CHAPTER VI

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*The Diviners*\(^1\) culminates and closes the circle of the Manawaka works. It is a complex and a profound novel, an exploration of the meaning of a life, a quest and finally the affirmation of a life’s meaning. Its pattern is a diagram of the interweaving of the past into the present and on into the future. The shape of its flowing together of past and present is that of the ancient Yoruba symbol of the endless continuum of time, the serpent swallowing his tail. Margaret Laurence demonstrates that the continuum moves inexorably, but she also demonstrates that the present and the future are not relentlessly and totally predetermined by the past. They may be modified and ameliorated by the force of faith acted out in love. The perception is the final statement of affirmation in what is a profoundly hopeful book: the past is inevitably a part of us, but not the dead hand of the past; rather, by faith, by grace, translated into acts of love, the inheritors may inch upwards, though still within the enclosing coils of the present.\(^2\)

The novel is intimately concerned with voicing the problems of Margaret Laurence’s generation as it emerged from the 1960s. It provides a drawing of Canada as a whole, a country then searching for a past in other people’s stories. Laurence does this in *The Diviners* by pointing to issues that have since indeed preoccupied the country: gender, the family, native rights. It is a book very much of its time yet speaking firmly and surely about all times to come.

The thematic web of *The Diviners* is intricately bound up with the structure and narrative of the novel. We shall therefore be well familiar with all the themes in the sections dealing with narrative and structure. However, I have dealt with each of the themes separately since an understanding of these themes will mean an understanding of the Manawaka cycle itself.

*The Diviners* overflows with ideas about life, about life in Canada, and about life in Canada as experienced by a woman. One can almost feel the pressure on its author to make a final
statement about Life and Art. The novel, dense with themes and symbols, complex in structure, but meandering in plot, not only clarifies the ideas expressed in her earlier books but also expresses all those ideas for which Laurence never previously found a suitable fictional embodiment. *The Diviners* comes to grips with currently debated issues much more explicitly than the previous novels: the search for a Canadian identity; the discrimination encountered by women; the unjust treatment of native people; ecology; psychic and economic alienation; struggle, growth, hope.

It is the story of a profoundly religious pilgrimage, the affirmation of faith and the finding of grace. In this sense, the novel is the culmination of the Manawaka works; not only do ravelled strands from the lives and events of the other books come together here, but *The Diviners*' final statement encircles, encloses and completes them all and then rays timelessly outward from their circle.

The inheritors. Was this, finally and at last what Morag had always sensed she had to learn from the old man? She had known it all along, but not really known. The gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.369)

“Now the wheel seems to have come full circle - these five books all interweave and fit together”.

The Tonnerre family members of which have appeared in *The Stone Angel, The Fire-Dwellers*, and *A Bird in the House*, play a major and thematically defensible role in *The Diviners*. Julie Kaslik (sister of Nick Rachel’s lover in *A Jest of God*) and her husband Buckle Fennick (Mac’s tormented friend in *The Fire-Dwellers*) are present here. Stacey Cameron and Vanessa MacLeod, Morag’s contemporaries play together.

Not only characters but obsessive images recur in *The Diviners*: disemboweled gopher, which Stacey of the *The Fire-Dwellers* like Morag, saw as child: the grotesquely fat woman imprisoned by her bulk (Hagar, Buckle’s mother in *The Fire-Dwellers*, and now Prin); the burning shack that trapped Piquette Tonnerre and her children, which Laurence has described
twice before; and the greatest catastrophe Manawaka ever experienced, the departure of the Cameron Highlanders for Dieppe, mentioned in all Laurence's Canadian fiction.

1. PLOT

In this section I shall present a brief summary of the plot. Since the entire novel centres round Morag Gunn, I shall introduce her in this section. However all the intricacies of her character will be unfolded in the sections to follow.

_The Diviners_ is the last of the Manawaka novels and is the story of Morag Gunn of Manawaka. It follows the familiar pattern of the Kunstlerroman. On one level the story unfolds the process of Morag's life from the death of her parents when she was very young, to today, the novel's present when she is 47, long since divorced from Brooke Skelton, her English professor husband and caught up in a tormenting concern for the 18 year old Pique, the daughter of Morag and Jules Tonnerre. At the same time Morag is coping with the exacting, frustrating, but inevitable process of her own work, the writing of her fifth novel. Bound up in the story of Morag's life is the story of a writer's struggle to be born and to grow, an explicit and diverse explanation of one woman's experience of the craft of fiction in our time and in our society. Implicit in Morag's story is also the explanation and the insistent ratification for the whole enterprise of fiction - as an essential illumination of individual experience and a flashing out of history into wholeness, from the life of an individual to a complex of lives and events and then to an entire culture, its myths and legends.

Morag shares with all Laurence's misfits, problems of identity, injustice and betrayal, but she views them in a broader perspective. Through her imaginative sympathy, she sees her own misfortune as a fragment of something much more grand and terrible. She does so not with Stacey's confused sense of disaster, but with a deeper, more informed insight that discovers a tragic dimension in her story. She is an everyday heroine much like Stacey, but her story reveals heroism of a larger order. Tragedy and heroism were suggested in Laurence's African fiction, but were restrained in her more domestic Canadian novels. Hagar rejects divine comfort; Rachel does not know she echoes the Bible; Stacey belittles her own courage; Vanessa has only a glimpse of her grandfather as a glorious Charioteer. The chariot returns
triumphantly in *The Diviners*, where it is driven by legendary figures such as Piper Gunn, Rider Tonnerre, and the Celtic hero, Cuchulain.

The entire plot centres round Morag Gunn whose first clear memories begin at age five with Mrs. Pearl looking after her as her parents die. She knows only that it is her father’s voice. There is no sound of her mother’s voice, no sound at all. Morag terrified, scuttles back to the kitchen like a cockroach - she is a cockroach; she feels like one, running, scuttling.”(*THE DIVINERS* p.69)

Morag is at the opposite end of Manawaka’s social scale from Hagar Currie as a child. On their first day at school, Morag and Christie are greeted with condemning laughter:

The grotesque Prin, simple in every sense, is almost entirely static, acted upon, not acting, a fool of God. Much later in life, however; Morag realizes that Prin has actively loved her. Morag goes back to Manawaka because Prin is dying.
When Prin dies her grotesque death Morag realizes that she has become her child and Christie’s. Proximity; that day-to-day loving is more important than bloodliness. Towards the end of the book we realise that she maintains similar patterns with Ella, her college friend and with Eva Wrinkler, her elementary school friend. Morag realises that her real home is Christie’s home.

We shall now move on to the narrative.

**2. STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE**

I shall now analyse the narrative of the novel. In a novel narrative is important since it reveals structure: and structure reveals theme and vision. In the course of the narrative we will also be introduced to the major issues in the novel, principally that this novel is a story of attentive social consciousness.
A much longer work than the other Manawaka novels, "The Diviners" is structured in five parts. The first and the fifth, 'River of now and then' and 'The Diviners', are brief chapters of introduction to Morag’s present crises and their resolution about two months later. The three interior sections, 'The Nuisance Grounds', 'Halls of Sion' and 'Rights of Passage' are of the same basic dramatic structure, rising gradually to a climactic event which marks off one stage and heralds one major change in Morag Gunn’s life and growth in sensibility.

In this novel, Margaret Laurence uses separate headings 'Snapshot', 'Memorybank Movie', 'Innerfilm', 'Skinner's or Christie's Tale', 'Pique's Song', and even conversations with Catherine Parr Trail, along with the usual devices of letters and lists to convey the many experiences and influences that merged to form Morag. Laurence’s Memorybank Movies are not simply the result of her effort to distance herself from her material, but are meant to illustrate her belief that every person, writer and non-writer alike makes a fiction of his past truth, and by doing so, transmutes it into new truth. And the new truth is myth.

The folk songs have special appeals and give yet more evidence of Margaret Laurence’s multiple talent. The contemporary time sequence of The Diviners is from one of the warm weeks at the end of spring to the beginning of autumn; in the interim, Morag recalls her past in chronological snatches. These memories build on one another and gain in power through repetition as Morag first relives an event, then comments on it from her current perspective, and then recounts that incident for Jules, Ella or Pique.

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF THE PAST AS SEEN IN THE STRUCTURE

In the entire novel we find Morag the chief protagonist attempting to recall her past. In this section, I have shown that the structure of the novel is intricately bound up to the concept of the past, the fact that it is absolutely important to know one’s past, that the past is inevitably a part of us, that the past plays a major role in shaping our present and that the knowledge of the past helps us to move forward in life though within the enclosing coils of the present.
Morag’s efforts to reconnect ... ‘time lost and time continuing’ and transmit ‘inheritable wisdom’ to the future make *The Diviners* exemplary of the fundamental motive of narrative: the recovery of the past, transformation of the present, and transmission of inheritable wisdom to the future. 4 The past is ‘replayed to a more successful outcome’ 5; it is repeated ‘in order for there to be an escape from repetition, in order for there to be change or progress’. 6 Laurence’s writing is certainly an ‘attempt to come to terms with past’, ‘partly in order to be freed from it’; Laurence refers to ‘the explorations’ inherent in the writing itself ‘as a way of changing’ the patterns of the past.

The structure of the novel- in which time present alternates with time past until, in the final section, the past catches up with and becomes the present- similarly suggests the interdependence of past and present and foregrounds Morag’s efforts to transmit something of value to the future.

The sections, which take place in the past, concern (young) Morag’s relationship with a father and those, which take place in the present, concern (older) Morag’s relationship with her daughter Pique. The alteration of past action with present action shows the influence of past upon present. It demonstrates that the past has made Morag and Pique what they are; but the structure also shows the present acting upon the past, as Morag’s remembering and narrating the past alters her sense of it and thereby changes the present, enabling her to make terms with herself and her daughter, to let go off her guilt about the way she has raised her and to let go off her, sending her on her way with the best wisdom she has gleaned from her own past. The test of what Morag achieves is in what she passes on to Pique, ‘the inheritor’ (*THE DIVINERS*, p.452); and Morag’s legacy is not a ‘nightmare repetition’, but in the words of the epigraph, ‘a place to stand on’.

