

## Chapter I

### Introduction

Literary means not only what is written but what is voiced, what is expressed, what is invented, in whatever form.

-Greil Marcus and Werner Sollers

The realm of literature persists as a dynamic and ever-evolving domain, mirroring the perpetual flux of the human experience, all while preserving the enduring themes that bind across temporal epochs and cultural contexts. The contemporary literary landscape mirrors the multifaceted nature and intricacy of the modern world, as it grapples with a broad spectrum of issues, including matters of identity, societal challenges, the repercussions of globalisation, the influence of technology, environmental complexities, and a plethora of other themes diligently explored by authors. In this milieu, literature remains a compelling catalyst for fostering comprehension, empathy, and instigating transformative social progress. Concurrently, efforts aimed at recognising and elevating voices emerging from marginalised communities and underrepresented demographics have contributed to a more inclusive literary canon. The ascent of authors from diverse cultural backgrounds has enriched and diversified contemporary literature. As articulated by the eminent English literary critic James Wood in his seminal work, *How Fiction Works*:

Literature differs from life in that life is amorously full of detail, and rarely direct us toward it, whereas literature teaches us to notice. Literature makes us better noticers of life; we get to practice on life itself; which in turn makes us better readers of detail in literature; which in turn makes us better readers of life. (28)

World literature, with its universal themes resonating across diverse cultures and societies, encompasses a vast literary landscape. One distinctive subcategory within this

global sphere is Canadian literature. Characterised by its dynamic exploration of diverse themes, Canadian literary works often shine a spotlight on the experiences and perspectives of marginalised groups, contributing significantly to the global discourse on diversity and inclusion. This body of literature serves as a testament to the multifaceted nature of Canadian society, celebrating its rich mosaic of voices and stories that might otherwise remain unheard.

Canadian literature, shaped by the nation's unique cultural, historical, and geographical context, includes a wide array of literary forms, from novels and short stories to plays, poems, and essays. Exploring themes such as multiculturalism, identity, nature, the vast wilderness, immigration, Indigenous issues, and the nation's relationship with its colonial heritage, Canadian literature reflects the complex and evolving identity of Canada. In his book, *A History of Canadian Literature*, W. H. New makes the following observations about Canada and its history:

In Canada they helped to shape the expectations of the new society and its patterns of expression. As the new nation expanded to occupy most of the northern half of North America, these perspectives altered. A history of literature in Canada is of necessity, then, a record not only of specific literary accomplishments over space and through time, but also an account of ways in which the shaping contexts also changed, and of the interconnections between context and language. (4)

Early Canadian literature covers the period from the advent of European explorers and immigrants in the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century and includes the literary works created in what is now Canada during its early history. Both the interactions with Indigenous peoples and the many European cultures that settled in the area during this time had a significant impact on Canadian literature.

Many of the first Canadian texts were descriptions of explorers and daring expeditions that were exploring and charting North America's immense wilderness. These stories frequently described interactions with Indigenous peoples and the natural world. Indigenous peoples' recollections are included in some early publications, offering insights into their traditions, beliefs, and relationships with the immigrants.

Early Canadian literature frequently portrayed the difficulties that settlers faced as they adjusted to the unfamiliar climate, landscapes, and survival concerns. Overall, the formation of a unique literary heritage in Canada was made possible by Early Canadian literature. It depicts the historical setting, the interaction between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and the early stages of the creation of Canadian identity.

Samuel de Champlain, a French explorer and writer, stands as one of the notable authors from the early Canadian literary period. His writings vividly depict his travels to the New World and his interactions with Indigenous peoples, earning him a revered position as one of the founding figures in Canada's literary canon.

In the nineteenth century, Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, two sisters, embarked on a journey to Canada. Their writings offer in-depth descriptions of the settlers' experiences in the Canadian wilderness, including Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada* and Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*. E. Pauline Johnson, a Mohawk-English author and performer, celebrated her Indigenous roots through poetry and performances, establishing herself as one of Canada's first Indigenous literary voices.

During the Modernist Movement in the twentieth century, Canadian literature saw the emergence of modernist authors who experimented with novel forms and subjects, including E. J. Pratt, F. R. Scott, and A. M. Klein, who are noteworthy figures from this period. In the mid-twentieth century, writers like Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler, and Robertson Davies rose to prominence, marking a period of substantial growth in Canadian literature.

Contemporary Canadian literature boasts a wide and diverse array of authors, themes, and literary genres, with a rich legacy shaped by various cultural, historical, and social influences in early twentieth-century Canadian literature. Below is a list of prominent present-day Canadian authors and their notable works.

The notable contemporary author, Margaret Atwood, is well-known for her works of science fiction and dystopian literature. Her most famous book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, has garnered significant interest due to its relevance to discussions about gender, power, and authoritarianism. Michael Ondaatje, a renowned novelist and poet born in Sri Lanka and raised in Canada, achieved fame with his Booker Prize-winning novel, *The English Patient*, which was adapted into an Academy Award-winning movie. Yann Martel's writing often explores themes of spirituality, survival, and the relationship between humans and animals. He is best known for his novel *Life of Pi*, which tells the story of a young boy stranded on a lifeboat with a Bengal tiger. Author Patrick deWitt's Western book, *The Sisters Brothers*, portrays the adventures of two assassin brothers during the Gold Rush era, while in 2008, Canadian author Rawi Hage, a Lebanese-born native, delved into the immigrant experience in Canadian society through his novel *Cockroach* set in 1930s Montreal. Additionally, Heather O'Neill's *The Lonely-Hearts Hotel* is a beautifully written tale of love and endurance also set in 1930s Montreal.

Indigenous Canadian literature encompasses a diverse range of literary forms, including novels, short stories, dramas, poetry, oral storytelling, and non-fiction books. It serves as a vital lens through which to understand and appreciate the unique cultures, histories, and contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The article titled "Indigenous Canada: Literature and Culture" by Pratim Das briefs out Indigenous Canadian literature and its history, he says, "Indigenous Literature in Canada collected its material from long history of colonialism, history that has been recognized only by the mainstream Canadian community much later."

Key themes and characteristics of Indigenous Canadian literature include Reclaiming Identity and Heritage, Land and Environment, Oral Tradition and Storytelling, Historical Trauma and Resilience. This body of literature continues to thrive and gain recognition globally, contributing significantly to Canada's literary landscape and promoting understanding and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Literature indicates growing literacy in the contemporary works by the emerging writers is exemplified in the article of Pratim Das. He says, “The diversity of contemporary work of indigenous people is significant. In a nutshell it can be said that diversity and plurality of Indigenous cultural heritage had a major contribution in indigenous literature as it has strong influence over contemporary writing.”

Prominent Indigenous Canadian authors include Thomas King, known for works like *Green Grass, Running Water* and *The Inconvenient Indian*, which skilfully blend history, satire, and modern social commentary. Eden Robinson, a Haisla and Heiltsuk author, has received acclaim for her *The Trickster Trilogy*, which explores Indigenous identity and mythology. Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse* is recognised for its portrayal of the impact of residential schools and the healing power of cultural connections. Cherie Dimaline's dystopian novel, *The Marrow Thieves* honours Indigenous storytelling traditions while addressing environmental and societal challenges. Katherena Vermette, this author, explores trauma, family, and community in an Indigenous urban context in her dramatic book, *The Break*.

To be precise, Canadian literature is a rich and dynamic reflection of the nation's intricate social, cultural, and political tapestry. It has earned global acclaim and remains a vital platform for exploring Canadian identity and artistic expression. As described by Manorama Trikha in *Canadian Literature: Recent Essays*, “Canadian literature inherits the “tradition” of a larger body of world literature in English as well as enjoys the advantages of

its marginality. This enables Canadian writers to adopt an aesthetic stance both from within and without simultaneously” (16).

