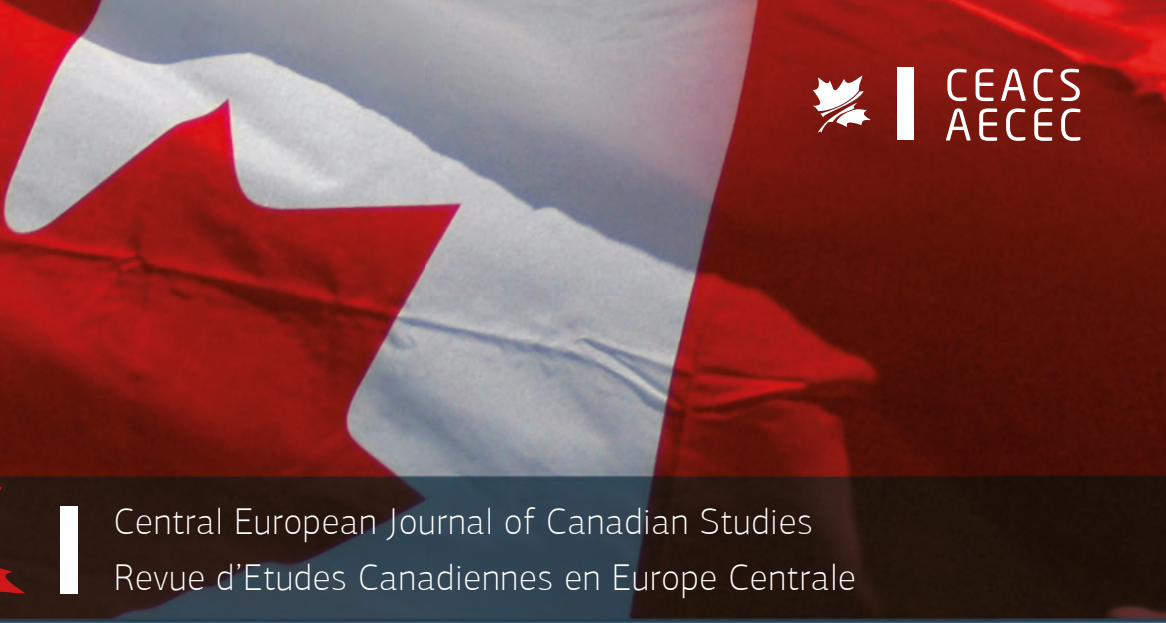
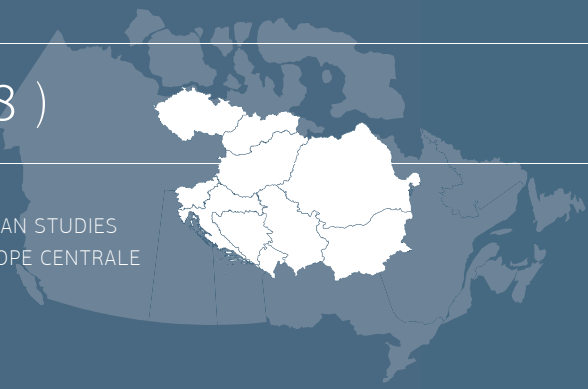


CEACS
AECEC

Central European Journal of Canadian Studies
Revue d'Etudes Canadiennes en Europe Centrale

volume **12/13** (2018)



CENTRAL EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES
ASSOCIATION D'ETUDES CANADIENNES EN EUROPE CENTRALE

CEACS
AECEC

Central European Journal of Canadian Studies
Revue d'Etudes Canadiennes en Europe Centrale

volume 12/13 (2018)

CENTRAL EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES
ASSOCIATION D'ETUDES CANADIENNES EN EUROPE CENTRALE

CENTRAL EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF CANADIAN STUDIES
The *CEJCS*, the official journal of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies, has appeared on a regular basis since 2001. All submissions are subject to double blind peer review.

REVUE D'ÉTUDES CANADIENNES EN EUROPE CENTRALE
La *RECEC*, qui est le journal officiel de l'Association des études canadiennes en Europe centrale, est publiée régulièrement depuis 2001. Tous les manuscrits soumis sont évalués en double aveugle par les pairs.

