Bridget demonstrates the power of female agency, Clarke’s misogynistic representations of women demonstrate how patriarchy continues to preserve, and produce, reductive female narratives.

George Elliott Clarke is recognized nationally and internationally as one of Canada’s most prolific writers and scholars. He currently holds the title of Canada’s Parliamentary Poet Laureate, and is the E.J. Pratt Professor of Canadian Literature at the University of Toronto. Clarke started his career as a poet from Three Mile Plains, Nova

⁴⁶ See: Christy Ann Conlin, *Heave* (2002), *Dead Time and Shelter* (2011), *The Memento* (2016); Sarah Mian, *When the Saints* (2015); Amy Jones, *What Boys Like and Other Stories* (2009), *We’re All in This Together* (2016); Sara Tilley, *Skin Room* (2008), *Duke* (2015).

Scotia, before receiving his B.A. in English from the University of Waterloo, his M.A. in English from Dalhousie University, and his Ph.D. from Queens University. He eventually succeeded in becoming an acclaimed novelist, essayist, anthologist and literary critic. He is unquestionably the most academically successful writer being analyzed in this study, and the sheer amount of criticism available on his work is a testament to this. He also contributes to the conversation himself through literary criticism and anthologies dedicated to African Canadian Literature⁴⁷. Over the last three decades, Clarke's work has dominated the discussion of race relations in Atlantic Canada, particularly Nova Scotia, through an imagined community he calls "Africadia".⁴⁸ Clarke has proven his ability to create varied voices in a range of genres that reflect the history, racism, socioeconomic-conditions, and community that continues to shape his work through ground breaking publications like *Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues* (1983), *Whylah Falls* (1990), *Execution Poems* (2001) which won him the prestigious Governor General's Literary Award, and his first novel, *George and Rue*.

Clarke's work actively identifies and interrogates the institutionalized racism that is routinely left out of the Canadian, and Atlantic Canadian, narratives of place and belonging. As Maureen Moynagh suggests "(l)iterature is but one of the technologies of cultural memory" (99) that allows us to reconceptualise our understanding of a Canadian national identity and of the cultural groups that can or cannot contribute to this shared

⁴⁷ Academic criticism on Clarke consistently increases on both his past and contemporary works. He has also published anthologies: *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature* (2002), *Directions Home: Approaches to African-Canadian Literature* (2012), along with countless scholarly articles.

⁴⁸ For more on Clarke's Africadia, see: Alexander MacLeod, "'The Little State of Africadia is a Community of Believers': Replacing the Regional and Remaking the Real in the Work of George Elliott Clarke."

identity. For Clarke, “Not only is literature [his] chief medium for cultural memory work, it is also arguably his medium for, as it were, communing with the dead” (99). As Moynagh indicates, Clarke’s work gives voice to previously untold stories that shed light on the systemic racism that underscores “the meaning of growing up black in Atlantic Canada” (Hlongwane 292). Critics of Clarke further highlight the varied nature of the racialized discourse that informs his texts, and stress how the black experience in Nova Scotia (and Canada as a whole) is not as homogenous as stereotypical representations write it to be.⁴⁹ Through texts like *Whylah Falls*, *Beatrice Chancy*, *George and Rue*, and his most recent novel, *The Motorcyclist*, Clarke plays with time to show a variety of experiences as historically situated and connected to the contemporary systems in place that perpetuate racial and social inequality.

Left out of all of this criticism, however, is Clarke’s increasingly problematic representation of women. In terms of Clarke’s version of the female experience, readers are continually shown sexist representations of female sexuality and agency, and we are rarely presented with alternatives outside of the stereotypical “good versus bad” feminine dichotomy. The other (notably female) writers featured in this study – Moore, MacDonald and Coady – continually challenge traditional depictions of femininity, yet their work has never achieved the same level of academic success, nor attracted the same kind of scholarly attention, as Clarke’s. Despite the superior commercial success of their texts, and the wider audiences they appeal to, there are, as of yet, no critical studies available on

⁴⁹ See: Alexander MacLeod, “‘The Little State of Africadia is a Community of Believers’: Replacing the Regional and Remaking the Real in George Elliott Clarke,” for a more in-depth discussion.

their work that focus on their representations of female sexuality, desire and agency.⁵⁰

What does this say about the state of sexism in comparison to racism in Atlantic Canadian fiction? Clarke's texts are highly charged, both racially and sexually, yet it appears that the sexual politics he outlines are considered worthy of critical attention only when they are highlighted as racialized issues – not ones that are purely misogynistic. *The Motorcyclist* is no exception.

The startling absence of any sustained analysis of misogyny in Clarke criticism can be seen by “reviewing the reviews” that *The Motorcyclist* received in major national newspapers when it was first published. In *The Globe and Mail*, for example, Emily Donaldson gives only basic descriptions of the women in the story, and instead contextualizes Carl Black, Clarke's protagonist, and the novel as a whole, as reflections on “race, class and history.” In *The National Post*'s review by Ryan B. Patrick, *The Motorcyclist* is described as “a love letter of sorts to the Maritimes,” and a novel that “highlights a time where Canadians of black heritage scrapped, struggled, yet ultimately survived during an era where the nation itself was shaking out its own post-war identity” (Patrick). Although Patrick provides historical insight that is not insignificant, his focus on racial inequality and identity without making any mention of the overt misogyny that marks most of the novel's plot does a disservice to women and the inequality that women continue to encounter – both in the novel and in the social reality of life. Patrick does highlight that “white Canadian women are often objects of Black's desire,” but the

⁵⁰ Moore and Coady's work is almost guaranteed to be recognized by prestigious literary prizes and national best-seller lists; MacDonald's work far outsells the other writers included in this study by consistently reaching an international market; and George Elliott Clarke's work receives far more scholarly attention than the works of Moore, Coady, and MacDonald combined.

objectification of both white and black women is persistent throughout the novel. It seems that Patrick only highlights Clarke's misogyny as it relates to racism, and he presents Carl's victory over white women as a "personal victory over the systemic racism he faces" (Patrick). To focus on the objectification of white women by a black man, over the objectification of black women by a black man, situates racially charged objectification as being more problematic than objectification that is rooted purely in sexism. This, albeit inadvertently, privileges one form of marginalization over another.