These authors also deserve a place in the discussion on Canadian writers because of their significant contributions to the country's literary landscape and their exploration of diverse themes and aspects of Canadian society. Somnath Sarker's article titled, “A Brief History of Canadian Literature in English” published on *E-Literature*, declares Canadian authors can write on any themes, “Canadian literature is not restricted to certain topics in writings but, its perspective has now amalgamated much new concerns in its literature.”

Hugh MacLennan, a distinguished modern Canadian novelist, is celebrated for his keen awareness of the real challenges faced by Canadians. His novels, including *Barometer Rising*, *Two Solitudes*, *The Watch that Ends the Night*, and *Voices in Time*, have earned him recognition as a representative novelist of the contemporary world. MacLennan urges his fellow countrymen to confront the issues of a divided culture with pragmatism, effectively becoming the first to articulate a Canadian tradition in fiction. He, along with Callaghan, is regarded as one of the founding fathers of Canadian tradition in fiction.

Deborah Ellis is a renowned Canadian novelist known for her influential books, primarily in the fields of young adult and children's literature. *The Breadwinner*, *Parvana's Journey*, *Mud City*, *No Safe Place*, and *My Name is Parvana* are a few of her well-known works. Ellis frequently explores issues of social justice, human rights, and the fortitude of young people in the face of adversity in her literature. She is adept at handling delicate and complex subjects, offering readers a window into the lives of children dealing with hardship around the world. She has received critical acclaim and recognition for her contributions to children's literature.

Frederick Philip Grove, a German-born Canadian novelist and translator, stands as one of Canada's most influential novelists. Settling in Manitoba in 1912, he became

renowned for his exploration of Western Prairie pioneer life in multicultural communities. Grove's semi-fictionalised works, including *Over Prairie Trails*, *Settlers of the Marsh*, *A Search for America*, and *In Search of Myself*, along with his essays, novels, and short stories, offer a gritty yet precise portrayal of life on the Canadian prairies in the early 20th century. He also experimented with modernist forms, incorporating elements of autobiography into his fiction. His autobiographical work, *In Search of Myself*, earned him the Governor General's Award.

William Robertson Davies, a prominent figure in Canadian literature, excelled as a novelist, playwright, critic, journalist, and professor. He founded Massey College and received numerous accolades, including being short-listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction in 1986 for *What's Bred in the Bone*. As the first Canadian to become a Honorary Member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Davies left a lasting legacy. His notable works such as *Leaven of Malice*, *A Mixture of Frailties*, *The Manticore*, *World of Wonders*, and *The Cunning Man* explored themes like cultural life in Canada and the workings of a small-town newspaper, topics he intimately understood.

Douglas Coupland, a renowned Canadian novelist and artist, is perhaps the best-known in the country. Beyond his acclaimed fiction, he has produced notable works in design and visual art, drawing from his early training. With a diverse portfolio of thirteen novels, two collections of short stories, seven non-fiction books, and numerous dramatic works and screenplays, Coupland has made a substantial impact on the literary and artistic landscape. His famous novels, including *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, *Shampoo Planet*, *Life After God*, *Microserfs*, *All Families Are Psychotic*, and his contributions to visual arts such as *Infinite Tire*, *Digital Orca*, and *Golden Tree* have garnered widespread recognition. He has received honorary degrees, become a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, and was honoured with the 2017 Lieutenant Governor's Award for Literary

Excellence for his insightful contributions to the examination of the contemporary human condition as a novelist, cultural commentator, and artist. In 2013, he was made an officer of the Order of Canada.

Alice Ann Munro is a major Canadian author highly acclaimed as a contemporary master of the short story. She has published fifteen collections of short fiction, with most of her work set in her native Huron County in Ontario. Her stories delicately explore human complexities in an uncomplicated prose style. Munro's writing has firmly established her as "one of our greatest contemporary writers of fiction." She is the recipient of numerous literary accolades, including the Man Booker International Prize in 2009 for her lifetime body of work. Additionally, she is a three-time winner of Canada's Governor General's Award for Fiction and has contributed her short stories to esteemed periodicals such as *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Munro's international recognition culminated in her being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013, making her the first resident Canadian author to receive this prestigious honour. Some of her notable works include *The Moons of Jupiter*, *The Progress of Love*, *Friend of My Youth*, *Open Secrets*, *The View from Castle Rock*, and *Vintage Munro*, a collection of short stories.

L. M. Montgomery, born in 1874, is a renowned Canadian novelist, poet, and short story writer, celebrated for her seminal series of novels commencing with *Anne of Green Gables* in 1908. Her debut novel enjoys immediate success, spawning numerous sequels. Montgomery's literary contributions significantly shape Canadian literature, remaining popular for almost a century and inspiring various adaptations across stage, television, and film. Notably, she is honoured as an officer of the Order of the British Empire by King George V. Her notable works encompass *Anne of Avonlea*, *Anne of the Island*, *Anne's House of Dreams*, *Rainbow Valley*, *Rilla of Ingleside*, *The Golden Road*, and *The Blythes Are Quoted*.

Jean Margaret Laurence, a pivotal figure in Canadian Literature, emerges as a Canadian novelist and short story writer. She also plays a crucial role in establishing the Writers' Trust of Canada, a non-profit organisation supporting Canada's writing community. Laurence's novels portray resilient women seeking self-realisation amidst a male-dominated society, contributing significantly to the emerging Canadian literary tradition. She garners two Governor General's Awards for her novels and is invested as a companion of the Order of Canada in 1972. Among her notable works are *The Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God*, *The Diviners*, and short story collections like *The Tomorrow-Tamer*, *A Bird in the House*, *The Olden Days Coat*, *Heart of a Stranger*, *Dance on the Earth: A Memoir*, and *The Christmas Birthday Story*. In 2016, she is designated a National Historic Person.

Kathleen Margaret Pearson is a highly regarded Canadian writer and the recipient of numerous literature awards. She is widely celebrated as one of Canada's most beloved children's authors. Pearson's notable novels include *The Daring Game*, *A Handful of Time*, *The Sky is Falling*, *Looking at the Moon*, *The Lights Go on Again*, and *Awake and Dreaming*, which earned her the Governor General's Award for English-language Children's Literature in 1997. Her accolades also include the Vicky Metcalf Award for a body of work and the Canadian Library Association Children's Book of the Year Award, as well as the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction. In 2018, Kit Pearson was appointed a member of the Order of Canada.

It is important to note that Canadian literature effectively addresses a wide array of disability themes. The academic discipline of disability studies in Canadian literature scrutinises the portrayal, experiences, and exploration of disability within the works of Canadian authors. It is a multidisciplinary field, drawing insights from disability studies, literature, cultural studies, and social sciences.

Identity and agency stand out as fundamental facets within disability studies in Canadian literature. Disabled characters' creation of identities and exercise of agency are under the lens, shedding light on how their disabilities shape their prospects, relationships, and experiences, and how they challenge ableist expectations. This interdisciplinary perspective often intersects with other identity dimensions, including race, gender, class, and sexuality, enriching the understanding of how disability intertwines with various facets of identity in Canadian literature.

In addition, examining autobiographical writing and memoirs by Canadian authors with disabilities contributes significantly to the discourse. Shirley Neuman and Susan Jackel, in their encyclopaedic article titled "Autobiographical Writings in English" on *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, emphasise the innovative nature of these authors' forms of expression, stating, "The forms they develop to deal with very disparate experiences are among the most innovative in Canadian autobiographical writing." These first-person narratives provide invaluable perspectives on the experiences, challenges, and victories related to disabilities, deepening our insight into disability narratives within Canadian literature.