Contact/Contact : www.cecanstud.cz
ceacs@phil.muni.cz

1st edition, 2018. Circulation 100 copies / 1ère édition, 2018. Tirage 100 exemplaires

Published by/Publié par Masaryk University, Brno 2018

Printed by/Imprimé par Ctrl P s.r.o., Bezručova 17a, 602 00 Brno

ISBN 978-80-210-9023-1 (paperback)
ISBN 978-80-210-9024-8 (online : pdf)
ISSN 1213-7715

content — table des matières

reviews — **comptes rendus**

Central European Journal of Canadian Studies
Revue d'Etudes Canadiennes en Europe Centrale
volume 12/13 (2018) | (155–168)

Defining Motherhood – Three Canadian Short Stories

Définir la maternité – Trois nouvelles canadiennes

Sanja Ignjatović

Abstract
The chosen selection of Canadian short stories – Craig Boyko's "The Baby" and Clea Young's "Split", both published in the *Journey Prize Stories* 2006, and Zsuzsi Gartner's "Pest Control for Dummies™", published in the collection *All the Anxious Girls on Earth* (2000) – deals with the theme of motherhood through various examinations of the personal identities of, mostly, female characters. Namely, this selection explicitly deals with skepticism about prevalent traditions and the diverse body of themes pertaining to what is nowadays known as motherhood studies. The primary focus of the paper is to examine how the culturally constructed concept of motherhood, as inseparable from the concept of womanhood, affects individual female identity. Additionally, the paper investigates how three different authors, incidentally in the same collection of short stories, treat the discourse on motherhood.

Keywords: motherhood, Canadian short stories, Craig Boyko, Clea Young, Zsuzsi Gartner

Résumé
La sélection choisie des nouvelles canadiennes, « The Baby » (Craig Boyko), « Pest Control for Dummies™ » (Zsuzsi Gartner) et « Split » (Clea Young), traite le thème de la maternité à travers des divers examens d'identités personnelles, principalement des personnages féminins. A savoir, il traite explicitement du scepticisme à propos des traditions dominantes et de la diversité des thèmes différents à ce que l'on appelle aujourd'hui les études sur la maternité. L'objectif principal de l'article est d'examiner comment le concept de la maternité, culturellement construit, comme une partie inséparable du concept de la féminité, affecte l'identité féminine individuelle.

Mots-clés : la maternité, nouvelles canadiennes, Craig Boyko, Clea Young, Zsuzsi Gartner

Introduction

The paper primarily examines how the culturally constructed concept of motherhood, inseparable from the concept of womanhood, affects individual female identity. In a brief review of related concepts, the paper strives to find a solidly defined framework that would allow for the analysis and literary interpretation of different perspectives on motherhood and identity, as well as the interrelatedness of the two concepts, in Craig Boyko's "The Baby", Zsuzsi Gartner's "Pest Control for Dummies™" and Clea Young's "Split". The paper will propose that the concept of motherhood, even when examined in literary narratives, exposes a very powerful network of political and economic conditioning inbuilt in the mainstream discourse thereby exhibiting significant and authoritative influence on individuals, and in this case women.

Despite numerous attempts at defining the concept of womanhood in terms of political, cultural and economic opposition towards the equally under-defined concept of manhood, and the respective implications, feminists, philosophers and artists remain undecided about what their task is – to describe the socio-political situation pertaining to gender, or to redefine the concepts involved inspired by the quick paced socio-political changes at the end of the twentieth and the onset of the twenty-first century. Essentially, conclusively defining or re-defining the concept of womanhood necessarily entails a thorough examination of multiple gender-typical roles and their effect on individual identity. However, the definition of individual identity, and in this case female identity, presents a separate theoretical issue. Women's struggle for political recognition stands as the foundation for what is considered, on the general level, an identity that could consequently be taken as the norm in political and economic context.

On the other hand, this practical construct evades the answer to what this 'group identity' or the 'desired' identity represents. In essence, what it means to be a 'woman' remains obscure and somewhat dependent on the proposition that gaining political rights and formal equality removes any necessity for further feminist or political engagement, which it, clearly, does not. However, both when it comes to the role of women in economy, or to women's political, legal and civil rights, and most importantly, personal freedoms, the sets of concepts participating in this implied construct of identity are often reductive or un-inclusive. This prevalently cultural reluctance at expanding the definition of female identity, or at least making it more inclusive, is usually based on the biological and physiological differences between women and men, translated into cultural performative imperatives. Women, biologically designed to bear and give birth to children, are paradoxically both ascribed specific qualities in terms of child-rearing and care-giving, and denied the right to expand their culturally prescribed gender-identity or reduce it without consequences of lesser or greater

degree. Refusing motherhood removes women from the mainstream discourse and renders them vulnerable to negative stereotypes. By extension, sterility in women becomes a handicap or a disability.