Adam Nayman, who reviewed *The Motorcyclist* for *Quill & Quire*, however, highlights Carl's indiscriminatory sexual behaviour and the hypocritical standards that the women are held to in terms of the "Madonna/whore binary in which [Carl] tries to locate them" (Nayman). Nayman situates Carl's sexism as a sign of the time in which the novel takes place: "The politically correct move would be to chastise Carl for his possessive, dismissive, and at times subjugative behaviour, but *The Motorcyclist* does something more interesting, observing it as a by-product of a particular moment while suggesting Carl's attitude is hardly unique to his time and place" (Nayman). Nayman's framing of Carl's behavior within the age-old, "boys will be boys," argument does not exempt the text from criticism, especially when there are ample opportunities throughout the novel to show female sexuality and femininity as being more than ending in what is perceived by the reader as failure.

The lack of any sustained critical response to Clarke's misogynistic representations only serves to normalize and perpetuate this kind of writing. Clarke's work is consistently read through a lens that focuses primarily on race relations instead of

challenging the other overtly problematic representations he provides.⁵¹ This does a disservice to Clarke by only ever thinking of him as a writer who is always and only writing about race, and it limits the way we respond to his creative output. Unlike all the other complex and well-rounded female characters discussed thus far in this study, Clarke's women in *The Motorcyclist* often appear as one dimensional archetypes and they are given little room to grow outside of the objectification they experience at the hands of Carl, a character who is based in part on Clarke's father's diaries written when he was a young man in Halifax during the 1950s. Throughout the novel, readers are only shown glimpses of female agency, and even when female agency is apparent, patriarchal assumptions prevail and the female characters always resume their positions as inferior to Carl. Clarke's novel comes to the literary scene long after texts written by Moore, MacDonald, and Coady (among others) who have worked hard to carve out new spaces, and to re-write the complex realities of femininity, female sexuality and agency in patriarchal society. The novels we have already considered all provided textured representations that showed us women actively working to combat the ideologies that govern their selves and bodies. *The Motorcyclist*, however, seems to move in the opposite direction, as it serves as a text that perpetuates masculinist perceptions of femininity, female sexuality and agency. This is not to say that Clarke himself is a misogynist and it is important that we mark the clear distinction between the voice of the author, Clarke, and the voice of Carl. Throughout the novel, Clarke's third-person narrative strategy purposely works with this distinction. He often explores the inside / out dynamic of Carl's

⁵¹ The scholarly criticism and reviews routinely contextualize Clarke's work in terms of race relations and regionalism. Jim Johnstone, who reviewed Clarke's poetry collection, *Gold*, for *Canadian Notes and Queries* (November 2016) is the only reviewer I have encountered to explicitly comment on Clarke's misogynistic treatment of women.

view of himself, but the novel itself, never actually challenges the outcomes that each of the female characters experiences, and it does not sufficiently problematize its own representations. In what follows, I want to re-read these representations of women in some depth, and I want to argue that these representations perpetuate the ideologies that writers like Moore, MacDonald, and particularly Coady, have all written against.

Although reviews of *The Motorcyclist* refer to Carl Black's journeys on his motorcycle in a racially and class divided 1950s Halifax, Carl's relationship with the female characters, who are filtered in part through him, are the primary focus of the plot. I argue that his motorcycle allows him to navigate through the various women he simultaneously romances, serving as a tangible representation of the agency he is afforded over the female characters. Readers are first introduced to Muriel Dixon, then Marina White, Laura 'Blue Roses' States, Averil Beauchamps, and finally, Liz Publicover as the five women who occupy Carl's love life. Each of the women comes from a different class and a different racial background, and Carl uses these markers as he establishes a hierarchical categorization of each of them: "Possibly: Marina is for marriage, Muriel for relief, but Averil allows philandering that's *first-class*... As for 'Blue Roses' States, their coupling had been commendable, but she is literally a *distant* memory. Finally, Miss Publicover remains unproven" (199-200). Carl sees Marina as (hopefully) his future wife because of her superior beauty, her sexual purity, and the potential middle-class status she may be able to offer him thanks to her nursing degree. Muriel, a maid, "is fuckable" (115), but nothing more, while Averil, Laura 'Blue-Roses' and Liz P. are all women whom Carl originally covets because of their fair skin and upper-middle class status. Their race and their socio-economic potential secure them positions ahead of Muriel, but behind Marina in Carl's derogatory and sexist system of

categorization. Throughout the course of the novel, readers see the female characters be categorically objectified, and held to unrealistic standards in terms of their sexuality and femininity by Carl. He categorizes them based on their race, class, and their ability (or inability) to define what he sees as desirable femininity. We are told that Carl “likes a hussy – a nice-size, pretty slut” (19), and that he only sees these women as valuable, and not merely as sexual objects, if they fulfill the categories he has outlined in terms of class-status and femininity.

Muriel is the first of Carl’s lovers readers meet, and although she is described as a woman who “defines *Femininity*” (20), her status as an uneducated maid allows Carl (as he sees it) to classify her as “a scullion” (21). Clarke writes: “Carl don’t want his sex odysseying to end with his being hog-tied to an unlettered maid. Though he’s a railway serf, he don’t wanna settle for a scullion. For Muriel. He’s gotta have someone – anyone – *better*” (21). Although Carl sees Muriel as less than adequate because of her occupation as a maid and the lower-class status this affords her, she is rendered independent and not disillusioned by both her class status and sexuality. Muriel’s apartment, located in the (pre-gentrified) North End of Halifax, serves as one example of her independence. Carl sees her home as rat-infested, rancid squalor, but for Muriel, “it is the best of places: *hers*. ... a refuge – a redoubt – from the posh South End mansion where she must dress as a maid, clean and cook as a maid, kowtow as a maid, bend like maid, stoop like a maid, and be furtively pinched and fondled as a maid” (23). In this important instance, Clarke offers a promising glimpse into Muriel as someone other than a sexualized object in Carl’s repertoire of women. Muriel’s apartment, however rancid and rat-infested it may be, represents her independence and agency; it reflects how even under the racial, class and

patriarchal restrictions that oppress her, she is able to assert herself as independent and someone in control of their surroundings.