Evidently, representations of disability and attitudes towards it in Canadian literary works are significantly influenced by prevailing social and cultural circumstances. Therefore, the evolving perceptions of disability over time and its connections with broader societal concerns, as emphasised in the chapter titled "Understanding the Social Model of Disability: Past, Present and Future" by Colin Barnes who quoted the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons from 1975 in the book, *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies* Edited by Nick Watson et al. Barnes stating, "Disabled persons, whatever the origin, nature and seriousness of their handicaps and disabilities, have the same fundamental rights as their fellow-citizens of the same age, which implies first and foremost the right to enjoy a decent life, as normal and full as possible" (16), are central to this analysis.

Furthermore, a noteworthy literary trend, 'Deconstructing Ableism,' takes on the task of challenging ableist presumptions, biases, and stereotypes. Through a critical analysis of language and imagery in literature, it aims to increase awareness and understanding of disability issues while advocating for more inclusive representations. Notably, several celebrated Canadian authors have contributed to the exploration of disability themes within their works.

Several Canadian authors have made significant contributions to the literary exploration of disability effectively fostering a more inclusive literary landscape. Hari KC in the article titled "Disability Discourse in South Asia and Global Disability Governance" gives insights into the emerging topic of disability in various countries. He declares, "Disability is too complex and multidimensional to be precisely defined" (31). Within their works, these authors have not only focused on disability but have also woven it seamlessly into the fabric of their narratives, thus contributing to the broader societal conversation on inclusivity and representation.

David Chariandy's novel *Brother* delves into themes related to disability through the character of Michael, who has down syndrome. The book explores the challenges faced by Michael and his family as they navigate his disability. Alice Kuiper's, in her young adult novel *Life on the Refrigerator Door*, tells the story of a mother and daughter communicating through notes left on the refrigerator door as they both deal with the mother's cancer diagnosis. This novel addresses themes of illness and disability.

Louise Penny's mystery novels, featuring Chief Inspector Armand Gamache, often include characters with disabilities. For example, in *The Beautiful Mystery*, one of the characters has a disability, and Penny explores how it affects their life and interactions with others. Kathleen Winter's novel *Annabel* is about a child born with both male and female genitalia and explores themes of gender identity and the challenges of growing up with a unique physical condition.

Michael Winter's memoir, *This All Happened*, offers poignant reflections on his brother's disability and its profound impact on their family dynamics. Within the pages of this memoir, Winter provides readers with an intimate and personal perspective on the experience of living with disability within the Canadian context.

Lawrence Hill, renowned for works such as *The Book of Negroes*, ventures into disability themes in his novel *Some Great Thing*. While Hill is more widely recognised for his other literary achievements, this work introduces a character with a disability. Through this character, Hill sheds light on critical issues related to workplace accommodations and societal perceptions surrounding disability, showcasing his ability to engage with multifaceted social issues.

Beverley Brenna has made significant contributions to the realm of disabilities as both a writer and educator, with a particular focus on increasing knowledge and understanding of autism and neurodiversity. Her notable achievement in this area is the critically acclaimed *Wild Orchid* trilogy, encompassing the novels *Wild Orchid*, *Waiting for No One*, *The White Bicycle*, and *The Moon Children*. However, Brenna's influence extends beyond this series.

In addition to her *Wild Orchid Trilogy*, Brenna's body of work consistently addresses social justice, diversity, and disability themes in literature aimed at children and young adults. Through her writing, she actively fosters discussion and reflection on issues affecting marginalised and underrepresented individuals, with a particular emphasis on those with disabilities. Beverley Brenna's dedication to crafting authentic, inclusive, and thought-provoking fiction serves as a powerful vehicle for dispelling misconceptions and advancing a deeper understanding of neurodiversity and the lives of people with disabilities, establishing her as a notable contributor to the field.

Timothy Findley, a renowned Canadian novelist known for his adept storytelling and exploration of challenging themes, also significantly contributes to the portrayal of

disabilities in literature. While celebrated primarily for his impact on Canadian literature, Findley's depiction of disabilities in his works resonates with readers, addressing complex issues and showcasing his ability to engage with important themes. Beyond his acclaimed novels like *The Wars* and *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, Findley's works delve into the human condition, touching on mental health, physical infirmity, and disability-related subjects with nuance. His portrayals reflect a deep understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with diverse abilities. Through his writing, Findley not only crafts gripping narratives but also challenges societal assumptions, raises awareness about disability issues, and offers insight into the realities of those living with disabilities. He utilises his platform as an author to draw attention to significant societal concerns, further amplifying his impact within the disability community.

Adam Pottle, a distinguished Canadian author, has garnered recognition for his literary contributions that center around themes of disability, identity, and inclusion. As a writer with hearing impairment, Pottle brings a unique perspective to the Canadian literary landscape, challenging and reshaping prevailing narratives. His debut novel, *Mantis Dreams: The Journal of Dr. Dexter Ripley*, has received critical acclaim, serving as a testament to his distinctive voice and storytelling prowess. Beyond novels, Pottle also explores poetry and playwriting, underscoring his versatility as a writer. Through his creative endeavours, Pottle actively advocates for a more profound understanding and representation of individuals with hearing impairment and disability within both literature and society. His impactful presence establishes him as a significant figure in the realm of Canadian literature.

Dorothy Ellen Palmer, a writer and disability activist who herself lives with a disability, offers a deeply personal perspective through, *Falling for Myself: A Memoir*. This poignant work chronicles her experiences as a disabled woman navigating the complex terrain of the healthcare system and society at large. In addition to her memoir, Palmer

engages with disability and accessibility issues through her fiction and essays, making substantial contributions to the discourse surrounding disability.

Rahul Varma, a playwright and the artistic director of Teesri Duniya Theatre in Montreal explores disability themes in his plays, such as *Counter Offence* and *Bhopal*. Through these works, Varma delves into critical issues related to disability rights and social justice, shedding light on the challenges and inequalities faced by individuals with disabilities.

These authors, through their literary contributions, play pivotal roles in enriching the landscape of Canadian literature by offering more inclusive and diverse representations of disability. Their works illuminate the experiences, challenges, and perspectives of individuals with disabilities, contributing significantly to the broader narrative of inclusivity in literature.

One such remarkable writer who has made substantial contributions in this regard is the late Canadian novelist Jean Little (1932–2020). Best known for her outstanding contributions to children's and young adult literature, Jean Little's life journey itself is a testament to resilience and determination. Born with a serious sight impairment, Little overcame numerous obstacles to create a substantial body of work that had a profound impact on readers worldwide.

Little's journey was marked by the challenge of corneal scarring, which left her half-blind from birth. Her parents, both Canadian doctors, were medical missionaries for the United Church of Canada, and they immigrated to Canada in 1939, settling in Guelph in 1940. Despite her visual impairment, she attended regular elementary and high school classes, driven by her unwavering belief in the power of education to showcase her abilities. This commitment to education led her to pursue higher studies at the University of Toronto, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature. Subsequently, she dedicated several years of her life to teaching children with disabilities.

Jean Little's contributions extended beyond her literary endeavours. She served as an assistant professor in the Department of English at the University of Guelph, imparting her knowledge of children's literature to future generations. Her accomplishments were a testament to her remarkable intellect and relentless pursuit of a meaningful and respectable life in society.

Acknowledged as a member of the Order of Canada and the recipient of six honorary degrees, Jean Little held a deep affinity for children's books and a genuine kindness towards young readers. Her unique perspective, influenced by her disability, infused her writings with distinct emotions and feelings, setting her apart from her family members. Her bond with her guide dog was a reflection of the companionship and love that she found in her furry friend during her travels.

Formerly residing in Guelph, Ontario, alongside her sister, nephew, and a host of beloved dogs, Jean Little harnessed the assistance of a talking computer to facilitate her writing. Her writing style was characterised by its distinctive use of British English and everyday vocabulary reminiscent of her household. Her unwavering belief in the power of stories to motivate children was a recurring theme in her literary work.