In her study *The Monster Within – The Hidden Side of Motherhood* (2010), Barbara Almond, a clinical psychologist, suggests that "[O]ur need for mothers leads to an idealization in which they are expected to be all-loving, all-giving, and self-sacrificing, an idealization that makes little room for normal emotional reactions, such as ambivalence" (Almond 2010: 23). By extension, it can be deduced that such an ideal along with unrealistic expectations exerts a significant amount of pressure on women who chose to embrace the role under the conditions dictated by society and mainstream culture. Granted, women are generally not forced into marriage or motherhood. However, the rejection of motherhood, as well as biological inability to conceive, indirectly removes them from the position of identification with their cis-gender or cis-sexual group. Women who refuse to become mothers are stripped of certain expectations and of specific qualities customarily assigned to women – an unjustified yet prevalent mode of categorization in terms of cis-gender. The matter is all the more difficult with those individuals who stray from the cis-normative for they are almost invisible in political and legal terms, and culturally unsuitable – unproductive in terms of their biological givens. However, this paper deals exclusively with the question of heterosexual female identity as defined through the prism of motherhood. Moreover, the issue is the psychological pressure each of the characters cope with in their (in)decision to conceive with their partners. The selected Canadian short stories by Boyko ("The Baby"), Gartner ("Pest Control for Dummies™") and Young ("The Split") all deal with parenthood, or rather the inter-personal and inner conflicts of the partners as they reach that point in their relationships where children-talk becomes a matter of social and cultural custom. The paper focuses primarily on female characters, three of whom desire children, but also a character who remains completely disconnected from the idea of being a mother. On the one hand, the paper will explore the connection between the biological and psychological impulses on the part of female characters relating to their becoming mothers. On the other hand, the objective is to analyze the thinking process leading up to the decision, and their rationalization of it, in terms of how the decision changes the paradigms of their relationships, but also how it affects their personal identity.

Motherhood

Motherhood studies, "an autonomous and independent scholarly discipline" (O'Reilly 2010: vii), emerges from the broad theoretical and literary works by first and second-wave feminists, and yet its scope refuses to remain in the field of women studies or

feminist theory. In fact, motherhood studies incorporate interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches suggesting a very powerful link between social, psychological, economic and political circumstances in which its relevant topics are defined and contained in the discourse, as well as absorbed by individuals and especially women through the influence of public policies, religion, pop-culture, fashion, literature, etc. In the introduction to *Encyclopedia of Motherhood* (2010), Andrea O'Reilly introduces a paramount distinction between two specific terms which are often used interchangeably, but which seem to reveal a restrictive patriarchal mechanism of control aimed at the female gender. A framework that would allow for a satisfactory elaboration of the mentioned concepts requires an extensive overview of feminist theory and criticism. Unfortunately, it will have to suffice to use the potentially reductionist explanation of the two terms, 'motherhood' and 'mothering', as standing in opposition and as terms that may be substituted in a broader context as the cultural norm and as a performative action. It was Adrienne Rich who re-defined the two concepts in *Of Women Born* in 1976 (1995), and according to her, the concept motherhood can be used to "signify the patriarchal institution of motherhood" (viii), for it integrates a vast network of interrelated values, beliefs and practices standardized by society and culture. As such, motherhood is a construct representative of a complex system of cultural values and practices in service of imprinting on an individual a certain range of performative roles. By extension, O'Reilly suggests, "*mothering* refers to women's lived experiences of mothering as they seek to resist the patriarchal institution of motherhood and its oppressive ideology" (viii).

On the syntactic level, the two terms display a certain tension between the fixed and the mutable – passivity and action. Traditionally, womanhood has been defined exactly on the basis of opposition between the domestic and public, and in terms of the former being highly favorable, and the latter uncomplimentary and even disadvantageous. Therefore, womanhood is culturally assessed through the prism of self-realization motherhood-wise, but only within the cultural normative. It must be noted that the twenty-first century, with its focus on expanding political rights to minority and marginalized social groups within, particularly, Western societies culminates with a necessity to politically, economically, but also theoretically re-asses the institution of motherhood. This re-examination of the concept of motherhood focuses on the socio-political and cultural processes that treat motherhood fluidly enough for the potential restraints of the patriarchal framework to become the subject of discussion and change. The traditional role of a mother has only come to include new responsibilities and expectations, placing on women greater expectations and pressures both economically, and in terms of cultural values propagated by the mainstream media, literature and pop-culture. Ironically, however, this is exactly what the twentieth-century feminist movement saw as the only appropriate solution

to the "maternal dilemma" – a solution that allows women the full realization of their newly acquired political rights in the wake of the twentieth century, both in terms of the public sphere and economic independence, and in the domestic sphere in the role of a mother. This paper treats motherhood as one of the constructs and gender roles inevitable in discussing womanhood and female identity in terms of culture.