Although Clarke writes Muriel as being somewhat in control, she is consistently reminded of her place in patriarchal society. When readers are first introduced to her through Carl's memory, he recalls rescuing her from a "bungling rapist" (22), whom she was originally trying to manipulate for her own advantage: "Muriel was willing to see how far she could get ahead by tumbling, sprawling, in the humungous back seat. How much could her compliance, her kisses, her strokes and squeezes, 'Golly gees,' wrench from a white man's wallet?" (22) Muriel's intent is not dissimilar to Frances Piper's actions in *Fall on Your Knees* when readers see Frances working at the local speak-easy and prostituting herself in an attempt to save money for Lily's escape fund. Unlike Frances' ability to assert her position as dominant, Clarke applies the cliché damsel in distress story-line to Muriel, and sends Carl to her rescue: "Muriel had thanked God for Carl's chivalrous rescue, and then she had tucked her arm into his, as he'd led her, not striding, but pacing easily northward again" (20). Here, Clarke re-asserts Muriel as subordinate to Carl, despite the glimpses into her agency and independence.

Marina White is then presented in direct contrast to Muriel. Marina, as her last name White suggests, is defined by her purity and devotion to staying a virgin until she completes her nursing degree: "Mar figures an open-legs policy mandates a closed-door future. [...] In sum, Marina believes she'll slip out of *Peonage* and into the middle class *if* she keeps Matthew-Mark-Luke-John in mind, and models herself on The Virgin Mary, spurning Mary Magdalene" (31). Marina's insistence on remaining a virgin is both a source of frustration and intrigue to Carl. He remarks on several occasions how he would

like to, and will, “have” (37) Marina, insinuating that she is something to be consumed as long as he desires her.

Clarke’s clear framing of the women in terms of the “Madonna/whore binary” (Nayman) is maintained throughout the novel through the contrast between Muriel and Marina. For Marina, engaging with her sexuality, which she communicates as “needs” (37), means inevitable failure; Muriel acts as an embodiment of that failure. In order for Marina to avoid the failure that Muriel represents, she has to behave under strict guidelines that govern her body and sexuality. Marina’s reference to her sexual desires as “needs” insinuates how the Virgin Mary ideology⁵² placed upon her restricts her sexual agency; and because of her race, class, and gender, she is afforded a lesser degree of agency than many of the other characters in the novel. Although Muriel is in control of her sexual agency, it cements her status as a member of the lower-class, while serving as justification for Carl, and her community, to continually look down upon her; such a fate is what Marina is trying to escape.

Early depictions of Marina further reference what encompasses the failure embodied initially by Muriel if she fails to keep her sexual desires in check; “unless a gal wanna be left in the lurch, a papa-less *bambino* at her breast” (31). For Clarke, single motherhood serves as the epitome of feminine failure. Both Carl’s mother, Victoria Black, and Marina’s mother serve as early examples of this: “Mar gotta favour *Chastity*. Her mom was – well – too open to men. Mar’s siblings share her mama, but none her papa. Too, she’s grown up hungry; cash could bring home fire, enough for crusts and

⁵² See: Laina Bay-Cheng, “The Agency Line: A Neoliberal Metric for Appraising Young Women’s Sexuality” (2015), for more information on Virgin Mary Ideology, and the Virgin Slut Continuum that women contend with.

crumbs, but not enough to always stay warm or to stave off sickness” (30). In this description, Marina’s childhood poverty and her lower-class status are both directly connected to her mother’s sexual indiscretions. Although Muriel’s sexuality is seen on similar guidelines, unlike Marina’s mother and Carl’s mother, she is granted more respect than a single mother, and she still has a chance at a better class-standing through marriage. For Clarke’s women, marriage serves as the antidote to the shame associated with single motherhood that is referenced on numerous occasions throughout the text. Both Carl and Marina follow similar ideals that say “marriage [eliminates] *Disgrace* and *Bastardy*” (33). Unbeknownst to the reader, Clarke’s focus on single motherhood serves as foreshadowing for what will eventually become Marina’s fate.

The ideologies that readers see Carl and Marina ascribe to are closely connected to both of their mothers and upbringings. Although Marina’s mother is not referenced outside of her impoverished childhood, Carl’s mother, Victoria, is characterized and referenced throughout. Victoria, formally a minister’s daughter, is described as being “booksmart but homely” (59), and “generous” to black soldiers whom her father once chaperoned or chaplained, resulting in “five sons by five different negroes” (55). Her father suspects that “his daughter’s generosity...enacted her rebellion to his strictures as well as her revenge for having been spurned as being too dark in colour and indelicate in feature” (55). Victoria, like other female characters profiled in this study,⁵³ uses her sexuality as a means to manipulate and gain control of her surroundings. In this way, Victoria’s sexuality is reflective of her agency. Despite this agency, Clarke’s

⁵³ See: Chapter 1 on Moore: “Carmen has Gonorrhoea”; and Chapter 2 on MacDonald: the analysis of Frances Piper.

characterization of Victoria reflects her status as a failure for her inability to stay within the boundaries of acceptable femininity.