In 1962, Jean Little made her literary debut with *Mine for Keeps*, a poignant children's book featuring a young protagonist with cerebral palsy. This remarkable work earned her the prestigious Little, Brown Canadian Children's Book Award, marking the beginning of her illustrious career in children's literature. Over the years, Little authored more than fifty books spanning various genres, including novels, children's literature, autobiographies, poetry, and short stories. Some of her works, such as *Mine for Keeps* and *From Anna*, are considered masterpieces, as highlighted in the article "Tragedy Builds a New Family."

Many of Little's works, such as *Mine for Keeps* and *From Anna*, revolve around children with disabilities or those affected by someone with disabilities. These writings, many

of which were penned decades ago, serve as historical snapshots of how society used to perceive and treat individuals with disabilities. In addition to these themes, adoption and foster care are frequently discussed subjects in her works, as exemplified in *Home From Far* and *Willow and Twig*. Despite tackling deeply distressing topics like death, severe illness, and abuse, Little's narratives consistently conclude with uplifting messages that illustrate the resilience of children.

Themes of disability, acceptance, family, and friendship are recurring motifs in Jean Little's writings, often drawing inspiration from her personal experiences as a visually impaired individual. Some of her notable works include *Mine for Keeps* (1962), *Spring Begins in March* (1966), *Different Dragons* (1986), *From Anna* (1972), *Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird* (1984), *Kate* (1971), *Look Through My Window* (1970), *Stand in the Wind* (1975), *Dancing Through the Snow* (2007), *Orphan at My Door* (2001), *Exiles from the War: The War Guests Diary of Charlotte Mary Twiss* (2010), *Dear Canada: A Season for Miracles* (2006), *Do Not Open Until Christmas* (2014), and *The Belonging Place* (1997). Additionally, she penned two autobiographical works: *Little by Little: A Writer's Education* (1987) and *Stars Come Out Within* (1990).

For her significant contributions to children's literature, Jean Little has received numerous honours and awards throughout her career, including the Governor General's Literary Award, the Canada Council Children's Literature Prize, and the prestigious Canadian Library Association Book of the Year for Children Award.

Through her writings, Little has made a profound impact on the landscape of children's literature. Her ability to write using a talking computer demonstrates her dedication to her craft despite physical challenges. Her works have earned her numerous accolades and awards, with several of them briefly described below.

In 1962, Jean Little published her first novel *Mine for Keeps*, which weaves a heartfelt narrative that centers around Sally, a young girl who grapples with cerebral palsy. This compelling story chronicles Sally's remarkable journey, beginning with her enrolment in a special school meticulously tailored to meet her unique needs. As the plot unfolds, readers bear witness to Sally's courageous transition into a regular school, a transition that illuminates the challenges and triumphs she encounters on her path to inclusivity and self-discovery. One of the most compelling aspects of the novel is how it intimately explores Sally's family dynamics. Furthermore, the novel artfully highlights the significant role of pets in providing emotional support and companionship during challenging times, offering an additional layer of depth to the narrative.

In 1965, Jean Little published *Home From Far*, a poignant work of literature that centers on the narrative of twin children whose lives are forever altered by a tragic and unforeseen catastrophe. This emotionally charged story revolves around a young girl's journey as she grapples with the profound loss of her beloved twin brother and her family's collective efforts to navigate the complex terrain of life following this devastating tragedy.

Jean Little's prose captures the raw emotions, the struggles, and the resilience of her characters as they come to terms with the irrevocable change that has befallen their lives. Through her vivid and compassionate storytelling, Little explores themes of grief, resilience, and the enduring bonds that bind families together in the most trying of circumstances. This novel is a testament to Jean Little's exceptional ability to weave compelling narratives that not only touch the hearts of readers but also provide a profound reflection on the human spirit's capacity to endure, heal, and find hope even in the darkest of moments.

In 1966, Jean Little continued her exploration of family dynamics with the release of *Spring Begins in March*, a poignant sequel to *Mine for Keeps*. While *Mine for Keeps* primarily focuses on Sally, *Spring Begins in March* shifts its perspective to Meg Copeland,

Sally's younger sister, who takes center stage as the novel's protagonist. Meg, growing up in a seemingly well-functioning and loving family, faces a unique set of challenges, highlighting that even within a supportive environment, individuals can grapple with feelings of exclusion and inadequacy. Meg is portrayed as a bright and creative young girl, yet she finds herself prone to making mistakes and encountering difficulties both in school and at home. Her struggle to fit in and concentrate on her studies leads her down a troubled path, ultimately resulting in an act of forgery. Through the narrative's progression, readers witness Meg's journey of self-discovery and personal growth.

In 1968, *Take Wing* introduces Ross and James as the main characters. The story addresses the challenges of dealing with James' mental retardation within a family setting. It explores the themes of friendship, conflict resolution, and understanding. The 1969 book, *One to Grow On*, follows the story of Jeanie, a girl who feels excluded by her family and peers. Her only source of joy is visiting her grandmother's cabin, where she finds solace and a listening ear. In 1971, the novel *Kate* explores the protagonist's journey of self-discovery as she learns more about her family, friends, and Jewish heritage.

In 1972, Jean Little introduces readers to *From Anna*, a literary work that offers a profound exploration of the immigrant experience through the lens of a young protagonist. Anna Solden, a nine-year-old immigrant from Germany to Canada, grapples with a myriad of challenges upon her arrival, including language barriers and learning disabilities. Notably, Anna's visual impairment, which went unidentified in Germany, becomes apparent only after her move to Canada, introducing a unique layer of complexity to her already multifaceted journey. The narrative thoughtfully delves into how Anna copes with her newfound disability and the adaptations she must make in her daily life.

Family plays a pivotal role in Anna's life, with her older brother Rudi offering unwavering support and love. These familial bonds underscore a central theme of the novel –

the resilience of familial relationships and their power to provide strength and resilience in times of adversity. Moreover, the book offers poignant insights into Anna's educational experiences, from her time at a sight-saving school to her transition to a regular school, shedding light on the unique challenges she faces as a visually impaired student and her unwavering determination to excel academically. Beyond this, *From Anna* explores broader themes of friendship and the importance of embracing diversity, as Anna's interactions with her classmates and peers offer valuable lessons in acceptance and the beauty of differences. In essence, *From Anna* stands as a testament to the enduring power of love, support, and the human spirit's capacity to overcome adversity while navigating the complexities of immigration and integration into a diverse and evolving society.

A sequel to *From Anna*, titled *Listen for the Singing*, published in 1977, delves deeper into the intricacies of Anna's life as a visually impaired striving for recognition and acceptance among her peers. The narrative takes place against the backdrop of significant historical events, adding layers of complexity to Anna's journey. Notably, Anna's older brother Rudi, who was sighted in the previous book, becomes visually impaired due to his experiences in war, further intertwining the themes of disability and the impact of war on individuals and families.

As the story unfolds, *Listen for the Singing* also highlights Anna's deep-seated fear of war, stemming from her family's experiences during wartime. This fear adds a profound emotional dimension to the narrative, offering readers a glimpse into the lasting traumas and anxieties that can persist long after the cessation of hostilities. The book sensitively explores how these fears influence Anna's decisions and perspectives, shaping her character and resilience.

In *Listen for the Singing*, Anna continues to grapple with a myriad of challenges, including family dynamics and racism stemming from her German heritage. Despite these

adversities, Anna exemplifies unwavering perseverance, especially in her role as a supportive sibling to Rudi as he navigates the complex terrain of life as a newly visually impaired individual. Through Anna's experiences, the novel masterfully underscores themes of resilience, familial bonds, and the enduring pursuit of acceptance and recognition.

In 1986, *Different Dragons* introduces Ben Tucker as the protagonist, a boy who grapples with various fears and learns that everyone has their own 'dragons' to conquer. Similarly, *Hey World, Here I Am* (1986) focuses on Kate Bloomfield, who observes and reflects on school, friends, parents, and the journey to authenticity and self-discovery.