To be, or not to be a mother

Craig Boyko in "The Baby" (2006) plays with perspective by parodying a situation in which a young couple is expecting a baby, and where the male-protagonist is not entirely confident about his ability to connect with the bundle of joy itself, nor the impending changes. The narrative abounds in intentionally violent and brutal transitions, but also in unexpected distortions in character representation. These distortions are especially noticeable because they premeditate both the deeply personal and honest truth about becoming a parent, and because they emphasize the deviation from the discourse that typically promotes solely the sanctity and joys of parenthood. What is particularly brilliant in Boyko's opening of the story is the naiveté with which he introduces the biological impulse behind parenthood, ascribed to the main character's wife, Delia, immediately creating the basis for contrast with the otherwise overtly rational, though humorous, discourse:

> Delia was again making noises with her mouth. The noises she was making, with her tongue and her teeth and the selective vibration of the vocal folds of her larynx, were intended to convey me a message. The substance of that message was that she wanted a baby.
> "We don't need a baby," I said with my mouth.
> "Nobody *needs* a baby," said Delia with hers. "But I *want* one." (Boyko 2006: 73)

Nowhere in the narrative does the character-narrator mention anything about Delia's biological circumstance, age or the related haste. Quite the contrary, to the male protagonist, the matter of biological capability does not operate as a relevant factor in the decision. This invites two possible and equally interesting interpretations. Boyko's subtle opening of the story may suggest the male-protagonist's utter ignorance on the matter of the female physiological and reproductive capacity. For the protagonist, the biology behind Delia's plea is neither relevant nor threatening. Another interpretation may be that the male protagonist is well aware of the biological impulse, and that the parody addresses the matter most profoundly. He says "with [his] mouth" that the couple does not "need" a baby to be content, for the protagonist neither desires nor (yet) accepts the lifestyle changes. Moreover, the soon-to-be

father appears to be catapulted into parenthood without any emotional preparation, and without enough time to grieve the loss of his personal freedom and space. Delia, the mother, is the one who "wants" a child – suggesting an irrational decision triggered by something that is less controllable. Barbara Almond would explain this by saying that "[M]otherlove, the bright side of maternity, is fueled by intense biological strivings inextricably bound to powerful psychological wishes" (Almond 2010: 24).

From the perspective of the new 'daddums', the narrative tackles the contemporary concern for the loss of personal freedom, but also subtly brings into question the traditional concept of marriage and family and the highly romanticized ideas associated with it. The dialogical mode of the narrative reveals the necessity for this kind of parody because the negative attitude towards parenthood is not only unpopular, but also politically incorrect, among other things. The narrator in this story being a man, and the narrator parodying the events revolving around the baby, is an instrument cleverly employed by Boyko so as not to estrange the reader. It is almost inconceivable for a woman to express ambivalence, let alone reluctance or refusal to have children. With the inclusion of various voices of stock characters as representing society and the fixed romanticized attitudes towards parenthood, Boyko clearly explicates the necessity for the humor. His pragmatic and rational character-narrator, through time, finds "uses" for the baby, and acclimatizes himself into the new gender and social role (Boyko 2006: 78).

> The next day the baby arrived.
> I suggested that we return it as it was obviously defective. Though it seemed, I conceded, to be operating correctly for the time being (in truth I had no idea what functions it was supposed to perform), the harsh noises and sundry smells that issued from it gave me reason to worry that it would soon malfunction. I asked Delia if she'd filled out the warranty card. (Boyko 2006: 75)

The author defamiliarizes the newborn and instead of presenting it as a 'bundle of joy' he subversively approaches the customary and familiar cultural and ideological positions revolving around parenting and children. In this first and second-person narrative, the blatant and dark humor is manifestly aimed at the reader, and with the purpose of implicating them, as well as easing the reception of the controversial message that parenthood, for some, stands for a personal loss of sorts. The involvement on the part of the reader achieved by means of first and second-person ensures a broader, and more importantly, a personal understanding of the issue of becoming a parent (Boyko 2006: 75). Doubtful and yet undecided on the matter of whether they needed another family member, the protagonist-narrator quickly becomes unamused by the baby's capacity for appropriating his personal time and a propensity for physi-

