

Final Report for Study and Development Fellowship for Sessionals—Summer 2015

Cinda Gault

I would like to thank the Study and Development Fellowship Committee for supporting my manuscript entitled *Abortion in Canadian Literature*. My point of departure for this study is Canada's unique response to the issue of abortion as a nation. In 1988, the *Supreme Court of Canada* used the newly minted *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to render its decision in the case brought by Dr. Henry Morgentaler to challenge the law on abortion. The court struck down the nation's abortion law, leaving Canada as the only Western nation without any abortion law at all. Through political, legal, and social institutions over the latter half of the twentieth century, Canada has been telling a story about abortion that ends (for the time being, anyway) with reproductive autonomy for women. My project addresses the wider swath of this legal path by illuminating work done by literary writers who used abortion as a cultural symbol.

Project goals

Literary representations of abortion from the 1940s to the present reveal that Canadian writers have long used abortion to resist what they perceived to be dominant cultural pressure. Whether such pressure manifested on the basis of class, ethnicity, gender, race, nationality, or the idea of identity itself, writers used abortion to symbolize what should not be allowed to be reproduced in Canadian culture. In so doing, they argued for a more porous and flexible society.

I have pursued the writing of this manuscript over the past five years through my presentation of conference papers to the *Association of Canadian and Quebec Literatures* at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. These papers have constituted a good part of the development of my argument over the seven novels I analyze in the manuscript. This year, I presented a paper on the final chapter of my project. In addition, I was awarded a University of Guelph Humber Research Award in 2013, which allowed me to hire a research assistant and collect scholarship on legal, cultural, and historical aspects of abortion in Canada, along with literary scholarship regarding the representation of abortion in works of fiction. This summer's Study and Development Fellowship for Sessionals from the University of Guelph gave me the time I needed to complete the manuscript, and deliver it to the university press editor who has expressed interest and support each year at the Congress. The manuscript is now undergoing the peer review process.

Pedagogical goals

While students are generally encouraged to "make a difference" in their world, oftentimes this mantra eclipses deeper engagement with what that difference should be and why. As a teacher of literature, I think stories are more than word play. As a writer of fiction, I know that writers convey meaning. This manuscript conveys my daily teaching. I plan to help students make connections between what they understand of the world and what the novels and short stories they read represent to them. The classroom is a place for students of narrative to develop skills as literary readers, and to recognize that their role as critical readers does not stop with understanding a writer's craft. I want to inspire students to see their world through literary

representations so that they can gain confidence in their own understandings of themselves as humans living in a particular place and time.

My teaching draws historical and political connections between narrative and the real world. Developing such connections challenges contemporary intellectual anxiety over the relationship between language and the real world. The imaginative worlds brought to life by Canadian writers through the symbolic use of abortion can be analyzed according to the ways in which those representations connect the imaginative to the real. My project provides insights about these connections between Canadian social thought and literature.

In June 2015, I launched a novel, *This Godforsaken Place*, published by Brindle and Glass, a literary imprint of Touchwood Editions. I now have two writing goals for next year. One is a new novel, and the other is a new academic book on abortion. The latter has the working title of *Canada's Abortion Story*, for which I have written the Introduction and one chapter. I plan to return to the pool of research gathered during my Guelph Humber Research Grant to move this manuscript along. The same university press that is presently considering *Abortion in Canadian Literature* has expressed interest in *Canada's Abortion Story*.

Thank you again for your support of my work. It has moved along my scholarship and teaching development at a much faster rate than would have happened without your generosity.

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