Jean Little's autobiographical work, *Little By Little: A Writer's Education* (1987), provides insight into her life experiences, highlighting her educational journey and early writing career. It underscores the crucial role of education in her life, as well as the support and understanding of her parents, who were doctors. Despite facing bullying and discrimination, especially at school, Little persevered, driven by her passion for writing. Her father played a significant role in nurturing her talent and helping her produce well-written works. The book culminates with her debut novel, *Mine for Keeps*.

Continuing her life story in *Stars Come Out Within* (1991), Jean Little delves into her early experiences as a visually impaired individual, including her father's untimely death and her aspiration to become a writer. She candidly shares her struggles with blindness, including the loss of her sight and her efforts to continue writing using a talking computer. The book also introduces characters with minor disabilities.

In 1997, *The Belonging Place* was released. It tells the story of a Scottish orphan sent to Canada in the 1840s to live with distant relatives, where she must develop the ability to adapt to her new environment. In 1998, *Willow and Twig* was released. The main characters of this book are the brothers and sisters, Willow and Twig, who were left behind by their drug-addicted mother before finally finding safety and a new life with their grandmother. *The*

*Sweetest One of All*, a heartfelt and subtly amusing tale of a mother's love, was released in 2008.

In 2009, *Dancing Through The Snow* was released. At the age of three, the main character, Min, is left behind. Her situation worsens as she experiences exclusion and bullying. After a significant struggle, Min eventually settles into her new family, finds housing on her own, and develops her self-esteem.

Jean Little's unique qualities as a writer are multifaceted and deeply rooted in her personal experiences. Being visually impaired herself, she consistently incorporated characters with disabilities into her novels, a fact underscored in David D. Johnston's article, "Remembering Jean Little, C.M., Vic 5T5: A Life in Three Acts," where he acknowledges, "She was declared legally blind and spent her life portraying characters who were faced similar challenges." This deliberate choice not only promoted inclusivity but also fostered empathy among her readers, offering a distinctive perspective on living with impairments.

By crafting relatable and authentic characters in all her books, Little made it easier for young readers to connect with the stories and challenges these characters faced. As noted in the *WordPress* article titled "Jean Little - Part 3 in my series on Third Culture Kids Children's authors," the author, having read Little's autobiography, found a resonance in *From Anna*, stating, "*From Anna* is one of Jean Little's most popular works and has many similarities with her own life story." Little's writing was renowned for its emotional depth and its ability to delicately explore challenging subjects with compassion and understanding.

Jean Little's uniqueness as a writer can be attributed to several factors: her personal experiences, her skill in crafting believable characters and emotions, her commitment to addressing significant themes, and her sensitivity in portraying a range of situations, including disability, diversity, family dynamics, loss, friendship, and the challenges of adapting to new environments and languages. Catherine Carstairs, in her article titled "Jean:

Celebrating Friendship and Kindness," highlights some of the recurring themes in Little's works, such as the strong bond between humans and animals, and her exploration of "diversity and immigration." This combination of comfort and thought-provocation has solidified Little's position as a beloved author in the realms of children's and young adult fiction.

Furthermore, Jean Little was known for her straightforward and approachable writing style, particularly in her works aimed at children and adults. Her use of simple, clear language made her stories accessible to readers of all ages. Little often employed the first-person narrative, enhancing readers' ability to understand and empathise with her characters and their situations. Realism and empathy are hallmark qualities of her writing, as she incorporated real-life obstacles and limitations into her narratives. As cited in an interview quoted by D. Johnston on the *CBC Books* website, Little herself stated, "I try to be realistic." Many of her works feature strong, independent female protagonists who overcome adversity and evolve through their experiences. Additionally, her stories frequently delve into aspects of Canadian identity and culture.

Geography played a significant role in Jean Little's storytelling, with many of her works being set in locales reflecting her personal life and Canadian heritage. Her home province of Ontario served as the backdrop for several of her stories, incorporating places like Toronto, Guelph, and the surrounding countryside. Little's settings were informed by the geography and culture of Canada, showcasing the country's diversity. For instance, in *From Anna*, Little vividly explores the stunning landscapes of Newfoundland as the protagonist, Anna, relocates with her family. In *Orphan at My Door*, set in the Alberta prairies, and *Willow and Twig*, set in Nova Scotia, readers follow characters navigating life's challenges in small coastal towns. These settings often revolve around classrooms or family homes and are historically accurate, offering readers insights into various eras of Canadian history, including

the Great Depression and World War II. Little's ability to create vivid settings that resonated with her audience contributed to her literary success.

Friendship stands as a recurrent theme in Jean Little's writings. Her stories highlight the value of genuine connections and the profound impact of friendships on personal growth and happiness. Little's narratives also emphasise family dynamics and relationships, underscoring the importance of love, support, and understanding within families.

Additionally, Little frequently incorporated characters with disabilities in her books, prompting readers to better understand and empathise with the challenges these individuals faced. Many of Little's characters grappled with issues related to identity and self-acceptance, while her stories consistently explored themes of resilience in the face of adversity. Her passion for the natural world and animals shone through in some of her works, fostering respect for the environment. Furthermore, she addressed topics such as bullying and prejudice, encouraging empathy and tolerance among her readers. As a Canadian author, Little occasionally infused her works with references to Canadian identity and culture, instilling a sense of patriotism in her audience. In sum, Jean Little's themes centred on empathy, understanding, and personal development, making her novels not only relevant but also instructive for her readers.

In this scholarly review of the literature, an in-depth examination and analysis of pertinent studies on Jean Little, academic writings on Little, and the theme of disability is conducted. The aim is to provide an objective and scientific assessment of existing research and to illuminate the current state of knowledge in this field. This review of the literature serves as a valuable resource for clarifying unresolved questions and deepening the understanding of Jean Little and the overarching theme of disability.

Meagan Gillmore, a freelance journalist based in Ottawa and a person living with a disability, authored an article titled "The Author Who Shaped the Way We Represent

Disability" on *The Walrus* website, with a focus on the acclaimed author Jean Little. Gillmore, both an author and an individual who deeply respects Little and her literary contributions, draws significant inspiration from Little's work. Much like Little, Gillmore harbours a strong desire to write about her experiences with disability, albeit with some self-doubt regarding her writing abilities. As Gillmore reminisces, Little's books served as unwavering companions throughout her formative years, notably during her elementary and high school education, underscoring their enduring influence on her life. Reflecting on her encounter with Little's books at the Guelph library, Gillmore offers a poignant commentary on the value of Little's work, asserting that because books held significance for the author, they equally held significance for readers like herself, as they were among the intended audience. This sentiment, originally expressed by Little in a 1981 profile, resonates deeply with Gillmore, who holds great admiration for Little's writing, particularly her works addressing disability, which Gillmore credits with facilitating her personal growth.

The scholarly article by David L. Johnston, titled "Jean Little was her Family's Poet and a Pioneer in the Canadian Kidlit Community," can be accessed on the *Quill & Quire* website. Johnston extensively examines Jean Little, a prolific writer renowned for her contributions to middle-grade literature, poetry, picture books, and autobiographies. In addition to her literary achievements, Little garnered various accolades and academic recognition. Johnston delves into several aspects of Little's life, including her family, literary works, engagement with assistive technology, received awards, and her passing. Within his narrative, Johnston captures Little's personal experiences, as exemplified by her response to childhood taunts regarding her visual impairment, "She was often being instructed to go and wash her nose because it would have print on it." These remarks poignantly illustrate her struggle with learning from books due to her visual limitations, yet they also reflect her enduring love for reading and writing. Johnston also unveils Little's motivation for

predominantly writing for children, quoting her response, "Because I get to be 10," and highlights how this perspective is central to the enchantment of her literary creations.