ological discharge and vocalizing its needs. The baby is "defective" for it does not fit with the idea proposed by his wife – it does not require "love", per se, but constant attention and tending. And yet, Boyko relieves the mother of the unpleasant position in which she too should voice her dissatisfaction with the realistic image – she is there to protect the baby from the bewildered and immature father (Boyko 2006: 74). The character of Delia, the mother, represents the epitome of what is traditionally associated with women and motherhood – she voices the clichés often put forward as immutable truths. Basically, she is slightly parodied as the repository of love who desires a human being of her own to whom she would transfer whatever love has been undirected and unused. Obviously, Boyko's choice of words, the future mother calling the hypothetical baby "a thing", the almost imperceptible Freudian slip, adds to the overall humor, but also reveals a level of ignorance and possibly self-interest. Delia initially refers to the baby as "a thing" and uses the form "which", and then corrects herself and says "whom". The baby is an object, and the protagonist-narrator from the very beginning places it into the category of "things" they do not need, much like Delia, only without correcting himself.

In "The Baby", Boyko makes visible the disparity of personal experience with the narratives promoted by mainstream culture, and the difficulty of fulfilling societal expectations – regardless of gender. The overall tone of the story, the sardonic yet playful humor, suspends the familiar cultural conventions. However, it is not the baby, the minuscule human, that is ridiculed as much as the adults' hypocritical and sensational reactions to it. The baby is indeed an 'it' that arrives or is plunged into the world of the two adults, one of whom is initially reluctant to accept its presence (Boyko 2006: 81). The story closes with the protagonist reading the baby a bed-time story – a nonsensical and made up one with the purpose of parodying the romanticized image of a father reading to his child because babies, after all, wouldn't understand anything or know the difference between nonsense and the original version. Moreover, the story may be interpreted as a cautionary tale against the idealized idea of parenthood aimed directly at the reader. In fact, the entire story may be interpreted as a warning, or a real-life practical guide for new parents.

> I hesitated. "The moral? Why, the moral is look before you leap. Or perhaps it's don't bite off more than you can chew. Or maybe it's don't shit where you eat. Or perchance it's think before you speak. Or mayhap it's don't do something just because everyone else is doing it. Or peradventure it's pay no attention to honey-tongued demagogues for they act only and always in their own interest. All right? Okay? Now good night."
> The baby yawned. "Nigh-nigh daddums."
> … My heart melted. (Boyko 2006: 81)

Clea Young's "Split" seems to parallel Boyko's "The Baby" for it is a narrative about a woman who cannot bring herself to experience the pangs of the maternal instinct. Tova never reaches the culturally desirable ideal – the state of mind in which she could see herself in the role of a mother. However, in the character of Alannah, her best friend, she witnesses that very instinctual, or bio-psychological, transformation, and it leaves her confounded and acutely aware of the conflict between her private self and the socially appropriate, performative, version of it.

> Jed would like to have children and Tova would like him to have them. His arms are made to rock babies, to swing them dangerously high and catch them just in time. Only Tova hasn't yet fallen under that maternal spell she'd heard women speak of so rapturously. And so she must wait either until she falls or is pushed head-first into its deep, embryonic darkness. Until then, she will use Alannah's baby as a gauge. Tonight Alannah will offer the baby and Tova will receive it with tentative arms, note her pulse as she jigs the squirming bundle. She doubts anything will have changed. When Tova held the baby as a newborn, her mouth dried up and she began to sweat. The baby, who weighed almost nothing, almost broke Tova's back. It wailed bloody murder. (Young 2006: 203)

Exposed to a newborn and to her own fatherly husband, she is still entirely removed from the prospects of giving life to a baby. Moreover, the protagonist is terrified by the idea that a child is something that the future inevitably has in cards for her, which is the reason why she examines her own feelings for her husband, the quality of their relationship, as well the quality of the relationship with her mother (Young 2006: 203). Tova's husband Jed becomes a threatening figure in her life precisely because of his fatherly instinct and desires. Under pressure, the female protagonist feels that she must use her best friend's baby to temporarily satisfy her husband's needs and buy herself time – "until she falls or is pushed" into pregnancy. Essentially, it is a story about two friends who face an insurmountable obstacle after one of them becomes a mother for the two do not seem to recognize each other. Narration-wise, the story is told through the eyes of the unmarried and childless woman who observes the behavior of her once close friend (Young 2006: 206).