Reconstructing the past however is not easy and Morag does encounter problems. In *The Diviners*, Morag contemplates problems related to reconstructing the past. She tries to remember ‘what really happened’ and to understand the powers of language. ‘I used to think words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracle. But no, only occasionally’ (*THE DIVINERS*, p.5); she ponders the meaning of photographs and the ‘memorybank movies’ in
her head. She faces problems of memory and knowledge; in fact, the technique 'memorybank' movie implies an image of the artist as 'projectionist'. As regards point of view, Laurence's use of italics to mark shifts from third-to first-person pronoun is a way of rendering the movement of the mind as it interprets and revises experience. Thus we see that the 'creative process' is so deeply worked into the narrative, that all Morag's efforts to remember, reconstruct and revise the past are problems relating to narrative which I shall analyse below.

2.2. NARRATIVE

This section will show that Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* is a novel of attentive social consciousness examining the interaction of the individual and the constructions of Canadian society in the mid-twentieth century. The narrative will also throw light on issues like Laurence's exploration of the man/woman relationship, national identity, ecology and environment through the character of Pique. We also watch Morag learn about the conventions of communication and its gateway into society; we understand her gift of tale telling and story telling by using the form of letters, forms, poems and dialogues.

Unusually for its time, the novel presents a relentless refusal to be heroic or to search for determinist patterns. The issues are many, but the focus is upon women and men, children and adults, minority and powerful, pivoting around history and writing both as means of articulation but also topics in themselves.

*The Diviners* presents history initially as legend, something that provides a pattern and an inevitability because it had happened, is in the past and is possible to recount. But a substantial part of Morag's life is concerned with recognising the changes in the re-telling of legend, and learning the techniques and strategies needed to construct and make history. In the context of the re-telling, we see that each person has to find the points of difficulty, the parts that do not work smoothly in her life, at the same time as resisting the urge to fabricate a version of events where all things do work smoothly. The techniques and strategies to be learned are intimately part of the skills of oral and written communication. We also see in the narrative a tentative
split between the articulation of the construction of gender in the re-telling of Morag’s past, interleaved with the articulation of the familial, the child/adult relationship in the telling of the present interaction between Morag and Pique. Yet the story of the re-telling gives the reader Morag as a child, then Morag the adult defined as a child by Brooke, followed by her rites of passage into defining herself as an adult, and superimposes this past on the present. In what follows I study the re-telling separately from the telling, so that the formal characteristics of each may be thrown forward.

The first section, ‘River of Now and then’, has at least four formal structures: present description, present commentary, snapshots and memory movie. The present description is largely anticipatory, densely filled with imagery, techniques, narrative strategies, and parts of stories that will later be developed. Present commentary is found in Italics that focus the reader’s eye. The first one is about words, ‘I used to think words could do anything. Magic Sorcery. Even -miracle. But no, only occasionally’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 4). The second is about the photographs seen both as tokens of the past and as a ‘jumbled mess of old snapshots’ kept not for what they show but what they hide. The snapshots themselves are split between description in roman type and comment in italic, graphics that separate what they show from a criticism of what they appear to show. Their importance or what they hide lies in the border area between description and comment.

Snapshot one presents the ‘couple by the gate’, almost a parody of classic frontier picture but for the statement made here about the reality beyond the cliché. The couple stands not ‘firmly’ but ‘stiffly’, the choice of word indicating the viewer’s sense of their embarrassment or unease; they are not touching but they stand close in an implied formal intimacy. Broadening the interpretation the describer notes that the house behind them has a ‘gracelessness’ which ‘atones’. There is the projected action of the man having run his fingers through his hair ‘an instant before’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 6); the dog beside her is called Snapdragon, ‘as one would not guess from the picture’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 7); and the child is ‘not like Prin’. In all of this there is a growing sense of questioning. Who is saying these things? Is it the 5-year-old? a child? an adult? Who provides the ‘presumed’ knowledge; who is the ‘one’ who gives us external factual information? And immediately we are told ‘I am
remembering composing this interpretation in Christie and Prin's house' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 7).

The narratorial voice develops the extraordinary complexity of attempts to record memory throughout the following snapshots, as it shows 'what is not recorded in the picture', or notes, 'I don't recall when I invented that one...'; and the reader asks why does this narrator remember the things she does? What do these details mean? By snapshots we have come to the end of the 'totally invented memories' and are moved to the more leisurely recalling of the young child's 'invisible creatures' that peopled her imagination. The kind of characters they are, indicate the child's cultural background; they speak of her isolation but at the same time affirm her contentment. Having done all this implicitly, the narrator then uses them to comment on her present, saying, 'I remember those imaginary characters better than I do my parents. What kind of a character am I?' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 11) – which question will take over the whole book.

The final structure in section one is a memorybank movie. This one is called 'Once Upon a Time There was'. The story is told in the historical present, a tense conveying a sense of fatalism as if everything is known before it happens: 'Mrs. Pearl... has come to Morag's house' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 11). The character description, dialogue, internal commentary is firmly distanced and in the past, but is followed in italics by extensive present commentary on the practical details of Morag's parents' death, a flashback which seems in context like a flash forward about visiting their grave, anger at not knowing them, guilt at forgetting them. snapshot, no purely visual memory to trigger it. With the death of her parents, we sense the resulting emptiness. Yet her mother and father, like the river with its strong current, are flowing 'unknown in my blood, and moving unrecognized in my skull' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 15) as this first section ends.7

Each of the central three sections articulates part of Morag's learning, her entrance into society. Each portrays her learning about communication, both written and spoken, practicing it and articulating through it. The memorybank movies work like colons in punctuation. They both evade responsibility and leave open to interpretation. There is an enormous range of
stylistic variation in the memory bank movies, as they tell forth the mind and the world of the child growing into woman. Each mirrors the vocabulary and grammar development, control of expression, use of colloquialism and literary genre appropriate for the time of life. In section two, ‘The Nuisance Grounds’, there is an intense artificiality of narrative presentation with tales, conversations, lists, songs, innerfilms, as well as considerable typographic play with capitals, italics, space and verse layout. ‘The Thistle Shamrock Rose Entwine the Maple Leaf Forever’ is a lengthy memorybank movie with colloquial vocabulary and structure outlining the child’s age and social context. The section also yields up the beginnings of Morag’s wordplay, which she learns from Christie, as they read Wordsworth who was a ‘pansy’, or rather, ‘daffodil’, and Ossian whose great (fake) Gaelic stories mean so much to Morag’s sense of language and history. Later memorybank movies indicate the importance of lists titles and indexes as ways not only of sorting factual detail but also of organising fictional presentation. The other devices include the innerfilms of Morag’s adolescence, which point the fantasies/daydreams of fame and success in unashamedly ‘corny’ prose (THE DIVINERS, pp. 101-2).

Throughout the three chapters in ‘The Nuisance Grounds’ Morag is finding out what teachers, adults, parents, friends expect of her and schoolmates: the establishments or institutions of education, religion, commerce and peer hierarchy. To a child they have equal status, equal calls on action. Gradually, we watch her learning about the conventions of communication and its gateway into society through reading, writing, speaking and telling. Christie always has a handle on language. Early on he teases her, saying, ‘Did they learn you much today’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 29) and Morag immediately recognises that ‘He says it like that on purpose. A joke. Prin would say it not on purpose.’ The first memorybank movie of the second chapter in this section has a lot to do with language, with Morag correcting herself from ‘feed bad’ to ‘feel badly’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 89), or with her recognising that Christie is addressed as such by lawyer Archie McVitie, while he calls the lawyer ‘Mr. McVitie’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 96). She is learning not only the rules but also the essential flexibility of language.

Morag’s early standoff between Wordsworth and Ossian (THE DIVINERS, p. 51) is doubled in her adolescence by that between Wordsworth and Browning (THE DIVINERS, p. 99). It is
Miss Melrose who encourages Morag to write, who recognises that something is wrong with her eyes, and who focuses Morag on ‘What she has to do’, which is to learn to communicate in writing. This first section also shows her starting off as a journalist on the local paper and finding out that while not all people are ‘verbal’ they often know much more than she does. Having a ‘knack of words’ gives one power, but it is power that should not be abused, should not encourage you to ‘look down on others’.

But the most important communication Morag learns is that of telling ‘tales’, story-telling. It begins for the reader with Christie’s ‘First Tale of Piper Gunn’ from which Morag tells in her head the ‘Tale of Piper Gunn’s Woman’, his apostrophes, rhetorical question and epithets. Morag’s other close relationship with a man is with Jules, and that too begins as an exchange of stories, although his way of telling is quite different from Christie’s. Gone are all the polished epithets, gone the conventions of phrasing. Instead, we have the opening ‘anyway, there is this guy…’, connections such as ‘see’, ‘I dunno’, ‘Another thing is’ and ‘Okay’. When Dieppe happens and Morag reads the lists of the dead, she questions the truth of the stories of ‘bravery, courage, camaraderie, initiative, heroism, gallantry, yet says, ‘probably it does not matter. They may console some’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 117). The only certainty is that they are dead. The final memorybank movie of ‘The Nuisance Grounds’ underwrites this probing of truth, history and story, at first with Christie’s ranting recounting of the legendary past which Morag now says is a ‘fraud’.