Victoria is shamed by both her family and community for her perceived failure as a respectable woman, and as a result, she is forced into marriage with Carl's Caribbean sailor father, Mr. Locksley Black, in a wedding reception that was little more than a cash transaction contracted by Victoria's father for two-hundred dollars (55). The wedding saved Victoria (and her father) the shame associated with being a single mother, and after the wedding, she and her children were moved into "a barn behind a house of [her father's] on Belle Aire Terrace," while "(h)e resided in a manse" (56). Clarke writes that because of this lower-class upbringing, "*Shame* shadowed Carl's childhood... Carl blamed his mother – he blamed *women* – for blighting the family's pseudo-heraldic *Honour*" (56). Victoria, however, would "rather be poor but proud and independent" (56). She worked as a laundry maid and a prostitute to make a living and provide for her children, including the art classes that Carl took that would eventually launch his future career as an artist. Victoria experienced an "uplift" later in life "due to her abandonment of one-afternoon or one-even stands to accept, instead, to be mistress to the black boss of the Halifax Coloured Railway workers" (61). Here, readers again see Victoria's social status being connected to her sexuality. She is "married" by her father to another man in a sham wedding that better reflects a sales transaction. In this way, Victoria is rendered as an object before being considered a person. What Clarke describes as an "uplift" for Victoria, is only made possible when a man, who has the ability to transgress the boundaries that patriarchal society places upon women, enters the picture and changes her social standing, either through marriage, and/or through overt economic agreements.

Similar to the contrast between Muriel and Marina that represents bad versus good femininity and sexuality, Clarke writes Victoria in direct contrast to her sister, Pretty Waters. Pretty is, as her name suggests, a beautiful, successful Opera singer, a figure who clearly highlights the disparity between desirable and undesirable representations of femininity. According to Clarke, “Pretty wore her name well,” and while their father “had cursed Victoria, he doted on Pretty” (59). As their opposite appearances suggest, “(t)he sisters traced opposite trajectories: Victoria became a laundress; Pretty a songstress” (59). Clarke’s basic, yet juxtaposing descriptions of Victoria and Pretty emphasize how the women in his novel are only granted the ability to occupy one of two spaces: either good femininity, as represented through Pretty and Marina, or bad femininity, as represented through Victoria and Muriel. Carl’s filtered version of the women and the guidelines he uses to actively police their bodies and sexuality reinforces a simplistic, unrealistic definition of the female experience that is perpetuated by the dichotomy of good versus bad femininity, and is always in accordance with patriarchal values.

Although Carl sees femininity in simplistic terms that are unrepresentative of the feminine experience, he hints at more complex female experiences that are only glimpsed at through key pieces of background information that emerge on the female characters. Pretty, for example, who was seen as perfect to the outside world, has actually lived through a much more complicated social reality: “Pretty-as-a-picture wasn’t perfect: like Victoria, Pretty also had borne a babe out of wedlock. But, in instructive contrast to Victoria, Pretty left her newborn boy with a childless couple who’d sworn her maternity to secrecy” (59). As a result, Pretty is able to go onto success, “unmolested by motherhood” (60), while Victoria, remains living in poverty and shamed by her family and community for her choices. Although Clarke writes background information on each

of the women that discredits Carl's simplistic perception of femininity, single motherhood is consistently presented, and upheld, as the epitome of feminine failure.

Victoria, conversely, does have her way of vindication against the systemic sexism, classism, and racism she faces: "She'd vindicate her self-taught morality if a white girl from a proper home were to be caught, *in flagrante delicto*, with an amorous negro" (79). Victoria conditions Carl to value white women as sexual objects, and teaches him that "the most desirable women are white and are the most satisfying once subjugated" (80). Though Carl clearly sees white women as the most desirable sexual objects, his objectification does not discriminate, and the ideologies his community impress upon him "became his answer to redneck racism and blueblood classism" (80). Carl seduces several white women over the course of the novel, but Laura "Blue Roses" States is the first of Carl's white lovers that readers meet. Although Laura is of mixed ancestry, her "ivory legs" and skin that passes for "white cream" grant her all the privileges afforded to white women: "she asserts her superiority to most Coloured women, due to her cream complexion, her college reading, ... her poise and elocution, and her fashion sense to garb herself so that her limp becomes a prop. [...] Her only rivals can only be *real* white girls" (95). Laura is further described as having a minor disability; one of her legs is shorter than the other, and she wears a rubber heel that "grants her the illusion of equilibrium" (90). This "illusion of equilibrium" references not just her physical ability, but her social status, too. Carl's continual references to her disability emphasize this, and it becomes clear that he is able to look past her physical challenges only because of her skin tone, femininity and education; all things that Carl values in order to calculate how desirable she is to him.

Carl's early interactions with Laura are, again, initially promising. Laura "deems *Sex as healthy and healing*" (97), and she appears to be both sexually in control and liberated. She is, however, not readily available to Carl, as she resides in Truro while she is enrolled at the Teacher's College. As a result, Carl begins to see "vanilla ice-cream-complexion" (98), Averil Beauchamps, an American student who, like Marina, studies nursing at Dalhousie University. Despite the qualities that are similar between Averil and Marina, "Averil is also starkly *not* like Marina, for she need not bear the burden of symbolizing *Venus as Virgin*" (98). This indicates that despite the similarities between them, Averil's skin colour, like Laura's, grants her a sexual agency that Marina is not granted. Averil is also intrigued by black men in the same way that Carl is intrigued by white women. Coming from Mississippi in the southern United States, "her yen for Coloured gents would be a death wish in the South" (98). Living on her own in Halifax gives her the opportunity to explore her sexuality, and Carl happens to be who she explores her desires with.

In the early stages of *The Motorcyclist*, readers are initially given insight, if only slightly, to several potentially fascinating, and promising, examinations of female agency and sexuality. As the novel progresses, however, most of this potential is lost as each of the female characters Clarke introduces, eventually experiences a social downfall that is brought on by actions that threaten Carl's masculinity. Muriel is the first of the women who experiences an uplift from her original standing in Carl's categorization, followed immediately by a downfall that eliminates her from the rankings altogether. Muriel's uplift occurs when Carl learns that she has had a miscarriage. When the news comes, Carl immediately values Muriel differently because he assumes paternity, but this increase in value lasts only as long as his paternity is involved.