"The Split" also asks whether motherhood is a natural stage in an individual's psychological and even spiritual development, and whether an individual who does not respond to this traditional cultural expectation may be regarded as underdeveloped, or egotistical and rebellious. The issue additionally refers to the institution of marriage as regulated to facilitate procreation and child-rearing. The character of Tova reveals how subtle cultural conditioning is, and how deviously effective its workings guide or direct the lives of individuals. In her own marriage, Tova feels obliged to conform regardless of her personal aspirations and desires, and regardless of her fears

and feelings of inadequacy. Her relationship with her mother is examined from this vantage point, and as pertaining to the manner in which societal expectations are transferred from one individual to another in the form of behavior correction or, simply, the instilling and perpetuation of gender-typical roles (Young 2006: 201). The implication, of course, is that the marriage to Jed was not a decision based entirely on her own feelings and desires, but rather something larger than that – a mish-mash of expectations, tradition and comfort. For this very reason, Tova observes Alannah, and sees her as "restrained, hunched, and without her old grace" (Young 2006: 207), which may be interpreted as a reflection of Tova's own idea of the effect children have on women – a projection of the anxiety onto Alannah who does not seem to be that distraught in her role even if the protagonist cannot shake off the discomfort. The story may be interpreted as a self-reflective narrative which, at the same time, problematizes gender roles, societal and cultural expectations, and the unpopular talk of psychological pressure in the face of pregnancy.

Tova, the protagonist, frustrated by the lack of this maternal impulse, delves into her past, and the relationship with her mother, and deconstructs her relationship with her husband, but also desperately looks for an explanation and an excuse in her own physiology.

> How even amid their ungainly groping, Tova managed to hide from Jed her split left nipple; whenever her shirt came off, her hand became a shell to cup her breast. Tova peels the waterlogged cloth from her chest and regards her anomaly. She's unsure if *split* is the correct word. Perhaps *inverted*. Maybe *mutant*. [...] Privately, though, Tova wonders if it will cause problems if, or when, she has a child and wants to breastfeed. What if the nipple doesn't work? What if the breast becomes full but the baby cannot drink from it and it grows painful and huge and must be punctured so that the trapped milk (might it sour inside her?) can flow? (Young 2006: 201)

Her "split nipple" flutters around the narrative as a kind of biological determinant and an omen. It is at the same time a materialization of Tova's anxiety and fears, and the inability to picture herself as a mother, but also as a kind of mark – a physical defect that makes her ugly and monstrous metaphorically. The protagonist sees herself as anomalous, and by analogy, it is her not wanting motherhood that makes her an anomaly in her marriage, and in the society.

> "A baby doesn't make it better, though." The words whip from Alannah's mouth and are gone. (Young 2006: 210)

Zsuzsi Gartner's "Pest Control for Dummies™" is a carefully layered narrative revealing of a disturbing moment in the female-protagonist's life – the moment of her realization that her mother had lost a child, a baby boy, before she was born. An explosive emotional reaction prompts Daisy, the protagonist, into a series of hallucinatory dreams in which she regresses to a place representing her mother's womb where she encounters the fetus of her brother. Cold, distant and blatantly judgmental, Daisy's mother is appalled by her daughter's soppy reaction to the practically hypothetical death of a child her mother never actually gave birth to.

> Daisy was mourning her brother. She had been mourning him for almost a month now, ever since her mother had told her he'd died. Her mother couldn't understand what the *fuss* was about. She was sure she'd told Daisy ages ago, but Daisy just doesn't *listen*. (Gartner 2000: 64)

Formally complex, the narrative of Daisy develops in the actual story-world, and a framed world within it – that of her own mind. The story-world real segments feature her partner Jack – a man guiltily attracted to the "boyish body" of a neighbor (Gartner 2000: 65) and Daisy's mother: "*Ohmegawd, your own girlfriend's won mother!* the little anal Jack in Jack's head said, as if everyone didn't have wayward thoughts" (Gartner 2000: 65); and the segments taking place inside the main protagonist's mind – a plastic space that is simultaneously her mother's and her own womb – feature the fetus of her never-born brother. Symbolically, the two worlds overlap, and Daisy, similarly to Delia in "The Baby" plunges into hallucinations as if to release the love inside of her otherwise unused, corroding her mental state and reminding her of the unloving relationship with Jack. It is in this world that Daisy not only fantasizes a life for her brother, but also re-examines her relationship with her mother, as well as the idea of having life growing inside her.