The procedure of the memorybank movies in ‘The Nuisance Grounds’ is to work like discrete units of memory, standing alone partly because they are the first in the book. They are to do with the sense, with things that children do not understand but recognise as important, such as ‘law’. Although there are few resonances at first, these build swiftly so that there are parallelisms of topic, of motif and of social event. The procedure is partly because a child’s life is often unconnected and fragmented. For Morag it is Christie who sets the standards of behaviour. Jules provides a kind of positive alternative for life, while Eva Winkler is the negative. Each memorybank movie also presents the elements of verbal communication appropriate to the maturing Morag, from the fascination with oral techniques and history to the journalistic handling of the elements of the news.
In contrast, the memorybank movies of section three, ‘Halls of Sion’, are quite different. At first, Morag opens up to an entirely new world with new ideas and social structures. There is a lot of extended description as she meets women with positive alternatives: Ella, Mrs. Gerson with their Marxism and socialism. On the whole, the memorybank movies units are far more coherent as narrative than in section two. They trap of demanding present attention and activity (existentialism) while denying the past and history (social construction) and lead to the positive ability to construct oneself while negatively denying the social institutions around one. In turn, this generates a stylistic alternation between existential emptiness and the sentimental romance of private desire. The first chapter retains some of the elements found in the memorybank movies of section two. Morag and Ella exchange letters, songs, and poems. The fourth memorybank movie (*THE DIVINERS*, pp. 151-66) is a long, coherent, lightly interrupted but not fragmented piece. It concentrates on forging the connections across emptiness by simple spaces or the occasional asterisk, rather than separate units of memorybank movie.

Many of the shifts in character and time are carried by dialogue, interleaved with increasing resistanceless, more conventional prose because what Morag says is usually socially acceptable, it’s what lies unsaid that is not so, and the unsaid is here diminished. The fourth memorybank movie begins with lists, songs, colloquial vocabulary and expression, but gradually moves to the pattern of dialogue and occasional commentary. The alternation between dialogue and innertalk is about being caught into social structures and about how difficult it is to recognise and break away from them. ‘Halls of Sion’ speaks largely about question of gender — the alternative definitions offered by Ella, Prin or Eva, and the actual road taken by Morag in her relationship with Brooke; and these questions are largely mapped on to those of family, parent and child. The importance of words to Morag is underlined early in her relationship with Brooke when she says, ‘Words words words. Words haunt her, but she will become unhaunted now, for evermore’ (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 168). 8

Writing is again a key topic. Brooke uses the position of literary critic professor to control her expression and herself. He sees her both as a child and as an incompetent writer. The
child/parent separation is mapped on to the woman/man gender issues from the start but only becomes explicit in the second chapter of this section. There are only three memorybank movies in this chapter and in each the relationship between adult and child is explored in terms of past and present. We first find Brooke selectively recalling some of his past while other parts remain repressed until Morag shocks them out of him in the final memorybank movie. Meanwhile, Morag is consistently denying her own past while exploring and developing that of Lilac, the character in her novel.

For Morag, writing is the only way to hang on to her past amid the insidious taking over by Brooke. Lilac, like herself, is ‘inchoate’, and the novelist’s difficulty is to find a way of allowing her character to express.

The child/adult and woman/man concerns are superimposed on to native issues, again by means of Brooke who says, ‘I thought it was supposed to be illegal to give liquor to Indians’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 220) when he sees her with Jules. The section is concerned with gender and family but is also shot through with the metaphors of race and imperialism. The question is how does one deal with oppression without creating further oppression? Morag’s time with Jules returns her to earlier delight with words; she likens him to ‘a dandelion seed carried by the wind’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 223). Language is history; the two rephrase each other.

‘Halls of Sion’ function oddly. There can be huge dissatisfaction because the richness of childhood is suddenly negated. Substituted for the freethinking, obstinate, quirky child is a broken frustrated, strangely submissive woman playing into the hands of man and of social ideology. But it is easy to forget the intensely historical role of the novel, to forget the position of North American women in the late 1940s and early 1950s whose suburban lives were captured so bitingly in McLuhan’s Mechanical Bride.

The fourth section of The Diviners, ‘Rites of Passage’, focuses on the coming to consciousness of one’s complicity. At the same time the section is also about the process of fiction making and its relation to fact, and about the serious business of writing. Morag has to find words before she can act, for her communication is necessary propulsion to action. The three chapters of this section each have a different geographical location: Vancouver, Britain and
Ontario. They generate a sense of serial fiction, self-contained short stories intimately related to each other. The memorybank movies gradually accumulate variety again in reported conversation, italic commentary, signs, songs, reviews and most of all in letters. The new device in chapter 8 is the incorporation of snapshots, this time of Pique, which underline the way that Morag’s memory from this moment on, although about her own life, is punctuated by what happens to her daughter at these times. The first snapshot reports the content of the picture but notes Pique’s eye looking ‘trust’ at her mother. The second is Pique at 3 ½ and generates Morag’s question ‘will she remember’ the time. Other snapshots of Pique, and Pique and Morag, serves to raise many of the questions that surfaced in section one. In a way, these are the beginnings of another story, which eventually surfaces into the present telling while they convey the start of another life. Pique’s life, presented here, centres around the use of tales and her meetings with Jules.

This other life provides a background to Morag’s own, which continues to be linked to questions of sex, gender and power. These questions arise quite specifically from Morag as she sets about constructing her own life. Looking at her landlady Fan and comparing her with Lilac, she asks, ‘Does fiction prophecy life?’ But Fan is a mirror image of Lilac, in real life the character finds ‘terrifying innocence’ in her total knowledge of the world (THE DIVINERS, p. 254). Morag also asks, ‘How much is foisted upon a person and how much is self-chosen to mesh gearlike with what is already there?’ While she learns from Fan, Maggie and Julie Kaslik, Morag’s experiences with men are more to do with learning against them.

The overall key to Morag’s progress is how she writes, how she constructs her fictions. The first memorybank movie of section four is titled ‘Bleak House’ and begins, ‘some of the mountains beyond the city are called snow mountains because the snow is perpetual upon those far off peaks’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 239). Following this introduction the memorybank movies pick up pace with ordinary conversation, description and more letters from Brooke, from Ella, from Christie and later from Jules, prompted by a photo of the newly-born Pique. The memorybank movies are intensely literary recalling more overtly the literary history within which Morag places herself: ‘Bleak House’, ‘A Room of One’s Own’, ‘Portrait of the Artist as a young Skivvy’. Partly, they ironise the picture, allow her to present her troubles at
one remove; but they also implicitly recall the sweeping social background of nineteenth and early twentieth-century fiction as a necessary context to the personal.

These stylistic techniques are set against the literary as topic and Morag's own new fiction, 'Prospero's Child'. She comments that the book takes *The Tempest* and uses it to explore the woman/man relationship. His Excellency on his island, like the prince in the halls of Sion, has to be rejected so that the character can 'become her own person' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 207). The central question is whether Prospero the magician will give up his powers, which disguise the limits of his knowledge and hide from despair. Significantly, Morag moves on from the necessary escape from the island, to questions of making construction. Having realised that one has the ability to change and make, both in life and in fiction, one also has to learn how to handle that power, how not to impose how to achieve balanced activity.

These literary elements continue in parody of the opening of *Bleak House* at the beginning of the first memorybank movies. Coming to terms with Christie and this part of her past ends when Morag returns to Canada to see Christie die in the memorybank movie 'The Ridge of Tears'. Having had a stroke, Christie the taleteller is left with garbled speech except in the final 'Well I'm blessed' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 323). The images surrounding Christie tie the past re-telling into the telling of the present. His voice like the croak of a bullfrog, and his words, belong to the set of Morag's present vocabulary. They pull the reader into present consciousness, preparing us for the last chapter in this section where the Pique and Morag story comes to dominate and introduces a number of other elements from the present telling, such as the character of Royland or images of the long grass and the Canada geese.

Pique and Morag become the centre of the re-telling mainly because as a family unit they provide a constant in a changing life, and also because they are thrown in each other's company so much. The family focus points to all the 'old patterns' emerging from Morag and Jules into Pique: the eccentric parents, a half-breed and a woman writer; the isolated rural school filled with prejudice and bigotry. 10 Again, issues of family and gender are startled into Pique's consciousness primarily by issues of race, made more difficult for her than for Morag because of her Metis blood. When Jules comes to visit, he clasps Morag's hand in their 'consolation against time'. (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 346) He gives both women the songs of his
family, even one of the death of Piquette which he says he has to tell Pique. This necessary
telling of these songs about his story is his way both of becoming aware of the relations
involved in society’s consolations and of using them effectively by articulating the
contradictions. The chapter ties up loose ends in the novel\textsuperscript{11} as if carefully finishing with the
past yet also allows Morag to adopt from the past a motto ‘My Hope is constant in ‘Thee’ and
a war cry ‘Gainsay who Dare’. They would have meant little if simply copied when she was
young, but to the mature woman they seem to be a gift. \textit{(THE DIVINERS, p. 353)}

In a similar manner the tales change their role, as Morag grows older. At first, they provided a
fixed history; then she questioned them and moved on to knowing that they were important
primarily because of the people who told them. The next step was to understand that it is the
historical context within which they are told that is important; further, that it is necessary to
recognise that to make a legend out of someone (like Christie) somehow denies his actual
existence. Finally, Morag sees the tales as a sign of the ‘inner truth’ of people: bodied forth in
a context of the historical that provides a guide to understanding them. The manner in which
tales are articulated is intimately bound up with the relationship between the history of the
teller and the history of the tale. Parallel to this understanding and in part a voicing of it,
Morag writes her novel shadow of Eden. She tells Ella that she needed to known the ‘inner
truths’ of Christie’s tales, that Piper Gunn’s factual existence was not as important as the
emblem of spirit and fight he became in Christie’s mouth. Her novel also tries to deal with the
concept of ‘Infactuality’ which she finds in Jules’s story of Rider as Gabriel Dumont, or the
tale of how Rider got his horse which was ‘from a Cree legend \textit{(THE DIVINERS, p. 341)}. The
tales come to seen as ‘history and fiction interweaving’, social and personal constructions
questioning each other and trying to find a voice for the present.