Although Carl assumes paternity of Muriel's baby, readers know that she has been sexually involved with several other men. This fact alone reflects directly on her sexual agency and clearly demonstrates that Carl does not occupy the centre of Muriel's social universe. Carl obviously dislikes Muriel's relationships with other men, although his own simultaneous involvements with several other women seem unproblematic. This indicates the hypocrisy that underscores Carl's categorization of 'his' women, and demonstrates again how men and women experience different degrees of sexual agency based on patriarchal values.⁵⁴

Muriel's ultimate downfall, however, is not characterized by her relationship with other men. Instead, it is characterized by her relationship with another woman. The true nature of Muriel's close relationship with her good friend Lola is questioned throughout the novel by Clarke, and Muriel eventually comes out as a lesbian to Carl. When this happens, Carl is directly threatened by Muriel's sexuality, and he refuses to believe that she is a lesbian: "Carl's bitter disappointment borders on *Repugnance*. He'd *had* plans this night" (187). He had had plans to sleep with Muriel that night, but was thwarted, and disgusted, by her sexual revelation. Carl "kisses Muriel hard, intensely, to remind his ex-lover that she needs a man: *himself*, who also almost likely made her a mother" (188). Muriel rejects Carl, and "feels [his] tongue hard against her teeth, steely against her mouth" (188). Muriel's refusal to give into Carl, despite "his insistence on penetration" (188), further emphasizes her agency, which ultimately threatens Carl's masculinity.

Muriel's failure to embody Carl's heteronormative definition of femininity threatens his perceived masculine superiority in patriarchal society, and he is unable to

⁵⁴ See: Herb Wyle, *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic Canadian Literature: Analysis on Lynn Coady's Strange Heaven*.

understand, or accept Muriel's sexuality: "Carl still disbelieves that Muriel is a woman who likes to suckle on women. [...] Nor does he credit that Muriel, *once his woman*, should feel *manly* toward other women" (201). This indicates that Carl has clearly defined ideas of what encompasses masculinity and femininity, and when his ideas are threatened, he tries to redefine Muriel on his terms as "his" woman. Muriel tries to enlighten Carl by encouraging him to read Gale Wilhelm's, *We Too Are Drifting*,⁵⁵ but Carl refuses to do so: "He's amazed that Muriel – a maid – is reading; not only reading, but commanding *him* to read" (200). This further reveals that Carl is threatened not just by her sexuality, but her intelligence, too. For Carl, Muriel's class status and third-grade education level had always placed her below him in terms of social standing. Her recommendation of a book, coupled with her sexuality, threatens Carl to the point where he re-classifies her as "a scullion" (220). This reclassification of Muriel indicates that Carl is desperately trying to repair the damage done to his masculinity by her rejection, her sexual agency, and her intelligence. When he thinks of her as a "scullion," however, "he retracts it: Muriel could have been the mother of *his* child" (220). Carl only retracts an insult he had repeatedly used to classify her after connecting her to motherhood; and even then, it is only due to his possible paternity of the child.

The threat the female characters pose to Carl's masculinity becomes a major theme that outlines each of their perceived failures. Muriel's failure is defined by her sexuality and her inability to embody what Carl defines as acceptable femininity. In order to reaffirm his patriarchal ideals, Carl seeks out Averil to remedy the challenges that Muriel's sexuality presented. Carl's relationship with Averil is defined primarily in terms

⁵⁵ Gale Wilhelm's 1935 novel that features lesbian themes. Clarke writes that it is what opened Muriel's eyes to the possibility of a lesbian relationship with Lola (200-202).

of sex, and Averil serves almost exclusively as a sexual object to Carl. Although readers see Averil as sexually in control, Carl sees her as an object, or something to be consumed. After learning of Muriel's sexuality, readers watch Carl go straight to Averil, where he "scooped her up like she was water to lap from his palm" (190). This suggests the consumable nature of Averil's sexuality that Carl desires. Averil's sexual appetite, however, is what marks her failure. After Averil and Carl attend the Olympic Gardens Dance Hall together, she ends up connecting with one of his friends and CNR coworkers, Erv "the Perv" Johnson. Clarke writes that both Erv and Carl "share tastes in 'cutie pies' and 'cupcakes'," further insinuating that the women they desire are items for them to consume. Although they view Averil as consumable, she reverses the gaze that Carl and Erv place upon her by treating them as items for her to devour: "Averil likes the feel of a different black-boy-body, one that's like licorice and red wrapping paper" (206). Carl, had previously "cast Averil as a classy lady" (207), but her sexual relationship with a man beyond him threatens his masculinity, and he decides that "Averil is no more his Godiva, but a *zorra*, all cunt and no *Conscience*. [...] Mentally, Carl crosses Averil off his list of viable lovers" (208).

As soon as Averil exhibits sexual agency that is beyond Carl's construction of her, he has to reclassify her in the same way he reclassified Muriel in order to reaffirm his superior, masculine identity. Where Averil had once been compared to "vanilla ice-cream" (98) and various candy, her sexual agency reclassifies her as "dog food" to Carl (209). Clarke offers insight into Averil's position and her framing of Carl as a "morbid jerk" (209) because of his unwillingness to "strive to keep her – not let another Negro claim her by massaging her butt" (209). The language that Clarke uses reinforces patriarchal ideals that perpetuate false notions of masculine chivalry, and the

romanticization of “claiming” a woman for ownership. Although Clarke provides insight into sexual agency through Averil’s reversal of the gaze, the outcome of her agency reinforces her status as a failure. Carl challenges Erv’s claim on Averil by manipulating Erv’s schedule at their shared work place: “When Erv discovers his hours have been cut, he begins to beat Averil, to thrash the cash outta her. He rips open her blouse to steal whatever she might think to stash in her bra cup” (213). Avril ends up reaching out to Carl for help, “sobbing quietly about Erv’s manhandling of her,” but “Carl spits, ‘Good luck. *Ciao.*’ And hangs up” (209). Erv’s beating serves as a vindication of sorts for Carl; in treating Carl exactly like he had treated all of the women, “Averil had cast Carl in the unlovely position of having been bested, and in the domain in which his mirror and his yardstick said he should dominate” (214). Although Clarke is explicit when referencing the hypocrisy that outlines Carl’s ideals and how he justifies his treatment of women, the female characters are still situated as failing in patriarchal society, and they are rendered incapable of achieving redemption. In this way, Clarke perpetuates the stereotypical ideals that patriarchy posits as normal, and Averil’s outcome seems both acceptable and justified.