Tragically, Little's life was cut short while she was actively engaged in various publishing endeavours. Johnston cites Little's publisher, who attests to the enduring relevance of her writing six decades later.

Judy Stoffman, in her article titled "Blind Children's Author Jean Little: Shaping Narratives of Disabilities," featured on *The Globe And Mail's* website, offers an in-depth exploration of Little's life, education, familial relationships, writing career, and numerous honours. Stoffman emphasises the broad appeal of Little's writings, which both entertain and provide solace to children with and without disabilities. The translation of Little's works into multiple languages, including French, German, Dutch, Japanese, Greek, Welsh, and Norwegian, has facilitated the accessibility of her stories to young readers across diverse cultures. Despite her visual impairment, Little's impressive body of work encompasses multiple novels and a host of accolades, such as the Vicky Metcalf Award (1974), The Canada Council Children's Book Award (1977), Ruth Schwartz Children's Book Award (1985), and the Mr. Christie Book Award (2000). Furthermore, she received the Order of Canada, four Honorary degrees, and every major Canadian literary prize for Juvenile literature. Beyond her literary pursuits, Little's love for travel and her cherished moments with her sister Pat and nieces and nephews are revealed by Stoffman.

*Harper Collins Publishers* provides a comprehensive analysis of Jean Little's literary journey on their website. Little, known for her prolific output, has authored numerous children's books, including noteworthy works such as *Hey World*, *Here I Am*, *Different Dragons*, *Lost and Found*, and *Emma's Magic Winter*. Despite facing visual impairment, Little's enduring love for reading and writing has been sustained with the aid of a voice-

activated computer. Additionally, readers can explore further intriguing details, such as information about her loyal guide dog, Pippa, as detailed on the website.

*The Publisher Weekly* website presents an article titled "Books by Jean Little and In-Depth Book Reviews," offering insight into Little's diverse literary offerings, accompanied by individual book reviews. Titles such as *Willow and Twig*, *Dancing Through the Snow*, *Do Not Open Until Christmas*, *Little by Little: A Writer's Education*, and *Stars Come Out Within* are discussed.

In the article titled "Jean Little: Celebrating Friendship and Kindness" on *Active History*, Catherine Carstairs commends Jean Little for crafting a world where injustice is acknowledged, yet her characters strive to make it a kinder place. Carstairs highlights Little's notable focus on children with impairments and credits her for offering inspirational tales of friendship, the importance of sharing, and respect for diversity. Carstairs goes on to provide detailed insights into several of Little's works, expressing deep respect for the positive impact Little has had in promoting empathy and kindness through her storytelling:

Prior to Jean Little, most children's fiction showed children miraculously recovering from their disabilities. Alternatively, their disability taught them patience and stoicism. By contrast, Little showed children thriving with their disabilities. Children with disabilities were portrayed as valuable members of their community, who gave as much as they received.

In the *Toronto Star* article titled "Jean Little Recalls Her Father, A Poem, and a Day That Changed Her Life," the focus is on Jean Little's deeply personal relationship with her father and the pivotal moment that left an enduring impact on her life trajectory. Little reflects on her conversations with her father, during which he played a crucial role in shaping her literary endeavours. His unwavering commitment to perfection led him to consistently point out her errors and provide an abundance of ideas aimed at improving her work. Additionally,

he offered invaluable insights into the industry and facilitated meetings with esteemed authors and editors, thereby enhancing her growth as a writer. To express her profound affection and gratitude following her father's passing, Little composed a heartfelt poem that culminated with the poignant line, "While I'm alive, so."

The author Beth Stillborn dedicates a piece on her website, *Beth Stillborn*, titled "Jean Little, Great Canadian Writer," to Jean Little. In this tribute, Stillborn unequivocally acknowledges Jean Little as one of her most cherished authors. She demonstrates a meticulous understanding of Little's life and literary contributions, presenting them comprehensively in her essay. According to Stillborn, Little's writing strives for realism, encompassing the challenges that children face while also illuminating the joys of everyday life. Her narratives offer a unique brand of hope—less centered on healing and more on portraying the lives of regular children who happen to confront various challenges.

*The Writer's Trust* provides a succinct yet informative introduction to Jean Little, recognising her as a prominent Canadian children's author with a rich tapestry of honours to her name. The article "Jean Little" underscores Little's practice of drawing extensively from her own life experiences, notably her journey as a person born blind, as the foundation for her storytelling. Little's works often feature characters grappling with physical disabilities and confronting psychological complexities. Additionally, the article mentions the prestigious "Matt Cohen Award: In Celebration of a Writing Life" as a significant accolade in her distinguished career.

The website dedicated to Jean Little, titled *Jean Little: Canadian Author*, shines a spotlight on her picture book, *The Sweetest One of All*. This touching and humorous narrative explores the profound bond between a baby animal and its mother, resonating with readers across all age groups. The book's success is further amplified by its inclusion of vibrant illustrations, capturing the attention and hearts of its audience.

In a comprehensive article authored by Mary Rubio for *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Jean Little's life and work are extensively discussed. Little is hailed as a "Successful contemporary writer of Children's Fiction," and Rubio's piece offers insights into the impact she has on students with impairments, portraying her as an inspirational teacher. Through her profession as an education teacher, Little has been able to achieve financial independence, and her life journey has sustained itself despite her visual impairment. Remarkably, Little's unwavering spirit has taken her to twenty-seven foreign nations, with her novels being translated into multiple languages. Her predominant themes encompass isolation, disenchantment, intolerance, familial stress, and the intricacies of interpersonal and cultural connections.

In *The English Journal's* review of Jean Little's book *Kate*, the narrative is described as a captivating portrayal of the multi-faceted character of an adolescent girl. The review lauds Little's ability to authentically capture the nuances of everyday life and positions *Kate* as a beautiful testament to the enduring power of love. It is recommended as an exceptional addition to junior high school libraries, emphasising Little's consistent production of literature that remains relevant to the experiences of children.

In the review from the *Boston Sunday Globe*, Jean Little is lauded as an exceptionally graceful author. Her books consistently introduce readers to a captivating ensemble of likeable characters, akin to attending an enjoyable house party where leaving these attractive characters behind is the last thing one desires. Little's skilful portrayal of characters and engaging plotlines effectively hold readers' attention, making her novels a compelling choice. Moreover, her unique approach, which incorporates elements of poetry and music, serves as a magnet for young readers, captivating their imaginations and drawing them into her narratives.

*Scholastic Canada* has published a commendatory review of Jean Little, celebrating her remarkable achievement of receiving the prestigious Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award—an accomplishment that marks the eighth time she has been nominated for this esteemed honour. The article provides a comprehensive account of the accolades garnered by Little, underscoring her relentless commitment to writing that began during her childhood, even in the face of blindness. Notably, she utilised a talking computer as a tool for composing her books, a technology that played a crucial role in her prolific literary career. The article also offers an overview of the remarkable journey that Little embarked upon with her talking computer, shedding light on the ingenuity that enabled her to overcome her visual impairment and continue crafting impactful stories:

My computer reads back what I write letter by letter, or word by word, or whole sentences, or it will even read an entire file aloud if I tell it to. You just have to punch in the right command. It will also read the punctuation, the menus, e-mail letters, etc. it will read Googled things too. I usually have it reading out the letters as I type and then I get it to read back what I have done only in whole words. It is tricky! The most important thing is that it will read back to me what I write.

The *CBC's* article titled "Children's Author Jean Little Dead at 88" provides a comprehensive account of Jean Little's life, encompassing her family background, illustrious career, and the numerous honours she received. Little's remarkable journey as a prolific writer is celebrated in this article, highlighting the extensive recognition she earned during her lifetime. Notably, she was honoured with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal, and her consistent nominations for the prestigious Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, one of the most esteemed prizes in the realm of children's literature, underscores the magnitude of her contributions.