The ends of the past and of the re-telling begin to be tidied up in this section, of the present
summer, which is the duration of the novel-writing time, and the whole past. The past of
Morag’s life has been defined by questions of gender, although the child/adult relationship is
important, and all is underrun by race. But the present is focused on family relations. The
final section, ‘The Diviners’, attempts this by combining a tentative visual structure with no
memorybank movies and a lot of bank space, and a series of resolutions in image and topic.
The beginnings of the present have their own variety of techniques and strategies which connect then indissolubly with those of the past. There are the continuing dialogues with the Cooper family who owned Morag’s farm with Catharine Parr Traill, which outlines the dominant fantasy/innerfilm of her present: the myth of the self-sufficient farm which A-Okay and Maudie try to realise. The broadest interconnections between the re-telling and the telling are in structure and character. Each recounting of Morag’s past life parallels an event in Pique’s present several significant characters move between both, and all the women in the present narration, Sarah Cooper and Catharine Parr Traill, Maudie, Ella and Royland’s wife, parallel all those from the past providing the gallery of Morag’s examples. In the last section, the death of Jules brings to an end one of the prominent story lines of the past re-telling. The death resolves at least one contradiction: that of why Morag’s own parents, presented in the very first memorybank movies of the book, did not want to see her when they were dying: they had wanted to see her; they has not wanted her to see them. The gaps in understanding...

(THE DIVINERS, p. 365). This ending also tells the story of Pique coming to some consciousness, of her going off to Galloping Mountain; an action filled with potential sentiment that both Morag and Laurence have to retard if Pique, and the novel, is to be left with any balance. The point being underlined is the repetition of pattern from one generation to the next. The problems of the 1970s are not those of the 1950s, so Pique has to work out her own awareness.

Lifted out of context, the beginnings of each chapter tell the story of Royland, the fisherman and diviner, who divines, who loses his ability to do so, yet who does grieve because although the divining is a ‘gift’ it is also learned. It is ‘not something that everybody can do, but ... quite a few people can learn to do it (THE DIVINERS, p. 369). This is what Morag has been waiting to learn from Royland, that despite the withdrawal of her gift of writing there will be inheritors; and in the end even that does not matter so much, it is ‘The necessary doing of the thing-that mattered’. Like the epithet ‘the strength of conviction, that Christie used of Piper Gunn and that the child Morag used in her first tale, at the same time asking, ‘what means the strength of conviction’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 42), it is necessary to use the words even without knowing their meaning because they speak to experience beyond the private. When Pique,
years later, asks the same question, Morag interprets it as the 'belief that the people could make a new life for themselves' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 307).

We now look into the question of voice in the narrative.

### 2.2.1 VOICE

Laurence has rejected the first person voice, which serves for Hagar’s, Rachel’s and Vanessa’s narratives. Voice, the most difficult problems for a writer, is a primary consideration for a novelist. In *The Diviners*, a third person voice combines Morag’s thoughts and language with those of another narrator. “We are captured by the illusion of Morag describing herself.” Morag’s voice is distanced, with no loss in intimacy.

“Although Morag does not technically speak in her own voice, the third person narrative voice, in the past tense for the fictional present and in the present tense for remembered sequences, is always extremely close to her, presenting events through her eyes, constantly adopting her mannerisms until we feel we are listening to her thoughts. Laurence uses this third person voice brilliantly ... The third person allows a minimal distance from Morag creating, in addition, the sense that there are two Morag’s one who experiences and remembers while the other writes, a doubling phenomenon quite common in artist hero novels”.

The third person voice emphasizes that this is the story of a people and a country not simply an individual. A first person voice, Morag’s, is used less frequently, usually signalled by Italics. There are also two major variations on the flashback narratives that form much of the novel: “snapshot” and “Memorybank Movie”. Laurence flanks her organic green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after the years of river - watching...

Pique had gone away. She must have left during the night. She had left a note on the kitchen table, which also served as Morag’s desk *(THE DIVINERS*, p.30.) river metaphor with mechanical metaphors, computer and camera suggesting 20th century forms of man, toolmaker

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and wordsmith. Language is itself the Memorybank Movie upon which our survival depends. The movies may be introduced by the third person voice before a subtitle and the shift to dramatic form. The subtitles are usually ironic and frequently blackly comic. In ‘The Law Means School’, Morag learns the authoritarian and hypocritical structure of society, power and justice are not synonymous and courage is needed for survival.

“River of now and then” (Part I), gives the polar points of Morag’s experience - her foreground, its river setting, her present combination of personal and professional concerns, and her background, the beginning of her life outside of Manawaka. She has been established through the variety in her own voice and the major narrative techniques that Laurence uses throughout the novel. It establishes the middle-aged Morag, loving, anxious, ironic, defiant, “born bloody-minded”, the succeeding generation rebellion, the preceding generations battle with poverty, drought and disease; their ancestor’s trials in the Scottish highlands, and the river metaphor, identified with the generations, genes, instinct, blood, memory, cultural values and individual experience.

Morag’s own voice and ends “The River of Now and Then”, contemplating in herself the flow of generations, Morag’s - and The Diviners’ - deepest concern: “I remember their deaths, but not their lives. Yet they are inside me, flowing unknown in my blood and moving unrecognised in my skull”. (THE DIVINERS, p.15). The image of the river is one of the most important images in the novel and calls for a detailed analysis.

2.2.2 RIVER IMAGE

The river image unifies the novel. The Diviners starts and ends with the description of the river. In this description, there is both acceptance and affirmation of the flux of time and energy through all the generations of mankind.

At the beginning: 17 The river flowed both ways: The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south.....

And as the novel ends:
The waters flowed from north to south, and the current was visible, but now a south wind was blowing, ruffling the water in the opposite direction so that the river, as so often here, seemed to be flowing both ways.

Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence. (*The Diviners*, p. 37).

The river seen from Morag’s desk also becomes a central metaphor for the way in which we experience time and life itself. As the novel opens, this phenomenon introduces Pique’s departure and the apparent contrast between her daughter’s way of life and Morag’s own. Laurence stresses the impossibility of the river’s act, and by juxtaposing the note from the 18-year old, suggests that it too pose impossibility for Morag.

The image also develops into the comment on river slaying, which would destroy the current by drying up the river. Morag is speaking of the need we have for these streams of life, a deep running history and biology without which the winds of daily change have no effect, no role, without which they can produce no contradiction. From the start Morag stakes her claim to the importance of history and expresses her unease at the swiftness with which it can be lost and destroyed. 18 The river seen from Morag’s desk becomes a central metaphor for the way in which we experience time and life itself. As the novel opens, this phenomenon introduces Pique’s department and the apparent contrast between her daughter’s way of life is linked with Morag’s sense of order and Pique’s reversal of this order by staying up at night and sleeping by day. Pique’s reversal is also expressed through her unsettled nature, her difficulties in finding a vocation and her lack of ambition. 19

At the novel’s end the river has accumulative force. The water at its edge is clear, while beyond it, deeper and keeps its life hidden. River depths suggest mysteries in time for individuals, generations and nations. The novel’s ending like its beginning evokes the mysterious loss of human experience and its unity in diversity. For individuals, the two-way flow means that relationships are being continually altered as events are reinterpreted. Though this can be frightening and painful it carries with it creative possibilities for growth.
3. DIVINERS

Gradually, we see that there are many diviners; the writer who selects from the chaotic complexity of events to give certain moments and certain processes meaning and permanence for a person - or a people - is one of these. This section will provide an analysis of 'The Diviners' and the divining process.

1. Christie Logan is the first and greatest character from Morag’s past and her first and greatest diviner, though it takes her most of her life to recognise this. He had fought in the First World War with Colin Gunn. Christie, Manawaka’s garbage man - by his own choice, has his own way of divining people’s lives by their garbage: “By their garbage shall ye know them”...“They think muck’s dirty. Its no more dirty than what’s in their heads or mine (THE DIVINERS, p.32).

Christie is a splendid mentor who teaches her qualities unbecoming to a lady: a disrespect of respectability gained from his long acquaintance of the town’s ‘muck’. “You don’t want to believe everything them books say”. (THE DIVINERS, p.83) He also teaches her never to say sorry’, (THE DIVINERS, p.209) or to make herself a ‘doormat’ (THE DIVINERS, p.107) Morag disowns Christie, spending years trying to be normal, (THE DIVINERS, p.81) before finally coming to recognize him as ‘my father to me’ (THE DIVINERS, p.369) and to know her ‘home’, as ‘Christie’s country, where I was born’. (The Diviners, p.391)

Christie is Morag’s mentor in that it is he who gives her a past and teaches her the power of the creative imagination. Since her parents died when she was a child, Morag’s past is blank. Christie gives Morag a heritage with his stories of Piper Gunn and his woman Morag and her conquest and settling of a new land. Part legend, part history, but mainly spun ‘wholecloth’, ‘out of his head - invented’. (The Diviners, p.367) These are tales of action and adventure of the sort more customarily associated with boys than with girls; and unlike the romantic fictions that shape the consciousness of other female protagonists, they do not teach Morag to expect that her ‘end’ will be a man. Identifying with male action and potential, Morag has more freedom than heroines customarily have; for women may gain by ‘Look [ing] at the male
protagonists who have until now stood as models for human action and say [ing], that action includes me.’ Christie’s stories provide Morag with the inspiration for her first literary creations.

2. Royland is another diviner in the novel. He is Morag’s neighbour, confidante, counsellor and friend. His gift of divining water is mysteriously important to Morag. Royland is a kind of shaman to her, and she can see the actual evidence of his power whenever she watches him divine a well. Through knowing him, Morag gradually recognizes other “diviners”. Royland and his gift form the hinge on which the book’s deepest meaning turns: Morag had once tried divining with the willow wand. Nothing at all had happened. Royland had said she didn’t have the gift. She wasn’t surprised. Her area was elsewhere. He was divining for water. What in hell was she divining for? You couldn’t doubt the value of water....

The tip of the willow wand was moving. In Royland’s bony grip, the wood was turning, moving downwards very slowly, very surely. Towards the earth. Magic, four yards north of the smith’s clothesline (The Diviners, p. 83).