Even Averil, who Clarke presents as the female character who most embodies positive female sexuality and agency, is unable to overcome patriarchal domination. Readers learn that she is eventually forced to move back to Mississippi to escape Erv’s aggression. When Carl’s relationship with Averil dissolves, he reasons; “*I still have a chance with Mar. Mustn’t blow it!*” (207). Similar to the way Carl sought out Averil after his falling out with Muriel, Marina offers the possibility for Carl to repair his bruised ego and threatened masculinity. Marina’s “abrupt fall from *Grace*” (118), however, had already begun at this point in the novel. Carl pursues her regardless of her perceived

transgressions, as his relationships with Muriel and Averil had been proven to be unsuccessful; Laura “Blue Roses” was back living in Truro, and Liz Publicover, was not “proven” to be a successful conquest, yet. The first event that marked Marina’s failure to come took place after a sexual interaction between the two on his birthday that left Carl seeing Marina as tainted. In this encounter Marina was in control of their sexual interaction, and Carl was threatened by her agency: “Carl’s climax marks *Sorrow* and *Regret*. Contradictorily, Carl deems Mar no longer 100 per cent virginal” (111). Marina’s value is directly connected to her purity, and when she engages Carl in a sex act that he is not in control of, she inadvertently threatens his masculinity by placing him in a subordinate position that discredits her “pure” image. Carl’s threatened masculinity becomes apparent through his devaluing of Marina, and to remedy her actions, he thinks “He could right now roll atop her and grind her ass into the grass” (111). Carl’s imagining of raping Marina gives him the false impression of power and control after a situation in which he had felt vulnerable: “Mar’s manipulation of Carl – literally – leaves him feeling a waste. Her forwardness bothers him, despite his *Pleasure*” (110-11).

The entire birthday scene is set up to take place in an Edenic setting to juxtapose Marina’s perceived purity with the agency that Carl sees as grotesque. Marina is described as, “so prodigiously ripe” (109), and when Carl lowers her to the ground, it is “as if he’s got her down in a baptismal pool” (110). After their sexual interaction that left Carl feeling like a “science project” (109), he wonders “if the moment is Edenic, after all” (111), comparing Marina’s agency to that of Eve’s when she is tempted by the snake to eat the apple. After their interaction, Carl brings Marina home where they are confronted by Leicester Jenkins, a Grenadian medical student studying at Dalhousie University. To Carl’s further displeasure, Leicester and Marina have a date. This serves as a further

indication of Marina's agency, as she is willing to treat Carl exactly the way that he treats her. Readers then see Carl seek out Muriel, as at this point in the novel Muriel was still "his dependable, 'bottom' girl" (113), and while at Muriel's, Carl dreams of Marina:

Mar is naked and plastering her gold self with a rainbow of smears that resemble a life-size Rorschach test. [...] Carl grabs hold of her, thus slashing colours all over his clothes. He tells her, 'I'm an artist.' The scene shifts. [...] Carl pushes apart her legs – bullishly – and thrusts himself to the heart – the crux – of the matter, and she is moaning as he, groaning ecstatically, awakes, pleased that he has finally asserted himself – though uselessly – in a dream. (114)

This dream, similar to Carl's day-dreaming of raping Marina, reflects his need for power in their relationship. Marina's agency poses a threat to Carl, both in real life and in his dream where he asserts that he's the artist, not her. His dominance is fully asserted when he has sex with Marina, despite her protests (114). Although it is only a dream, the threat that female agency poses to Carl's masculinity is explicit, and the only way for him to equalize the power imbalance is through forceful sex where he can assert his dominance and superiority.

Although Carl is taken aback by Marina's agency, her overall failure stems from her relationship with Leicester, whom Carl dislikes because of his superior class-standing as "M.D.-to-be" (112). Carl cannot challenge Leicester in the same way he can challenge Erv, who Carl sees as his equal.⁵⁶ After the birthday incident that marked the beginning of Marina's downfall, she and Carl see less of each other, both because of Carl's

⁵⁶ See: Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, "Introduction," for more on the relationship between class systems and patriarchy.

subordination in their sexual encounter, and because of her relationship with Leicester.

After the Dance that marked the removal of Averil from Carl's list, however, he believes that he and Marina still had a chance. At this point in the novel, Carl's relationship with both Muriel and Averil is finished, and he has not seen Laura "Blue Roses" States because of the distance between them. When Marina calls upon Carl to meet, he agrees, and she tells him that she is expecting Leicester's baby. Carl shames her repeatedly, and "[she] refuses to meet his eyes" (244), indicating the shame she feels is based on her pregnancy out of wedlock. She discloses to Carl that Leicester is refusing to marry her, which is what she needs if she wants to "be respectable" (245), and is to avoid the shame associated with single motherhood. Carl thinks that "The woman who personified *Virtue* is unworthy of the deification" he had once associated with her (246). Marina tries, but fails to stand up for herself by challenging Carl's sexual relationships with other women, as Carl justifies his actions by arguing that he's a "natural man" (247). He is so angered by her pregnancy that he again contemplates raping her, as he feels inferior to Leicester, and he wants to assert his dominance over both he and Marina. Carl, feeling sorry for Marina, however, formulates a plan to (aggressively) entice Leicester to marry her, and she obeys every command Carl gives her. Marina's obedience gives Carl the satisfaction he was looking for, and he "sees her as an obedient animal – if contaminated – at last" (247).