Numerous research articles and texts contribute to a comprehensive understanding of disability as a contemporary and universal issue of significance. Among these, Sara Goering's work titled "Rethinking Disability: The Social Model of Disability and Chronic Disease," published in the *National Library of Medicine*, introduces the concept of the social model of disability. Goering challenges the conventional perception of disability as primarily a physical ailment requiring medical intervention. Instead, she distinguishes between impairment and disability, shedding light on the social model's distinctive perspective. This model highlights a disconnect between an individual's physical attributes and their social environment, emphasising that it is the societal framework that often imposes limitations. She cites the theory articulated by Crow C, asserting that "a person's functional limitations (impairments) are the root cause of any disadvantages experienced." In her concluding remarks, Goering underscores the imperative of collective effort in creating a more equitable world for all individuals, regardless of their physical conditions.

In the article "Medical Versus Social Model of Disability" authored by R. Cigman and published in *the International Encyclopedia of Education*, the discourse on the social model of disability is further explored. Cigman delves into the distinctions between the social and medical models of disability, drawing upon Disability Equality in Education to emphasise the core belief that the issue does not lie within the child or their impairment. Instead, the root of the problem is identified in the societal and attitudinal barriers inherent in the education system. Cigman quotes Lord Low, who shares his perspective as an individual with blindness, noting in 2007 that education fundamentally aims at impacting and transforming each unique child. While altering the social circumstances that surround the child can contribute to this transformation, it is acknowledged that individual factors cannot be entirely eliminated. Ultimately, Cigman underscores the central tenet of the social model of disability—its

emphasis on the necessity for social change as opposed to a sole focus on the impairments themselves.

In the article "Canadian Disability Policies in a World of Inequalities" by Deborah Stienstra published in *Societies* (2018), the author discusses how a worldwide system of inequities, which includes colonialism and neoliberalism, influences Canadian disability-related policy. The article explores the disparities that affect persons with disabilities, particularly at the intersections of their condition, gender, race, and age. According to the author, "Constructive actions between Indigenous peoples and settlers may help to find new ways of addressing disability and inclusion in Canada" (1). In order to overcome the disparities that are present in Canada, this article contends that decolonising inclusion is crucial.

There are articles specific to particular regions catering to their disability population. In "Living with Disability: A Content Analysis of the Social Contexts of Women with Disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa" by Johanna Ekblom and Hanna-Sofia Thomson (*Global Studies*, 2018), the emphasis lies in mainstreaming the needs of people with impairments. Education and mobility are highlighted as crucial factors enabling women with disabilities to overcome the obstacles they face in various aspects of social life. The article quotes the World Health Organization, stating, "Without education and mobility, women with disabilities become isolated, which further limits their quest for the same opportunities as persons without disabilities" (32). The study is framed as a response to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Similarly, in the article "Disabilities Research in India" by H. Chandrashekar et al. (*Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 2010), the changing concept of disability is recognised. It shifts from a focus on personal impairment to one rooted in social factors. The article articulates this shift, stating, "Thus, disability is a complex phenomenon, reflecting an

interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives" (5281). The study played a pivotal role in this context, numerous texts are available, and a book review of one such publication is presented.

University dissertations often cover topics related to disability, with some specifically focusing on children or learners. Sharron E. Guillett's dissertation, titled "Quality of Life Among Children with Physical Disabilities" (Madonna University, 1992), lays the groundwork for understanding the relationships between disability, health, and the quality of life among children aged 8 to 15. The study's discovery that "disabled children do not perceive themselves to be disadvantaged by their disability" (83), challenges prevailing notions of disability.

Similarly, Lisa Marie Cooper's dissertation, "Disability as Diversity: Assessing the Perceptions of Students with Physical Disabilities regarding Access and Equal Opportunity in Postsecondary Education" (The George Washington University, 2012), brings to light the historical exclusion of individuals with disabilities from discussions about diversity. The study underscores the significance of taking into account the perspectives of students with disabilities regarding "access and equal opportunity" in postsecondary education, with the aim of preparing them for an increasingly multicultural society (9).

Dissertations also delve into the economic and social conditions of individuals with disabilities. Dr. Jose Fernando Arango Restrepo's thesis, titled "Disability, Living Conditions, and Quality of Life" (University of Oslo, 2015), investigates the impact of disability on the living situations of Colombians residing in rural areas and explores the interplay between disabilities, living conditions, and quality of life. The thesis introduces the concept of the "disability paradox," which underscores the phenomenon of individuals with disabilities reporting a high quality of life (14).

Similarly, Ashmita Basnet's thesis, titled "Disability and Livelihood" (Tribhuvan University, 2022), conducts a comprehensive examination of disability models, disability classification in Nepal, the role of disability in Nepalese society, prevalence estimations of disability in Nepal, and policies and practices related to disability. The study observes a continuous evolution in the social understanding of disability over time and underscores the opportunities available to people with disabilities to improve their standard of living, "Accessibility to various services and facilities seemed to ease their condition by providing comfort in daily life situations. Their participation in social and work life expanded the opportunity for a better standard of living" (53-54).

Dissertations exploring the relationship between literature and disability are not abundant; they are relatively few in number. Radka Lhotska's thesis, titled "Representation of Characters with Disabilities in Children's Literature in English" (Masaryk University Brno, 2013), delves into the portrayal of disability within specific children's and young adult stories. In Chapter II of this thesis, various perspectives challenge the concept of 'disability,' highlighting that "There are numerous distinct forms of disabilities and limitations, encompassing social disabilities, including emotional and behavioral difficulties" (10). Furthermore, the thesis offers insights into the diverse historical and contemporary approaches to disabilities.

Similarly, Andrew Patterson's thesis, "Telling Our Story: A Literary Analysis of Disability Narratives" (Baylor University, 2019), provides a concise history of disability while examining various models of disability that continue to be relevant today (7). This thesis covers a broad spectrum of topics, including the concept of disability, its function, models, and an extensive review of literature pertaining to disability field studies.

M. Ellangothai's thesis, "The Journey from Gloomy Seclusion to Gleaming Supremacy of Visually Impaired Persons in Selected American Novels" (2021), examines the

transformative journeys of visually impaired individuals in American literature, addressing emotional, physical, and social challenges and proposing strategies for advancement. Gawade T. P.'s thesis, "Understanding Indian Experience of Disability with Reference to Select Autobiographies of Persons with Disabilities" (2022), delves into the lived experiences of disabled individuals in India, analysing socio-cultural influences on their lives. These studies make notable contributions to disability studies by offering nuanced insights into the diverse experiences and potentials of individuals with disabilities across cultural contexts.

After conducting a comprehensive review of the literature mentioned above, the research gap is identified as the lack of scholarly inquiries that integrate Jean Little's literary works with the discourse surrounding disability, particularly through the lens of the social model of disability. Despite the existence of numerous research essays and studies exploring Little's life and works, as well as the topic of disability separately, there is a noticeable dearth of studies that bridge both realms. The present study aims to address this gap by adopting a social model of disability to analyse Little's selected works. By doing so, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive examination of how disability is portrayed within the context of interpersonal relationships and societal dynamics in her literature, thereby bridging the existing divide between literature and disability discourse.

The concept of the social model of disability, which emphasises the rights of people with disabilities, has had a profound impact on disability studies, policy, and advocacy. This model highlights the importance of societal change, inclusion, and equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities, in alignment with principles of equality and non-discrimination. Instead of viewing disability solely as a consequence of an individual's physical or mental condition, the social model of disability underscores the role of societal barriers in rendering people with impairments disabled.

The social model of disability, popularised by British sociologist Mike Oliver, challenges the notion that disability is an inherent trait of individuals. Oliver contends that disability is a socially constructed concept born out of prejudice and cultural constraints. He distinguishes the social model from the medical or individual approaches, noting that the latter views disability as a personal tragedy, while the former identifies externally imposed restrictions as the root cause.