3. Jules Tonnerre is the third diviner. Morag Gunn, was a fellow student of Vanessa, Stacey and Piquette in the school at Manawaka, but she lived there in a middle ground between the children of respectable homes and the metis. It is between her and Skinner Tonnerre, the young Jules who is the son of Lazarus and brother of Val and Piquette, that a bridge of understanding is built that is not, like the trestle bridge of The Stone Angel, a way to destruction. Morag, in the beginning is half frightened by Jules and half fascinated by him; he represents a kind of freedom which complements the defiance of convention personified by Christie Logan, the man so embittered with the world after World War I that he deliberately chooses the occupation of scavenger and the contempt that goes with it.

The fact that Morag and Jules are both outsiders draws them together. Once ineffectually, they try to make love, and then Jules goes away to fight in the way and narrowly escapes death at Dieppe. Morag obsessed with writing becomes the only reporter for the Manawaka Sentinel, and this leads her back towards Jules and his family for she is sent out to report on the burning
of the shack in which Piquette and her children have died, and the scene eats itself into her mind, as the memory of Jules has done, for when she meets him in Toronto as her marriage to the English professor Brooke is lurching to an end, they immediately become lovers, and their relationship is cemented by the memory of tragedy in a terrible scene in which Jules more or less forces her to tell what her sense recorded at the scene of Piquette's death.

Morag and Jules do not remain together. Each lives in his own half world. Both have come out of the isolations of their childhood, Morag as a well-known novelist and Jules as a folk singer. Yet neither is accepted entirely into the respectable white world for the artist is in a different way as much an outsider as the Metis. Each belongs to a peculiar tribe. And while their difference as well as Jules's nomadic habits make any established relationship impossible, and their intermittent contacts are broken by vast gaps of time, Morag and Jules are bound to each other by deep emotional ties and their daughter Pique becomes the image and the concrete fact of their relationship which in its turn is an image of reconciliation.

4. Morag compares her skills as those of Royland, the professional diviner—'He was divining for water. What in hell was she divining for?' (The Diviners, p.102)—and wonders if her gift, as mysteriously conferred, maybe as mysteriously taken away, The Diviners, p.452). Her divining is, like his, related to water in that she spends time 'river watching' (The Diviners, p.3), contemplating the river she lives by— which suggests symbolically her interest in time and the processes that make people. Also like a diviner (in the sense of soothsayer or seer), Morag watches birds, though she observes them for information about seasons and life cycles (The Diviners, pp.404, 411), for natural rather than for supernatural significances. Yet her skills as diviner may actually give her a kind of 'second sight', in that they help her to understand the future, an understanding suggested by her epiphany of a 'Great Blue Heron' (The Diviners, p.357). Whereas Stephen's epiphanies of a hawk-like man and a bird-like girl beckon him to flight (Portrait. 171-2) Morag's heron suggests equanimity about the future: its 'sweeping serene wings' and 'the soaring and measured certainty of its flight' signify 'certainty', 'serenity', 'mastery' even in the face of extinction. (The Diviners p.357). Laurence's use of 'diviner' draws in a full range of meaning: water finder, reader of omens, one who has the skill in the reading of character and events, seer, soothsayer, prophet. The artist-diviner looks
into 'the river of now and then' to fathom life, time and the passing of generations, and through her understanding of the past, gains equanimity about the future. Morag compares her skills to those of Royland, the professional diviner. Her divining, is, like his, related to water. She spends time 'river-watching' (*The Diviners*, p.3) which suggests symbolically her interest in time and the processes that make people. Also, like a diviner, Morag watches birds (*The Diviners*, pp.404-411) for natural rather than supernatural significance. Yet her skills as diviner actually give her a kind of 'second sight'. They help her to understand the future, an understanding suggested by her epiphany of 'Great Blue Heron' (*The Diviners*, p.357).

Laurence’s diviner also has powers, which suggest a Joycean analogy of the artist to God: in giving life to stories that would otherwise die, the artist-diviner performs acts, almost of resurrection. In her first novel, *Spear of Innocence*, Morag seeks a way of expressing an 'inchoate' character, and this problem in some sense, mirrors Laurence’s, for though Laurence’s protagonist is not inchoate many in *The Diviners* are. Laurence gives voice to those who cannot speak for themselves: outcasts, ‘unmentionables’, half-breeds and poor, those for whom living is so difficult that many prefer not to. Most of the Jules family-Lazarus, Piquette, Val, Paul - ‘die before their time,’ (*The Diviners*, p.430). Prin buries herself in her mound of flesh; Lachlan MacLachlan, and Naill Cameron the undertaker find oblivion in drink, giving up the ‘battle in the mind-field, the mine-field of the mind’ (*The Diviners*, p.399); Royland’s wife drowned herself (*The Diviners*, p.241); Eva lives on but is ‘beaten by life’. (*The Diviners*, p.113) Morag’s husband Brooke also denies life in refusing Morag a child and insisting that she remain one.

Not introspective or educated, ‘not very verbal people’ (*The Diviners*, p.155), the characters in this novel do not have language to speak their experience. ‘Loners and crazies’ (*The Diviners*, p.301), they express their pain and rage in cries like Lazarus’s ‘dere mine dere, dem’ (*The Diviners*, p.159) as he rushes into the burnt stack to claim the charred remains of his daughter and grandchildren.

All in this novel are shut into themselves 21, as in *The Wasteland*, ‘each locked in a prison, each confirms a prison’. 22 As diviner, the artist speaks for those who cannot speak for
themselves, fathoms the unfathomable, communicates the incommunicable, mentions the unmentionable. In this, her art has affinities with Christie’s gift of the garbage-telling (*THE DIVINERS*, pp.74-75). Making arrangement for Christie’s funeral, Morag recalls Christie joke ‘who buries the undertaker? Whoever will undertake it’ (*THE DIVINERS*, pp.314, 399). The answer to the riddle is that it is the artist who ‘undertakes the undertaker’: Morag does this in undertaking the story of Naill Cameron and other buried lives. This artist also resurrects the dead: Lazarus is ‘born again’ in Jule’s songs: Jules songs live again in Piques songs, and all are made to live in Laurence’s *The Diviners*.

Laurence’s artist remains compassionately involved with her creation. The conception of art and the artist that emerges from *The Diviners* suggests an aesthetic, which includes the processes of its own creation. Unlike the Modernist aesthetic implied by Joyce, which is separate and apart from the processes that creates it, Laurence’s aesthetic is ‘both fabricated from and immersed in... temporal, social and psychic conditions’, and ‘charged with the conditions of its own creation (*THE DIVINERS*, pp.97, 103); it is a poetics of domestic values: nuturance, community building, inclusiveness, empathetic care that resolves the dichotomy between ‘artisanal’ works and ‘high art’ and ‘counters the modernist traditions of exile and alienation’. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.103)

4. THEMATIC WEB OF *THE DIVINERS*

In the introductory paragraph of this chapter, I mentioned that *The Diviners* contains all of the themes that Laurence wishes to put across. They will be discussed separately in the sections to follow.

4.1. LANGUAGE AND THE MAKING OF FICTION

The making of fiction is one of the important themes in this novel. This section will prove that Laurence has commented at length on words and their power to both make as well as break. Intertwined with this theme is theme of gender. The fact that literature written by men is taken more seriously than that written by women is aptly brought out by Laurence through this novel.
Some aspects of Morag’s personality and development are deftly and convincingly portrayed, particularly her sensitivity to the power of languages, both in its inhibiting aspects, as a social indicator, and its liberating aspect, as an exquisite medium through which an artist can communicate. Even at the age of seven, Morag notices the grammatical lapses of her guardian, Prin: She was the only child and wasn’t none too bright. She relishes vivid colour and rich texture, even though they are found in bizarre forms in Christie’s hovel, and puzzles over the proper way to describe them:

When she peers close (to the flies), she can see their wings are shining, both blue and green. Can they be beautiful and filthy?
.... a blue plush (pl-uush - rich-sounding, but really it is like velvet only cheaper and not so smo-ooth on the fingers) cushion.

Both aspects of languages continue to play an important part in Morag’s life. Her concern for “Proper usage” epitomizes her feelings of inferiority in her relationship to Brooke her English Professor husband.

“Shall we have some sherry?”

“Please,” Morag says, having recently learned to say, simply, Please, instead of Oh yes thanks I’d just love some, or worse, Okay that’d be fine.

While her convictions about the beauty of the poetic “mot juste” are strong enough to allow her to combat Brooke’s patronizing influence: “... almost always if you get inside the lines, you find he’s saying what he means with absolute precision. ‘Sheer plod makes plough down sillion shine’ — I am not sure it really does, but it couldn’t be expressed more concisely and accurately.”

The mature Morag of the novel’s present is no longer concerned with the social niceties. She has also come to doubt her earlier belief that languages can accurately convey sensual experiences, although she remains convinced of the value of the effort:
How could that colour be caught in words? A sort of rosy peach colour, but that sounded corny and was also inaccurate.

I used to think that words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracle. But no, only occasionally.

Laurence has been quoted as saying, "...it's one of the most difficult things to do, writing about a writer. But I had to. At first I made her a painter, but what the hell do I know about painting?" However, her believable portrait of the artist as harassed Canadian woman is one of the most successful aspects of *The Diviners*. Morag experiences many of the barriers that can stand between a woman and creativity, including a husband’s ego, morning sickness and sleeping children. But in her presentation of the internal doubts that beset Morag as a writer (and which surely afflict Laurence as well), Laurence comes perilously close to sinking her novel under the weight of its self-consciousness. Six-year old Morag conveys fear, courage and defiance in her “Hang onto your shirt and never let them know you are scared” (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 28). The adult Morag’s explosive anger, when her husband insists on treating her as a child, issues in some of Christie’s choicest terms. Just prior, her grief and guilt over Prin’s death and Christie’s loneliness induce in Morag “the mad and potentially releasing desire to speak sometimes as Christie used to speak, the loony oratory, salt-beefed with oaths, the stringy lean oaths with some protein on them, the protean oaths upon which she was reared” (*THE DIVINERS*, p.209). Normally, Morag’s language is strong and ironic, but far from obscene.