> The fetus looks so much like some Hollywood version of an alien that Daisy wonders if she isn't hallucinating an abduction. Maybe they've already stuck a tube down her throat and up her ass and shone bright lights in her eyes and scraped away enough tissue samples to create a whole new race of Uber Daisys. A Daisy chain. She laughs. Air bubbles spill out of her mouth and dance around in the warm amniotic fluid. The fetus bats at them with his little curled fists. (Gartner 2000: 68)

Psychologically, using the death of her brother as an impetus, Daisy not only constructs a virtual past for herself and her sibling, but also works through the disturbing conscious and unconscious material pertaining to her conception of motherhood. More precisely, Daisy re-examines the narrative of her own birth, and the narrative

of the relationship with her mother. Essentially, by creating a fictional past for her never-born brother, it is as if Daisy selectively changes her own childhood memories. Though a conscious effort on her part, it happens on a more profound level. In order to become a mother, Daisy must understand the broken relationship with her own mother. Somewhat aware of the true nature of her hallucinatory episodes, Daisy describes the "fetus" as "some Hollywood version of an alien" (Gartner 2000: 68). By extension, she not only identifies with her sibling in the womb, attempting to identify or reconnect to her mother, but also reveals the nature of her present state – the fetus is an alien being to her as much as she is alien to herself. The fetus, a convenient substitute, inside their mother's womb, gradually allows Daisy to mentally and physically prepare for motherhood. This improvised cognitive therapy, the switching of roles with her mother, additionally re-examines the model of motherhood that she is familiar with, and towards which she has no aspirations (Gartner 2000: 68).

The vivid and surreal excerpt is the first hallucinatory episode in Daisy's narrative (Gartner 2000: 68), and there, the fetus of her brother is introduced – through humorous and somewhat scientific comparison with an alien. However, on a deeper level, both Daisy's melancholy and crying in the scenes happening in the actual story-world, and her imagining her dead brother not as a typical chubby baby but an alien-like fetus manifest a strong sense of anxiety. The insinuation of an abduction relates to motherhood and female identity in numerous ways. Daisy's anxiety exposes unresolved issues pertaining to her mother and childhood, but it is also closely related to a woman's sense of personal freedom and space. A child growing inside the womb is literally an invasion of sorts – it is a nine-month long biological abduction of the body and the mind, for it too is unarguably forced into an altered state. The monster metaphor, reminiscent of Ridley Scott's "Alien", is evocative of Tova's fear of Alannah's baby breaking her back, and his murderous wailing. In the case of Daisy, similarly to Tova in "Split", the emotional component is the most striking one – if whatever happens to grow inside them comes out replicating exactly what they internalize, would history repeat itself, and would they be deprived of an emotional connection with their children just like with their mothers. Barbara Almond says that this mechanism, based on "empathic identification" dictates the course of development in child rearing (Almond 2010: 25). Additionally, this author suggests, as "mothers unconsciously relive all the stages in the children's development" (Almond 2010: 25) they adapt their expectations according to this empathic model – the model learned from their own mother or mother-figure, and in their own infanthood. Unsatisfied needs, according to Almond's theory, lead to the replication of the same faulty empathic model, which in turn produces more unsatisfactory relationships – mothers who simply do not find the instinctual basis to connect. Whether Daisy's anxiety stems from fear that she would emulate the same sort of unloving relationship with

her child, or from pure reluctance to conform to a standard of selfless mothering – the other extreme in terms of the model of her mother – remains unknown. Yet, the very questions Daisy's hallucinatory dilemmas raise testify to a complex phenomenon of motherhood, and its deep relation to personal identity.

> The fetus is proving remarkably uncooperative, claiming no prior knowledge of ancient Hebrew… […] Daisy can't contain her fury. She grabs him by the umbilical cord and yanks him towards her. "You're not even trying." The fetus's eyes go wide. "Go easy on me, sis, I haven't even been born yet!" (Gartner 2000: 83)

In another hallucinatory episode, Daisy overwhelms the fetus-brother with her preposterously unrealistic expectations and "the fetus is proving remarkably uncooperative, claiming no prior knowledge of ancient Hebrew and insisting that as far as he knows "Jesus Christ" is just a curse their mother frequently uses" (Gartner 2000: 83), and experiences a kind of aggression towards it that resonates with the monstrous idea Alannah confides in Tova in "Split". Almost amused with the idea, and yet embarrassed by it, this character feels overcome by the amount of power she has over the child – the power to end the baby's life as easily as it had been to give it life. Correspondingly, frenzied Daisy muses how she could "chew him up, stick her finger down her throat, and puke up the pieces" and how she is "certain her mother would like that" (Gartner 2000: 83) revealing a culturally disturbing idea of mothers having the propensity to be ambivalent, indifferent or unloving to their children. In "The Baby", it is the voice of the father that toys with this dichotomy all through the story, and his gender and the dark-humor of the parody stand as a buffer zone between the individual and the culture. "Pest Control for Dummies™" ends with Daisy's unlocking of that instinctual capacity, the maternal instinct, and the process of her contemplating motherhood prompted by learning about her brother, may be interpreted as a form of therapy. If motherhood provides a framework for women to expand their identity – from daughters to partners and mothers – perhaps the link between childhood and motherhood may be reversed so that "reliving" the specific stages serves a therapeutic role.