Carl's reaction to Marina's pregnancy emphasizes the double standard that underscores his relationships with all of the women in the novel. When Muriel suffers a miscarriage and Carl's paternity is assumed, she experiences a brief elevation in status in Carl's hierarchy because of his paternity. Marina, however, experiences the exact opposite because Carl's paternity is not associated with her pregnancy. Readers further

learn that Leicester and Marina never marry, and Marina, “To mitigate her *Disgrace*, to – in fact – undo it substantially, will complete her *Nursing* degree in Montreal. She elects to become a secular nun – a spinster – dedicating herself to her profession, to have a distinguished career” (249). Clarke’s ending for Marina perpetuates the ideology that situates single motherhood as the epitome of feminine failure. For Marina to escape that failure, she must uproot, reject motherhood, and reject her sexuality in order to achieve redemption.

Carl’s double standard with respect to pregnancy and single motherhood is best signalled through Laura “Blue Roses” States. Although he and Laura experience a shorter romance than his relationships with Muriel, Averil and Marina, she ends up pregnant, but does not inform him of his paternity. During Carl’s romance with Averil, he received a letter from Laura explaining that she was in the hospital, but did not disclose why. Carl ignores her letter, and only finds out about her son when he receives a phone call from an unknown caller who informs him that “[his] son is dying” (258). Carl learns that “(t)he mother hadn’t wanted to call: Carl’s son was born in February, but the mother had kept her pregnancy private and Carl’s paternity secret” (258-9). Readers learn that Laura is the mother of “Carl’s son,” and that she had wanted to raise him on her own, without Carl’s knowledge. When her son, Royal “Roy,” becomes sick at three-months with pneumonia, she does not want Carl to find out. Instead, he is called by Laura’s mother: “Laur wanted nothing from you; we ask you nothing. I called you over Laura’s objections, just because I believe your fatherhood is more important than your once-upon-a-time *friendship* with Laura” (263). Carl treats Laura’s pregnancy differently than how he treated Marina’s: “To the mother’s credit, she has not tried to trap Carl, but has been eager to leave him free, she gets on with her own life. Carl thinks, *She’s quite the girl – obviously*” (260). Again,

readers see how Carl reacts differently when his paternity is involved: instead of classifying Laura in the way he classified Marina, he comments on her strength and independence.

Laura's agency becomes apparent in her pregnancy through her refusal to include Carl. When Roy becomes sick, however, her wants and needs are overstepped by her mother, who believes that Carl's fatherhood is more important than what she wants for both herself, and for her son. Furthermore, as soon as Carl is made aware of his paternity, Roy is continually referenced as "his" son, or as "your" (Carl's) son, despite having no part in Roy's upbringing. In this way, Laura's motherhood and agency are overlooked in favour of Carl's paternity, which underscores how female sexuality and female agency are constructed by Clarke throughout *The Motorcyclist*.

The Motorcyclist may be about Carl Black, *The Motorcyclist* himself, but it is also not about that. Nor is it about navigating one's way through a racially and class divided Halifax. The motorcycle, instead grants Carl a degree of agency that is never afforded to the female characters. In this way, the motorcycle acts as a tangible representation of patriarchal ideals that allow men to transgress the boundaries that patriarchal ideologies impose upon women. The female characters, in being filtered mostly through Carl, are rendered one dimensional and are given little space to move outside of the good versus bad dichotomy that characterizes cliché representations of femininity. Although Clarke gives instances of female agency through background information on the women, and moments where they attempt to gain control and challenge the systems that govern them, all of them inevitably experience failure. Readers see Carl move on to become a successful artist, and the artist serves as the ultimate agent by maintaining unwavering control of his own creative output.

Despite being explicit about Carl's hypocrisy, Clarke does nothing to challenge it. Instead he shows several women, all of whom experience failure that is rooted in sexist, heteronormative, patriarchal ideals that actively limit their agency and sexuality. The glimpses of female agency that readers are exposed to gives hope to female readers, but any hope consistently dissolves when each of the female characters experience outcomes that cement women as secondary members of society. For reviewers like Donaldson, Patrick, and Nayman (among others), dismissing Clarke's misogynistic representation of women perpetuates the ideals that patriarchy posits as normal. These are tangible representations of systemic sexism. That is the problem with systemic inequality; it is often not seen, but is instead regarded as normal. When we as readers, critics and consumers continually ignore it, it perpetuates it as such. Clarke's framing of the female characters and the failure they embody does situate them as "all cunt and no *Conscience*" (208), and we as readers need to refuse this interpretation.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The term "refusal" in relation to patriarchal discourses comes from Erin Wunker's text, *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy* (2016), that locates refusal as a feminist act.

Conclusion

Sometimes, refusal is a feminist act. Sometimes, a feminist killjoy has not just to call out the so-called joys of patriarchal culture, she has to refuse them, too. (Erin Wunker, *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy*)

This study is not just about female sexuality and representations of desire and agency in Atlantic Canadian fiction; it is also about refusing the patriarchal values that continue to govern women's selves and bodies in our contemporary society. In *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy*, Erin Wunker asserts the necessity of refusal in patriarchal society, arguing that "[r]efusal is a feminist act when you kill the so-called joys of patriarchal culture" (204). In re-reading the works of Moore, MacDonald, Coady, and Clarke in the context of contemporary discourses, and in a culture in the process of radically rethinking the terms of female sexuality and the female body as a whole, refusing patriarchal discourses that underlie contemporary constructions of femininity, female sexuality, and agency, is critical to the framing of this project. Importantly, the first three texts analyzed in this study locate new scripts for women's experiences that challenge traditional, patriarchal discourses. Perhaps more pressingly, *The Motorcyclist* serves as a representation of why the refusal Wunker details is still needed in the current state of our society.

The women we encounter through the works of Moore, MacDonald, and Coady explore the complexity of women's lived realities. They demonstrate how women experience sexuality differently based on a number of determinants, including, but not limited to, race and class; how women experience both agency and passivity, positive sexuality and what is coded as negative; the horrors of patriarchal domination, including physical abuse and rape; and how and why refusing patriarchy is necessary. Alternately,

Clarke's women are unable to move outside of the virgin/whore dichotomy that accounts for a patriarchal perspective of femininity.