From believing Christie’s tales, Morag comes to disbelieve them and then to ‘believe in them again in a different way’ (*THE DIVINERS*, p.367). To Pique’s questions about ‘the truth’ of Christie’s stories and Jule’s songs, whether they ‘really happened’, Morag says, in language like Christie’s:

Some did and some didn’t. I guess it doesn’t matter. Didn’t you see? “No, Pique said, I don’t see. I wasn’t to know what really happened”.

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Morag laughed. Unkindly perhaps. ‘You do, eh? well so do I. But there’s one version. There just isn’t. (THE DIVINERS, p.350)

Morag understands that the past, present and the self in its ‘many versions’ (THE DIVINERS p.396) are comprised of tales we tell ourselves and one another, constructs of the fictionalising imagination and that these fictions are constantly revised. Even the past undergoes revision. These realisations are related to her profession as writer. Morag agonizes, in true Calvinist fashion, about whether spinning tales may not simply be a form of telling lies: A daft profession. Wordsmith. Liar, more likely. Weaving fabrications.

Elsewhere, Morag wonders whether, as a writer, she most resembles Christie Logan the scavenger or Royland the diviner. Does she simply “tell the garbage”, by fictionalizing other people’s pain, or is she, like Royland, the possessor of a special gift, which allows her to reveal to others basic truths that they could not see without her help? She comes to the tentative conclusion that fictions her truth: Yet, with typical ambiguity, (Morag was) convinced that fiction was more true than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction. (THE DIVINERS, p.250.) “What is a true story? Is there any such thing? (THE DIVINERS, p.144). That the tales lead back not to ‘real things’ but to other tales suggests a post modern sense of referentiality, a sense of the fiction of truth and the truth of fiction, and a conception of the self as comprised of self fabricated fictions.

Laurence shares Morag’s concern about telling the truth in fiction:

There’s not only the talent in writing well.... The greatest problem of all is to try and tell enough of your own truth, from your own viewpoint, from your own eyes, to be able to go deeply enough... It sounds easy just to tell the truth. There isn’t anything more difficult.25

And she seems to have concluded that this truth telling is impeded by some of the ordinary conventions of novel writing. Although this realisation does not make Laurence’s distancing” narrative devices any more successful, it helps us to understand why she chose them.
Laurence has further expanded this theme through the person of Catherine Parr Traill—one of Canada’s pioneer women—, which shall be discussed below.

4.1.1. LAURENCE AND CATHERINE PARR TRAILL

This section will show that while Morag’s relationship with the tradition of English literature finds Morag pitting herself against dead fathers, her relationship with the friendly matriarch Traill is presented in a conversational mode as dialogue rather than in the written forms of epic and drama, hence opposing high canonical literary forms to more practical and ephemeral creations, letters. It also sets in play the oppositions of sexual politics when Ella, Morag’s poet friend and constant correspondent, and Catherine Parr Traill, famous for her botanical studies, her recipes and practical advice for emigrants in letters, are summoned forth. In this, Laurence raises the question of artistic illusion, the shifting boundaries of life and art as explored through a female perspective. 26 By drawing on non-canonized genres and naming non-canonical figures in their works, these women writers are both revalorising the work of their predecessors and creating a collective female tradition, grounded in the realities of women’s work and in the material conditions for textual production as women’s domestic labour. Remarking the traces of this hidden life in the high literary genres of poetry, drama and novel they provide evidence of the tessera, the antithetical completion. Anomorphic, these texts provide a vision of women’s lives and textual production that distorts the fictional representation of women in the Great Tradition.

Language as the expression of character is illustrated by Morag’s dialogue with Catharine Parr Traill, the 19th century Pioneer who lived and wrote in the Peterborough - Lake field area. Catharine’s formal language, innocent of humour, contrasts comically with Morag’s inner voice. “In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one’s hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing.”27 Traill serves as a model of women’s experience in an earlier century, just as Pique suggests future generations. Again myth and history join hands. Morag takes what she needs from “C.P.T.”, mythologizing the historic character.
Morag’s temptation is to see herself as a weak successor to the tradition of strong Canadian women represented by Traill: “Morag Gunn, country woman, never managing to overcome a quiver of distaste at the sight of an earthworm.... Detester of physical labour. Lover of rivers and tall trees. Hatter of axes and shoves. What a farce” (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 46). Morag prefers to buy food from supermarkets and travel by taxi. She worries incessantly about Pique and suffers from sexual loneliness, a problem unmentioned by the venerable Catharine. Morag’s version of Traills’ energetic pursuits, in the form of directions for filming, is pure slapstick:

Scene at the Traill Homestead, circa 1840. C.P.T. out of bed, fully awake, bare feet on the silver - hazardous floorboard no, take that one again. Feet on the homemade hooked rug. Breakfast cooked for the mutilated. Out to feed the chickens, stopping briefly on the way back o pull fourteen armloads of weeds out of the vegetable garden & perhaps prune the odd apple tree in passing. The children’s educational hour, the umpteen little mites lisping enthusiastically over this enlightenment. Cleaning the house, baking two hundred loaves of delicious bread, preserving half a ton of plums, pears, cherries; etc. All before lunch (*THE DIVINERS*, p.79).

Morag’s life would be considered easy by the formidable C.P.T. In her second dialogue Morag describes herself as caught between the old pioneers and the new. Morag envies “Saint Catharine”, her religious faith and the unspoiled land, which in her day was a visible analogue for Jerusalem, the Golden. Pollution threatens the very survival of Morag’s world. Her third dialogue with the ghost indicates an advance in self-acceptance. Morag promises Catharine that she is going to stop feeling guilty. She has her own work and her garden of wildflowers and human relations: “I’m not built like you, Saint C. or these kids, either. I stand somewhere in between (*THE DIVINERS*, p.332). Morag bids Catharine farewell.

Thus we see that the pioneer matriarch is a friendly adversary, a means of self-testing and reminds us of Laurence’s belief in the importance of assimilating local history. Ontario’s past is “equally necessary” for Morag’s patriation.28
4.2. MÉTIS

The theme of Métis has been discussed in all of Laurence's Manawaka works except *The Fire Dwellers*, a novel in which they do not figure. Below is a discussion of the treatment of the Métis in *The Diviners*.

In her Manawaka novels, Margaret Laurence has ideas of the relationships between peoples of different origins, which she wishes to work out in her fiction, and this she does successfully. But she never loses sight of her characters as human beings, she is always observing them from within in their own rights, for their own sakes, she sees the problems of a people like the Métis not in terms of the action within a community of a faith larger than either the community or its members, but rather in terms of human relationships of the erosion of prejudice through experience and understanding and ultimately empathy. Piquette is suffering humanity calling for compassion at the same time she is an individual caught up in the collective fate of her people.

In Margaret Laurence's tiny Ontario cottage on the Otonabee River two huge posters of Louis Riel and Dumont at once catch the eye of the visitor and remind one of the Métis rebellion in Manitoba and Southern Saskatchewan, which tragically ended with the hanging of Riel in Regina in 1885. She was very critical of the British imperial attitude back home in Manitoba. The grand daughter of an Irish Scots Presbyterian pioneer had lived close to the half Cree, half-French Métis and had soon come to resent the "colonial" outlook of her own people.

Thus it is not surprising that the French Indians should appear as one significant feature of her works set in Manawaka, the fictional embodiment of her own birthplace, Neepawa. The Tonnerre family provides the link between the different books, just as do the recurrent "white" characters. Through this one family Laurence exposes the socio-economic plight of the half-breeds. The Métis functions in her fiction mostly on a symbolic level as means for the writer, who has never really been reconciled to her heavy Irish Scot Presbyterian heritage to face her own inner conflict and to end an old feud.
Old Jules Tonnerre had fought with Riel and Dumont in the 80’s and had retired after their defeat at Batoche into the Wachakwa Valley. There he had intended to build a temporary shack, but that same old shack was later also to shelter his son Lazarus and his son’s children, Jules (“Skinner”), Piquette, Valentine, Paul and Jacques. A few references to the Tonnerre family are made in *The Stone Angel*. The moving short story “The Loons” is centered around Piquette. Valentine appears in a brief but significant episode in *The Fire Dwellers* but it is in *The Diviners*, Laurence’s last novel, in which Skinner plays a decisive role in the heroine’s life. It is in this novel that the Metis theme is treated most extensively.

4.3. MYTH MAKING: A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING THE PAST

A major theme in *The Diviners* is the process of mythmaking, and in particular, the application of this process to the needs of the Canadian imagination. This section will highlight Laurence’s concern with the past and also show that she attaches importance to myth making, an exercise that helps us to understand our pasts.

Morag realises that “everyone is constantly changing their own past.” Morag’s personal growth illustrates the need to come to terms with one’s ancestors, to understand their experience in order to be released from its bondage. Christie introduces Morag to the ballads of Ossians in Galeia as an antidote to the cultural imperialism of Wordsworths’ “Daffodils”. Ossian stimulates Morag so that she is able to imagine Piper Gunn’s woman building a chariot with materials and motifs drawn from the Canadian prairies: her imagination has been repatriated. Folk literature becomes myth when it is deeply accepted by an individual as personally relevant (ibid). It then assumes power to shape that individual’s identity.

In the past Laurence has given mythic dimensions to otherwise rather sketchy characters by suggesting that their relationships to the protagonist re-enact a biblical situation. Thus *The Stone Angel*’s Hagar (like the biblical Hagar) lives in exile from her husband Bram (Abram), and her son John, like Ishmael, is also an outcast. In *A Jest of God* Laurence developed the parallels between Nick Kaslik and the biblical Jacob, not only in his relationship to Rachel
(who, like her biblical namesake, demands of him, "Give me my children"), but also in his relationship to his twin brother Steve, the brother who (like Esau), was disinherited.

In *The Diviners*, Laurence takes the essential elements in these myths: exile and dispossession, and reworks them in Canadian terms. These experiences are not limited to Canadian: Brooke has lost his boyhood India forever, and Dan McRaith, the Scotsman, knows no Gaelic. But Brooke retains his language; he still has an identity as an Englishman, and McRaith retains the land, journeying back to Crombruach to renew his creative powers. The Canadian characters have lost both their languages: [Gaelic was] just a lot of garbled sounds to her. Yet she played the records often, as though if she listened to it enough, she would finally pierce the barrier of that ancient speech....