Conclusion

The three selected Canadian short stories explicitly deal with skepticism about prevalent traditions and the diverse body of themes pertaining to what is nowadays known as motherhood studies (O'Reilly 2010: vii). The female characters featuring the three stories, both the protagonists and the episodic characters, all belong to

the social group of emancipated, working contemporary Canadian women, and the setting is urban contemporary Canada. Namely, in Craig Boyko's "The Baby" and Zsuzsi Gartner's "Pest Control for Dummies™", it is the male characters who initially question the traditional concept of parenthood, and their personal desires and choices pertaining to fatherhood. Women in these stories show different kinds of motivations – either stereotypical and clichéd 'wanting' of an object of pure affection, or an object that could compensate for the personal failings in the romantic, marital or other aspects of their lives. Clea Young's "Split", however, is the most complex of the three stories for it voices an opinion in complete opposition to the previously mentioned two – for Young's Tova, a baby would not be a compensation for a failed mother-daughter relationship or an unaffectionate childhood for she has nothing particular to reproach at her mother; nor does she need a baby to whom she would impart un-allotted amounts of love, affection and care. In fact, Young's "Split" delves deep into the psychological, emotional and romantic aspects of the protagonist's life in order to investigate whether there exists a particular space in which Tova could reconcile her identity with another particular extension or role. This space is only hypothetical and disturbing for the fact that it is undesired yet a social and marital inevitability. Tova's womanhood is examined through the prism of her willingness to adapt it to the role of a mother. In comparison to her double, Alannah, Tova projects her reluctance and doubts as manifested in her skewed image of Alannah's body – a body which suffered a pregnancy but which does not seem to have changed to the extent of Tova's panic of looking at it as injured, which is visibly manifested in the image of her 'split' and 'anomalous' breast.

"Split", similarly to "Pest Control for Dummies™", deals with the issue of female identity as contingent upon the right of women to retain control over their bodies – literally and metaphorically. The 'alien abduction' in "Pest Control for Dummies™" suggests the complex nature of the motherhood-experience, but only two of the stories deal with the concept of mothering as defined by O'Reilly, and previously Adrienne Rich. Namely, "The Baby" precisely focuses on the excruciating experience of caring for an infant, and the parody facilitates a painfully sincere and unpopular account. In "Split", Tova examines both the idea of being entrapped by motherhood – being assigned a role and position from which she can neither escape her sorely perfect husband; and the idea of being forced to mother a child – without having felt a desire for it, or even the slightest twinge of the maternal instinct. Additionally, "Split" problematizes the discourse around motherhood in terms of the origin and quality of the instinct itself. Much like Daisy in "Pest Control for Dummies™" who plunges into an examination of her mother's and her own womb to uncover the maternal spark, Tova too attempts, although forcefully, to warm herself up to the idea, with different results. Both

stories, however, more or less explicitly, examine the extent to which womanhood is biologically marked and raise the question of whether, and how, culture, society, politics or biology encode it into individuals.

Works cited

Almond, Barbara. *The Monster Within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood*. University of California Press, 2010.

Boyko, Craig. "The Baby." *The Journey Prize Stories 18*, edited Steven Galloway, Zsuzsi Gartner and Annabel Lyon, 73–81. Toronto, Canada: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006.

Gartner, Zsuzsi. "Pest Control for Dummies™." *All the Anxious Girls on Earth*, 64 –89. New York: Random House Inc., 2000.

O'Reilly, Andrea, Ed. *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*. Sage Publications Inc., 2010.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W.W. Norton, 1995.

Young, Clea. "Split." *The Journey Prize Stories 18*, edited Steven Galloway, Zsuzsi Gartner and Annabel Lyon, 200–211. Toronto, Canada: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006.

SANJA IGNJATOVIĆ / is a PhD student at the Philology Department and a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš for the Canadian Studies and British Studies courses, but also Medieval English Literature, Renaissance Literature and Shakespeare. Her main fields of interest include the short story as a genre, its contemporary forms, as well as theory of literature and cognitive poetics.

Central European Association for Canadian Studies
Association d'Etudes Canadiennes en Europe Centrale

Central European Journal of Canadian Studies
Revue d'Etudes Canadiennes en Europe Centrale

volume 12/13 (2018)

muni PRESS

9 771213 771001 85