

CHAPTER III
CONCLUSION

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After analyzing both these representative short story collections of Audrey Thomas, her artistic visions becomes clear to us. We can undoubtedly call her a feminist writer. Feminism, in case of her writings, has achieved its full grown stage; yet we can not call it profoundly mature. Her feminism is from the third tier of the developing theory and practice of it namely the rejection of dichotomy between male and female as metaphysical. Her fiction proves herself a voice that was unrecognizable since the ages of suppression of female voices in society and literature. Thomas is trying to justify the role of woman of present generation, making balance in their sordid realities and expectations about them, chalked out by the patriarchy. Like other representative Canadian writers, namely Atwood and Krotzsch, she also shows the developing quests and yearnings of Canadian woman through her protagonists. Her attempts to focus on the 'New Woman'-self-aware, independent and seeking to evolve an identity of her own is in proportion with her unprofessed commitments as a woman writer. Male in Thomas's value system, is merely a metaphor for dominating and subjugation power-structures and not a gender specific referrant. She can articulate her emotions and her investigation of the role of woman in society.

Another interesting feature of her is that there is reflection of the relation between art and life. She believes that "art is the product of imagination and short story is a vehicle to reflect the way of living of Canadians."¹ Her female artists are neither socially recluse or psychopaths.

The female functions- pregnancy, giving birth, mothering- are inevitably ambivalent for the female artist in her short stories. She nurtures her book, as well as her children. In Intertidal Life, the protagonist Alice says :

“...writing, writing, writing by candle light so it won’t disturb the children.”²

In her fiction the social and sexual is not separated. They are intermingled. She has firm faith in “somebody’s got to be the parents.” While motherhood brings with it pain, it wields power too, and it also can give strength to the artist.

The prominent stories in these collections are about marriage disintegration, human relations and how women cope with solitude and parental responsibility.

Thomas is a social chronicler. For her, people and places become the raw material in stories. Her stories are set in various places like Galiano Island, British Columbia, Greece and Africa. These places provide the background for the action in her stories.

“ Thomas’s use of island setting and water, coupled with her protagonist’s penchant for the voyager’s explorations and all its connotations, endeavours to link imperialist exploitations and charting of land with male exploitation and possession of women.”³

Place the specific locale of her stories aside, and the stories will be without proper, intelligible action and authentic narration. As a creatrix, she can smell the thoughts which lie buried in these places.

The Kaleidoscopic presentation of the changing man-woman relationship is marked characteristic of her craft. It serves as the main theme of many of her stories. She redefines the relationship between the men and women. The characteristic themes and pervasive motifs in Thomas's fiction are quest, artistic creation, sexual identity, male-female relationships and mother-daughter relationships. Sex is an inevitable ingredient of her plot-construction. Occasionally it erupts with an exceptionally high degree of gusto. Both the inward and outward conflicts come in her stories in the form of identity-crisis of the protagonists. Her female protagonists confront with the Machiavellian tactics of their male counter parts on the surface level. On the deeper level they wage a war against those social customs and beliefs which poison the mind of the later about their female life mates. It is only an attempt to assert her own identity in the outside chaotic world

Semi-autobiographical nature of many of her stories is the issue repeatedly brought to the critical anvil. Some critics are content to draw biographical parallels with her fictional works. They see Thomas's writing as "narcissistic obsession."⁴ We cannot claim such an obsession in her stories as her speciality lies not in drawing types but the individuals. There can be parallels between the life she has experienced and what comes to her narrators' lots. Yet, we shall never see her characters as the mere reflections or mirror-images of their creator's personality. If we consider universal womanhood as an independent species, the members of it will have more or less the same experiences and characteristic traits. Herein lies the universal appeal of her protagonists. The artistic consciousness of Thomas's various

female protagonists, culminating in a new maturity of a vision with Miranda and Rachel, needs to be distinguished from their political consciousness. This kind of maternal vision, incorporating both life and art, begins to relate in specific ways with the world and names it. What is troubling about this consciousness, for a reader from the East is its being an autobiographical consciousness.⁵