Jules, with two languages lost, retaining only the broken fragments of both French and Cree, and yet speaking English as thought forever it must be a foreign tongue to him and their land:

I’d like at some point to go to Scotland [writer Morag to her friend Ella] where my people come from....it haunts me, I guess.

The Metis, once lords of the prairies, were now refused burial space in their own land. Morag’s life is an illustration of what will and will not heal the pain of these losses. Morag loves, in turn, three men: the Englishman, Brooke Skelton; the Scot, Dan McRaith, and the Metis, Jules Tonnerre. Only the relationship with Jules bears fruit, a child who carries the blood of the two people who possessed the land before them. Brooke represents the cultural inheritance that attracts many Canadians to England ("I guess there’s something about London, as a kind of centre of writing", says Morag), but makes them feel that their own country is inferior. Dan McRaith represents the country from which Morag’s ancestors, too long ago for her to know their names, set our for Canada. But the value of these cultures for her, Morag comes to realize, is mystic and not literal.

*The Diviners* contains 3 sets of myths: Christie’s tales of the Highlanders and of Morag’s father in World War I, Jules Tonnerre’s tales and songs and the adult Morag’s imaginary reconstruction of Catherine Parr Traill. Christie Logan, Morag’s guardian, is the first spinner
of tales in the novel, and his stories of Piper Gunn, Morag’s mythic ancestor, are set both typographically and stylistically from the rest of the text. Although Christie is always a colourful speaker, the language in the tales has an archaic sonority:

Christie’s First Tale of Piper Gunn:

It was in the old days, a long time ago, after the clans were broken and scattered at the battle on the moors, and dead men thrown into the long graves there, and no heather grew on those places, never again, for it was dark places they had become and places of mourning.

Although as Morag enters adolescence, she begins to correct Christie’s storytelling from her history books, she later gives up the chance to enter Sutherland, the home of her ancestors, saying to Dan.

“It has to do with Christie. The myths are my reality....And also, I don’t need to go there because I know now what I had to learn there....I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not.”

“What is then?”

“Christie’s real country. Where I was born.”

That is Christie’s tales were valuable to Morag as myth, and not as history. Jules Tonnerre, Morag’s lover, is also a teller of tales, about his Metis ancestors, Rider Tonnerre and Old Jules. As with Christie’s tales, the point is made that their value does not lie in historical accuracy.

Rider was called Prince of the Braves, Skinner said [writes Morag to Ella], and his rifle was named La Petite. In factuality (if that isn’t a word it should be), those names pertained to Gabriel Dumont, Riel’s lieutenant in Saskatchewan, much later on. Jules’ stories stand even farther apart from the text than Christie’s. After Morag first goes to bed with Jules, they have a brief conversation about his family as he walks her home.
Although we are involved to assume that Jules told Morag his stories then, they are grouped together, each with a title, several pages later.

When Morag incorporates these tales as well as Christie’s into her mythology, she has come to terms with what Margaret Atwood calls the “ambiguity” of Canadian history, for in Christie’s tales Riel is a villain, and in Jules’ he is a hero. “Canadians,” writes Atwood, “don’t know which side they’re on.” So, the proper response is Morag’s when in relating these stories to her small daughter Pique, she takes neither side.

The gift of myth making, like the gift of divining, is “finally withdrawn to be given to someone else.” There comes a day when the adult Morag requests a story about Piper Gunn and Christie is unable to remember one; when Jules, whose myths had reached a further stage of refinement when he recast them as folk songs, develops, throat cancer and sings no more. But Pique is also a folk singer and will continue the myth.

At the end of the novel, Pique, whose restless search for identity has, as the time scheme of the novel allows us to see, paralleled Morag’s own, is making a journey back to her father’s people, with her grandfather’s knife as a talisman. But she also wants to carry a Scottish plaid pin of her mother’s, and Morag assures her that, when she is “gathered to her ancestors, “Pique may have it as well.” And then, symbolically, Pique will recover the birthright that Lazarus Tonnerre and John Shipley, the original possessors of the knife and the pin, and both exiles in their own land, had traded away.

Behind Jules, his poverty and despair, stands Rider Tonnerre. The settling of the Canadian West and the founding of Manawaka required the dispossession of the Metis, symbolized for Morag by the fire that destroyed the Tonnerre home. Behind Christie and his bitter self-reproach stands Piper Gunn. He belongs to another tale of dispossession in which the Scots were driven from their homes to Canada by the Duchess of Sutherland. Dan McRaith’s painting of their burning crofts provides Morag with a corresponding symbol. Similarly, Christie’s war cry, “The Ridge of Tears,” at first seems just another of his colourful oddities; but she gradually realizes that it expresses the pathos of human fate. She feels herself
mysteriously caught up in history and fate when she and Jules exchange gifts. He gives her a plaid pin, which had originally belonged to Hagar in *The Stone Angel*; she gives him a knife, marked with the letter T, which had belonged to Lazarus Tonnerre. As these items pass back and forth between the Curries, Shipleys, Tonnerre, and Gunns. They stitch together the ancestral pasts in a common fate.

As these items change hands, they become relics offering the blessing of the past. They become signs of the deepest past of all, in which opposing individual, families, and tribes are reconciled through the ancient stories and places that they share. “Beyond your great-grandparents,” Laurence explains”...the ancestors become everybody’s ancestor’s”. Eventually the long lines of western Canadian families inhabit a common past, which, from the vantage of the present, appears legendary rather than historical. At this point, “their past has misted into myth”. The mythical past is history reviewed by the imagination. Just as Morag half recalls and half creates her own past, and the resulting invented memories are true for her, so, through a “collective cultural memory”, do we mythicize history and give it the passionate truth of art. It is a marvelous coincidence that pin and knife should find their way into Morag’s and Jule’s hands, but the relics are signs of a coincidence and marvel of another kind. The histories of their antagonistic families coincide by exhibiting the same epic pattern, following the parallel lives of Piper Gunn and Rider Tonnerre, both real people transmuted into legendary heroes. Their marvelous tales gain the permanence of art in Morag’s novel and Jule’s songs.

We could conclude this section by saying that beyond the rebukes and disputes of time lies a shared, mythical timelessness, which, in all her novels, Laurence invokes through literary and Biblical allusions. Myths are timeless in the sense that they are universal, endlessly repeating the human drama of origins, banishment, and homecoming.

4.4 THE CANADIAN IDENTITY

Laurence tells us that the search for a national identity should first begin with a search for a personal identity. The four heroines in the Manawaka works that I have already discussed are engaged in the search for personal identity. However, it is *The Diviners* that Laurence discusses this issue in the political sense of the word. Laurence has provided a way out for the
much elusive Canadian Identity. Tracing and knowing one’s origins and coming to terms with the past is a solution to this. Since this theme has been extensively brought out in this novel, I have divided this section into various subsections for the purpose of clarity. All the sub themes discussed here are interrelated and are ultimately connected to the theme of national identity.

4.4.1. LAURENCE’S COMMENT ON THE ENGLISH TRADITION, TREATMENT OF GENDER

This section will show that in *The Diviners*, Laurence works against wider and older traditions reworking epic quest and Shakespearean romance in a revision of a central myth of Canadian culture, that of the ‘fortunate fall’, and proposing an alternative conception of ‘paradise’ and ‘the artist’. Laurence also defines herself against Modernists James Joyce and T.S. Eliot, drawing on *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* for her portrait of the artist as a young woman, and on *The Wasteland* for its concern with the uses of the past.

*The Diviners* also has affinities with feminist quest novels published in the early 1970’s. These novels follow a pattern: Woman seeks ‘freedom’ from conventional roles, looks to her past for answers about the present, speculates upon the cultural and literary tradition that has formed her, and seeks a plot different from the marriage or death that are her customary ends.

Morag Gunn uses her fiction to make her way in the world and to make sense of the world: Morag says, ‘If I hadn’t been a writer I’d have been a first class mess.’ (*THE DIVINERS*, p.4) Morag is also a reader, a reader of Shakespeare, Milton and Donne. Thus we see that unlike most women, Morag reads- and Laurence writes against- works which centre on male figures, concern male experience and are at the heart of a male-defined cannon. *The Tempest* with its one bland and conventional female character, and *Portrait* which registers women only as idealisations or sexual objects seem odd and unlikely models for the development of a strong female protagonist. The epic quest, which concerns a young man’s search for his father as part of his search for himself, seems similarly inapplicable; for since women ‘must assume their husband’s name’ as well as their husband’s home, and ‘identification with the father can only interfere with development.”

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But Laurence shows Morag engaged in a question for the father and shows her maturing from an identification with 'Prospero's Child' into the power of Prospero himself. In the course of this section, we shall see that, far from accepting the values of these works, Laurence critiques them: her artist as 'diviner' suggests an alternative to Joyce's 'artificer' and her adaptation of epic quest and 'fortunate fall' redefines 'paradise' as a process, 'the doing of the thing' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.452), rather than something tangibly and finally won.

For her portrait of the artist as a young woman, Laurence draws on Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This section is an attempt to prove that by the re-writing of canonical texts which expose the phallocentricism of the tradition by displacing the hero, Laurence also makes a statement about the conception of Art, Artist and Life itself that emerges from *The Diviners*. The connection to *The Tempest* is even more glaring in Morag's latest novel *Prospero's Child*. This fable has implications within the authoritarian structure of the family and also has resonances in the political sphere, nationalist liberation struggles against colonialism.