In the first chapter I study how Lisa Moore surveys a wide spectrum of female sexuality through the experiences of white, upper-middle class women. The chosen stories were picked to explore the varying nature of women's experiences in patriarchal society. Missing from these stories, however, are narratives that consider the ways that class and race intersect to create a reality that is absent from the lives of the white, upper-middle class privileged women associated with Moore's fiction. In contrast, MacDonald, Coady, and Clarke focus on the ways that race and/or class impact women's agency. MacDonald's Piper women experience physical abuse and rape as violent demonstrations of patriarchal force, while Bridget Murphy's actions show readers how female agency can challenge and overcome the patriarchal forces that work to govern women's bodies. Clarke's women, however, both black and white, do not experience the privileges associated with Moore's characters, they do not challenge the patriarchy in the ways attempted by the Piper women, and finally, they do not overcome the patriarchal forces in the way that Bridget Murphy does. Instead, the women in *The Motorcyclist* are consistently portrayed as inferior to Clarke's protagonist Carl. Despite their attempts at exerting agency and insistence on equality, their plots inevitably end in failure. Although Clarke's misogynistic representation throughout the novel is consistent, explicit, offensive, and at times, violent,⁵⁸ it has never been noted in any reviews or discussions of the text, in either scholarly or popular press.

⁵⁸ In *The Motorcyclist*, Clarke uses violent language, and even writes Carl as dreaming of violating or raping the women who threaten his superior, masculine identity, in order to position Carl as dominant.

In criticism of Clarke's work, racism dominates the discussion while his overt misogyny is rarely discussed. In researching for this thesis, I only located one review that drew attention to Clarke's problematic representation of women. In the *Canadian Notes and Queries* November 2016 web-exclusive, Jim Johnstone reviews Clarke's collection of poetry, *Gold*, and draws explicit attention to "Clarke's increasingly problematic portrayal of women." He notes: "[e]arly on in Clarke's career, his transgressions were more salacious than misogynistic," but in his more recent publications, "there are several instances [...] that are palpably hateful." Although Johnstone's criticism is focused on *Gold*, this argument is easily applied to *The Motorcyclist*.

The absence of any discussion of Clarke's misogyny in contemporary literary criticism on his work is perplexing, but not necessarily surprising. This trend follows a dominant current in many different discussions of feminism in popular discourses. Both in scholarly and popular spaces there continues to be a problem in defining what feminism actually is. Discussions of feminism, race, and class-systems are often seen as mutually exclusive rather than inextricably linked. In this thesis for example, I have demonstrated that in Clarke's work, although discussions of racism dominate the central analyses of his texts, it is impossible to explore how his female characters navigate their realities without acknowledging how gender, class, and sexuality intersect with race.

Contemporary feminist theorist and thinkers have embraced intersectionality, and their work demonstrates how this concept is critical to gaining a more nuanced approach to understanding the full complexity of women's experiences. In "Femme Theory: Refocusing the Intersectional Lens," Rhea Ashley Hoskins explores the ways that feminine devaluation, which she calls "femmephobia," is so pervasive that it is not even seen as a "form of oppression within dominant feminist theories, including

intersectionality” (95). Hoskins argues that “[t]he feminist history of anti-feminine rhetoric can still be evidenced in current Western feminist theories and pedagogies” (96), which serves as a form of oppression that is not effectively included in intersectional discourses. Intersectionality and perspectives that include the “many layers of social oppression” (100) is essential to contemporary feminism. As I previously argued, Nicole Dixon’s approach that privileges a specific feminist identity abandons an intersectional lens and negates the experiences of women who embrace and reclaim their feminine identities as feminist.

Intersectionality and the complexities of women’s experiences based on sexuality, race, class, and (dis)ability are the pillars of contemporary feminist studies. Scholars like Hoskins, bell hooks, Sara Ahmed, and Roxanne Gay (to name just a few),⁵⁹ are working to refuse what others will not. In doing so, they are aiding in the subversion of feminism under patriarchy, and are creating a dialogue that helps us better understand modern feminism, and the complex realities of women’s embodied experiences.

Influenced by these arguments, this thesis attempts to reread the works of Moore, MacDonald, Coady, and Clarke with the works of Hoskins, hooks, Ahmed and Gay in mind. Although this study is by no means comprehensive – the works I present cannot speak for all women’s experiences – I hope this project can signal a change in the dialogue surrounding Atlantic Canadian literature. It invites scholars to think about regional texts outside of critical discourses of regionalism, underdevelopment, and

⁵⁹ Sara Ahmed maintains the blog: <https://feministkilljoys.com/>, and is the author of several texts that branch the academy to “the real world,” as I call it, including: *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), *Willful Subjects* (2014), and *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (2012). Roxanne Gay’s *Bad Feminist* (2014) was on the New York Times “Best Sellers” List. Her recent short-story collection, *Difficult Women* (2017) explores women’s experiences from an intersectional perspective.

racism, and encourages readers to think about how patriarchy is still prevalent in our society, and why it is important to refuse patriarchal values. I believe this change needs to be ongoing, and that refusal needs to become a bigger part of feminist discourses. Women continue to experience discrepancies in pay;⁶⁰ gendered divisions of labour;⁶¹ and grotesque, often violent acts of sexism and violation, all while being fed false ideas of power based on popular discourses that give the illusion of equality. This illusion locates itself as the status quo, and as Wunker persuasively argues, “the status quo isn’t equality. Not for women, not for women-identified people, not for women of colour, not for queer women, not for working-class women, not for homeless women or women sex-workers, and not even for men” (36). Refusal, then, is an essential part to this study, as Wunker notes, “[r]efusal is a feminist act when you are acting against the oppression of others. Refusal is a feminist act when you kill the so-called joys of patriarchal culture” (204). This study refuses the patriarchal values that continue to undermine women’s experiences; experiences in our literature, and in the social reality of life.

⁶⁰ Arti Patel, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/03/08/canada-gender-pay-gap_n_9393924.html

⁶¹ Anna Almendrala, http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/equally-dividing-housework-household-chores_us_576875ebe4b0fbbc8beb7012

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