The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) played a pivotal role in shaping the social model of disability. UPIAS's *Fundamental Principles of Disability* published in 1975 articulated the core concepts of this model, asserting that disability is imposed on individuals through unnecessary isolation and exclusion from society, making disabled people an oppressed group.

Vic Finkelstein, an activist for disability rights and academics, contributed significantly to the social model. His research focused on how society itself causes disability through exclusion and power dynamics between disabled and able-bodied individuals. Finkelstein's work emphasises that society's characteristics, rather than individual attributes, should be the primary focus.

Colin Barnes, another prominent figure in the field, challenged the medical model of disability and advocated for societal reforms to eliminate barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. He reinforced the critique of mainstream disability research, aligning it with the social model perspective.

Paul Hunt's work during the 1960s and 1970s raised public awareness of the social implications of disability and the importance of disability rights. Hunt's observations underscore the need to break free from societal stigmas and recognise the full humanity of individuals with disabilities.

The social model of disability also incorporates the concept of intersectionality, acknowledging how factors such as gender, race, and sexual orientation intersect with

disability, leading to unique challenges and experiences. However, to create a more inclusive society, advocacy, policy development, and legislative reforms are essential components of the strategy. Additionally, language and terminology play a crucial role in reinforcing the societal identity of disability.

The social model's emphasis on societal change and inclusion, rather than dwelling on the limitations of individuals with disabilities, has influenced disability studies, policy formulation, and advocacy efforts globally. It has played a vital role in promoting diversity, accessibility, and active engagement of people with disabilities in society.

Furthermore, the social model of disability is complemented by the human rights model, which views disability as a social injustice that can be addressed through substantial changes. Both models serve as tools for disabled people to resist societal oppression effectively.

Various academic works and theses, such as those by Dimitris Anastasiou, James M. Kauffman, Oleana M. Marshall, Gillian G. Parekh, Sidney M. Salyers, and Charmaine Agius Ferrante, have delved into the implications and applications of the social model of disability in different contexts and fields.

Tom Shakespeare's book, *Disability Rights and Wrongs*, has challenged conventional disability studies and advocated for a more nuanced understanding of disability, emphasising social factors while acknowledging physical limitations. In 2021, Anna Lawson and Angharad E. Beckett's article explored the intersection of the human rights and social models of disability, emphasising the importance of addressing structural issues and discriminatory practices for achieving equity and social justice for individuals with disabilities. Further, Ranjitha Dawn's book examined disability in India from a sociological perspective, exploring cultural, gender, and religious dimensions and highlighting the legal and programmatic aspects aimed at addressing the challenges faced by disabled individuals.

To sum up, the social model of disability has profoundly shaped the understanding of disability, policy development, and societal attitudes. It underscores the need for societal change, inclusion, and equal opportunities while challenging stereotypes and discrimination. This model continues to inspire research, policy formulation, and advocacy efforts to create a more inclusive and equitable society for individuals with disabilities.

### **Thesis Statement**

As Jennifer Litton observes, "The world is disabling and needs to be fixed." This quote serves as a powerful preamble to the overarching theme of disability and the pressing need for change. Despite advancements in awareness and accessibility through government policies, disability remains a universal and enduring issue shaped significantly by societal attitudes and inaccessible systems. This study delves into the selected works of Jean Little, an author with a disability, to shed light on the persistent challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. It offers insights from a social model of disability perspective, highlighting both the systemic barriers, societal attitudes, and potential solutions that continue to affect the lived experiences of people with disabilities in contemporary society.

### **Objectives**

At the crux of this study lie several fundamental objectives steering the exploration of disability within Jean Little's literary realm. These objectives collectively shape the study's trajectory, aiming to unravel diverse dimensions inherent in the discourse surrounding disability within the context of Jean Little's literary contributions. The objectives are:

- To extract narratives and glean profound insights on the multifaceted subject of disability embedded with Little's writings.
- To delve into the representation and portrayal of inaccessible systems, discerning their impact on the experiences of individuals grappling with disabilities.

- To examine education, as a pivotal factor, under scrutiny for its dual potential—both as an empowering force and as a potential perpetuator of barriers for those with disabilities.
- To dissect prevailing social attitudes, recognising their profound influence on the lived realities and societal integration of individuals living with disabilities.

### **Research Parameters**

This scholarly research critically examines six sequential works by Jean Little: *Mine for Keeps* (1962), *From Anna* (1972), *Listen for the Singing* (1977), *Spring Begins in March* (1966), *Little By Little: A Writer's Education* (1987), and *Star Comes Out Within* (1991), which collectively explore the experiences of characters facing disability. Through meticulous analysis, this study aims to delve into the multifaceted portrayal of disability, elucidating evolving themes of barriers, societal attitudes, and the pivotal role of education in the lives of individuals grappling with disabilities within Little's literary realm. Theoretical underpinnings for this study are derived from Mike Oliver's chapter, "The Social Model in Context," found in *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice* (2009), as well as his essay, "Individual and Social Model of Disability." Additionally, Tom Shakespeare's chapter, "Social Model of Disability," from *The Disability Studies Reader 5th Edition* (2016), and *Disability Studies Today* (2002) by Barnes, Colin Et al, contribute significantly to the theoretical framework, providing essential support for the research.

### **Methodology**

For this study, adherence to the 8th edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* serves as a foundational guideline. The methodology employed is firmly rooted in the conceptual framework of disability theory, with particular emphasis on the Social Model of Disability. This theoretical framework, elucidated by scholars such as Mike Oliver and expanded upon by thinkers like Tom Shakespeare, has been drawn from various

authoritative sources, including books and scholarly articles. Among these sources, *The Disability Studies Reader (Fifth Edition)* by Lennard J. Davis serves as a central pillar of theoretical underpinning. In addition to this seminal work, several other scholarly texts have been consulted to provide a comprehensive and multifaceted analysis.

## **Structure**

The research is organised into five chapters. Chapter One serves as an introduction, providing an overview of Canadian Literature, disability studies, Jean Little's life, education, family, career, writing expertise, and her selected works. It also explores her contemporaries in the literary world, delves into the social model of disability, offers a review of relevant literature, identifies research gaps, presents the thesis statement, outlines objectives, discusses the methodology, and lays out the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two, titled "Navigation from Angles to Access," delves into the disability and social model perspectives found in *Mine for Keeps* and *Spring Begins in March*, with a focus on physical and structural barriers. This chapter explores Sally's life, her disability, her educational journey, and her inclusion in society. It highlights her determination to overcome obstacles, her self-sufficiency, her commitment to learning independently, and her meaningful relationships with friends and her beloved dogs.

Chapter Three, titled "Margin to Mainstream: Miles of Education," delves into the disability and social model insights present in *From Anna* and *Listen for the Singing*. It examines Anna's disability, her journey in acquiring language, her experiences with migration, her pursuit of education, and her brother Rudi's sudden tragedy. The chapter places particular emphasis on the accessibility of education for children with disabilities.

Chapter Four, titled "Segment to Circle," focuses on Jean Little's autobiography, *Little By Little: A Writer's Education*, and the sequential memoir, *Stars Come Out Within*. This chapter centers on social barriers and discusses Little's experiences with visual impairment,

her educational challenges, her encounters with bullies, her development as a writer, her work as a teacher, and her ultimate success as an author despite her impairment.

Chapter Five, titled "Conclusion," consolidates the analysis and presents the observations and findings derived from the study. It offers a comprehensive summary of the research, aligning the outcomes with the initial objectives. This chapter does not directly answer the thesis statement but serves to bring together the insights gained throughout the study, shedding light on the broader implications and potential avenues for further investigation in this field.