Splitting of voices is one of the important features of Thomas's fiction. The central figures, always torn between two possibilities, find very difficult to choose between them. One possibility is to play the role of responsible mother successfully and other is to become an ardent devotee of the Muse i.e. the creative artist. As Joyce's 'A portrait of an Artist as a Young Man' successfully marks the difference between men and man, Thomas tries to mark the difference between women and woman. Her female artists are with her one leg in the confining circle of responsibilities as mother, daughter, mate or innamorata; struggling to cope with the pull of freedom inside her. And that is why a splitting. The two voices dash each other repeatedly, always trying to overcome the other, make an obscure echo in which we find their own cries dissolved in the strange melody.

Thomas is well-versed in the technique of political allegory. Her stories with the African background like 'Two In The Bush', 'Joseph and His Brother' and other ones like 'Albatross' can be read on allegorical level. Africa, which features in several of her stories and novels often becomes for Thomas a symbolic place for the working out of paradoxes and contradictions of civilization. Even in these stories national differences and politics cannot be

separated from sexual differences and politics. 'Two in the Bush' depicts the harsh realities of chaotic state of African countries in the midst of recurring mutinies and the experiences of the two women as the two white foreigners and as an object of sex. The racial antagonism and its consequences pervade her stories like 'Omo'. A dichotomy of "One" and the "Other" in racial context is symbolically presented through her characters in these stories. There were found many instances of the white protagonists' speculations on what the "other" thought of, with regard to certain external differences between black and white. These stories attempt to interact with the "other's mind". The potential for dialogue with the "other" is there in 'Omo'.

Audrey is in agreement with H. E. Bates who defined the short story as anything that the author decides it shall be. Nearly all the standards of a successful short story can be met in her stories included in these two collections. There is very limited number of persons. There is an analysis and sustained development of characters in her short stories. Short. Story is a distinctive genre whose uniqueness lies in three related qualities: it makes a single impression on the reader, it does so by concentration on a crisis, and it makes that crisis pivotal in a controlled plot. Thomas's stories fulfill all these conditions very well.

Her images and symbols come from various fields like literature, natural sciences, geography, myths and legends, animal world and so on. Her use of archetypes and biblical allusions distinguish her style from other women writers of her age. Animal images like sea-lions, humming birds, queen-be, lark, phoenix, octopus, whale, tuna-fish, moth, scorpion, cockroach,

crab, turtle-dove, swallow etc. come symbolically in her stories. Her sea symbols are meant for different associations. Moon, lunar and solar eclipse, tide, earth-quakes are used symbolically to associate the mental states to the natural phenomenon. Blood, water, honey and wine have different connotations in her fiction.

Humour takes many forms in literature. It can be used both in a broad and limited sense. In the narrow sense, it means a little jolly good natured mirth. In its broader sense it stands for boisterous humour (fun), intellectual humour (wit), gentle or mirthful humour and bitter humour (satire).

Thomas's stories reflect all these forms and shades of humour. She uses the kaleidoscopic humour entertaining lavishly both in horseplay and gentle smile, in caricature and mild satire.

Canada is a multi-cultural nation which faces the question of national identity like other such nations. Its vast distances, enormous cultural and regional differences and sparse and heterogeneous population disallow a sense of organic unity and a monolithic identity. Canada, today, is a complex world in microcosm. The problem before the Canadian men and women of letters was, and will be, how to assert Canadianness of the literature and acquire a place on literary map of the world. The process of asserting Canadianness has been started by the early pioneers and is furthered by the women writers like Atwood, Gallant, Laurence and Audrey Thomas.

To conclude, Audrey Thomas can be treated as a significant Canadian writer of the post-modern world.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Laurence, Margaret. "My Final Hour." Canadian Literature. (Spring, 1964), p. 196.
2. Thomas, Audrey. Intertidal Life. (Toronto: General Publishing. 1986), p.107 .
3. Sarbadhikary, Krishna. Dis-Membering/ Re-Membering: Fiction of Audrey Thomas. (New Delhi: Books Plus, 1999), p.67.
4. *Ibid.*, p.4.
5. *Ibid.*, p.137.