There are similarities between Laurence's Morag of *The Diviners* and Joyce's Stephen of *Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man*. Joyce's Stephen, the exemplar of the 'monstrously isolated, monstrously narcissistic, pedestalled paragon' dominates the modernist imagination. Both Laurence and Joyce suggest that selfishness is a necessary part of the development of self which is required of an artist, and the name 'Gunn' suggests Laurence's ambivalence toward these strengths. Both Morag and Stephen are determined to escape the provincial communities that have shaped them. Morag develops defences like his, turns her back on the claims of others, refusing- as he does- to return home except for a funeral (Prin's) and death. (Christie's). But the young woman artist, Morag, faces greater difficulties, though she emerges stronger on account of them. She also experiences a more radical alienation from self, suffering the self-division and self-doubt which are part of growing up female and which leave her more vulnerable. Morag can never be as ruthless as Stephen can because she forms a tie of a sort that Stephen never does, to a child. In her relation to Pique she must reconcile the conflicting claims of the other and self, of being a mother and an artist - the conflict at the heart of the female Kunstleroman.
The earliest memories of Morag and Stephen show young minds acquiring knowledge through sense impressions and language. Both are nearsighted children who develop interest in language to compensate for their visual handicaps. But whereas near-sightedness is a little more than a physical inconvenience for Stephen, it strikes to the heart of Morag’s self-esteem. Though she is not particularly vain Morag knows that ‘wearing glasses’ means a girl’s life is over. *(THE DIVINERS*, p 123) Stephen and Morag learn similar ways of defending themselves against the authority of elders and the pressure of peers: they learn ways of concealing their intelligence and never to ‘apologize’. Whereas Stephen turns his sense of difference into a conviction of his own superiority, Morag remains more dependent on the opinions of others: ‘work like hell… Although not letting on to the kids… (they ) would be dead set against you’ *(THE DIVINERS*, p.120). Though for both education is the means of escaping stifling circumstances, Morag remains divided between impulses to conform and to rebel and is less certain of her course. And whereas girls exist for Stephen only as objects to be idealised or lusted after, boys are to Morag a constant presence and threat.

Boys are generally mean. Those girls who have a hope of pleasing them, try. Those who haven’t a hope, either stay out of their way or else act very tough and try to make fun of them first’ *(THE DIVINERS*, p.68).

Although both Stephen and Morag find their ways out of town, Morag, like Laurence, realises the value of what she has left behind. She leaves only to realise that she has taken the town with her, that ‘the town inhabits you’ *(THE DIVINERS*, p.227); ‘the whole town was inside my head, for as long as I live’. *(THE DIVINERS*, p.353) However, it is *The Diviners* more than *The Portrait* that gives a clear and generous rendering of the community (Manawaka) that the protagonist flees and takes with him.

The difference in their conception of artist is suggested by the figure each writer uses to symbolise the artist. Stephen’s conception of the artist is Dedalus, the ‘artificer’ who escaped the labyrinth of the Minotaur and constructed a means of flight, a symbol of the art he aspires to in order to escape the Ireland he despises, Morag develops the skills of a diviner - insight or
intuition or 'some other kind of sight' (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 4) - in order to 'fathom' what goes on in people's mind. Since water is a traditional symbol for consciousness, 'divining' is an apt symbol for what Morag tries to do in writing: to fathom people and the processes that make them what they are. Whereas Stephen is concerned with developing escape arts that will allow him to flee Dublin and become a 'creator' with power like God's, Morag is concerned with developing qualities of insight and understanding that will enable her to understand Manawaka and to make its people live.

*The Diviners* is thus -besides other things- an attempt to overthrow the English tradition. It is also one way of ridding Canadians of their English colonial past.

### 4.4.2. COLONIALISM: SHAKESPEARE AND MILTON

In this section we shall see that *The Diviners* revises Milton's *Paradise Lost* to show Eve making her way through the world once the gates of paradise have been closed behind her. It rewrites Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to attack the possessive paternalism of the tyrannical father on behalf of independent and active daughters who, like Miranda with Caliban, have a high linguistic competence and can become facilitators of exchange among different cultures so shaping a new world through dialogue, not power and magic.

Laurence tells us that finding an identity is opening up the Self to the Other. Besides being his last play, *The Tempest* is also Shakespeare's version of the 'fortunate fall': Prospero, whose name means 'I make to prosper', recreates a world, restores what is lost, restores the creatures of the world to themselves. In both, Shakespeare's play and Laurence's novel, art is the means of redemption and art is compared to magic; and in both works, the future is represented by a daughter. But Laurence's revisions empower the female, replacing the patriarchal with a matriarchal line. Whereas in *The Tempest*, Prospero's daughter Miranda is merely 'chaste, silent, and obedient', a receptacle for the future. In *The Diviners*, Pique is an artist in her own right: power passes from father (or step-father) to daughter and thence to daughter, through a female line, to a female 'inheritor'.
Laurence grafts *Tempest* allusions on to a pattern of loss and recovery which is her version of the fortunate fall, and suggests in her reworkings a sense like Shakespeare's and Milton's that redemption involves the loss of fragile innocence and a recreation from painful experience, and that this process requires faith. And that Laurence no more values a 'cloistered virtue' than Milton does is clear from her portrayal of the innocents of this novel, the childish Prin (*THE DIVINERS*, p.17), and Birdie (*THE DIVINERS*, p.373). But Morag's powers are considerably more attenuated than Prospero's, which makes it more difficult for her, since her purposes are not sanctioned by God or a providential plan.

As her English professor husband Brooke represents the authority of the cultural and literary tradition Morag reveres, but as she herself becomes a writer, her authority comes into conflict with his and destroys the marriage. But her writing also becomes a means of regaining the self she has suppressed to be with Brooke, the means of 'regaining paradise'—and the publisher's representative who arrives at the Vancouver boarding house where she takes refuge after leaving Brooke is described as 'angel of the Lord...come to explain how paradise can be regained' (*THE DIVINERS*, p.297). Her writing is also a means of exploring the questions of innocence and experience that she confronts in life. Morag's first novel 'Spear of Innocence' which portrays innocence as damaging (*THE DIVINERS*, p.225), is a repudiation of Brooke's ideal of her; and her second novel, 'Prospero's Child', similarly repudiates the person she was in the marriage, the child-wife in awe of male authority. Morag describes this novel to a friend, as having certain parallels with *The Tempest*, 'which may be presumptuous' but is 'the form the thing seems to demand':

It is called 'Prospero's Child', she being the young woman who marries His Excellency, the Governor of some island in some ocean very far South, and who virtually worships him and then who has to go to the opposite extreme and reject nearly everything about him, at least for a time, in order to become her own person. (*THE DIVINERS*, p.330)

Morag allies herself definitively with her past and her 'darkness' when she flees Brooke and becomes pregnant by Jules, a half-breed who, like herself, grew up on the margins of
Manawaka society, and who represents not only 'her immediate Manawaka past, but the historical Indian and French roots of Canada' (THE DIVINERS, p.60). Bearing his child, a daughter who has the dark skin of the Metis, Morag burns her bridges back to the respectable world. Her departure from the 'doll's house' occurs in the middle rather than at the end of her story, with the rest of the novel 'a writing beyond this ending. In presenting her protagonist a choice between two men, Laurence evokes what Jean E. Kennard terms the 'two suitor convention', according to which the growth of a woman is marked by her choice of the right suitor over the wrong suitor, the right suitor embodying the goals the protagonist aspires to. In the contemporary version of this, the husband has become the "wrong" suitor, the representative of patriarchal restrictions, the lover represents freedom. But Laurence revokes this convention only to subvert it, for Jules does not provide a resolution or even a resting place. Having outgrown the role of child-wife Morag must become an adult herself: 'If she is to have a home she must create it.' (THE DIVINERS, p.291) The association of the home she makes, the farm at McConnell's Landing, with 'some kind of garden' (THE DIVINERS, p.406) suggests that the creation of home is the means of regaining paradise; though since 'the state of original grace ended a long time ago' (THE DIVINERS, p.196), this paradise is a mere approximation- or 'shadow'- of Eden (Shadow of Eden is the title of one of Morag's novels). And that this home is near a small town like the one she fled and represents a return to a place which is 'different, but...the same' (THE DIVINERS, p.354) suggests that regaining paradise requires coming to terms with the past. The home Morag makes for herself and her daughter is 'different' from her Edenic childhood and the false haven of her marriage: it is a new order wrested from adult experiences and pain.

While Miranda teaches Caliban to speak and maintain hierarchy, European culture being inculcated in the aborigine, Morag listens to the natives' talking and learns from them.

As artist ordering her new island paradise at her own disposition, Morag is repeating the gestures of that great fabulist Prospero. To the epic quest for a new world home with its spiritual overtones, is added the plot of the pastoral romance with its escape from city to 'green world' outside social convention where a new order may be created. However, Laurence's Miranda leaves the Manawaka she has been living with to start a life as a modern
bard. Her achievements no longer come through the agency of a man but by her own efforts. In this, Laurence revises the heroines' plot, staple of the novel since the 18th century, to describe the marriage plot, concerned with marriageship, (the heroines being chosen in marriage by the hero), in which the heroine gains her power by being chosen as wife of the hero. Laurence's new order is an order of one in which the 'Shero' makes the choice and works hard for her own success. Laurence like Shakespeare is concerned with the question of the illusion of art. Morag's actors, like Shakespeare's are 'all spirits' melting 'into thin' air. Hers, too, is an 'insubstantial pageant', a vanishing 'vision'. Morag differs from Prospero in that she is suspicious of the way the words automatically write themselves on the page (THE DIVINERS, p.330). Morag has magic too - her power is the word. But no, only occasionally (THE DIVINERS, p.4). She too, has an Ariel in the person of Catherine Parr Traill. "So farewell, sweet Saint" - henceforth, I summon you not (THE DIVINERS, p.332). 
The Diviners' connection to The Tempest is made explicit when Morag Gunn talks about her latest novel in a letter to her friend, Ella.

Its done in a semi-allegorical form, and also it has certain parallels with The Tempest .... It's called 'Prospero's Child,' she being the young woman who married His Excellency, the Governor of some Island in some ocean, very far south and who virtually worships him and then who has to go to the opposite extreme and reject nearly everything about him, at least for a time, in order to 'become her own person'.
It's as much the story of H.E. (THE DIVINERS, p.270)

Here Morag abandons the role of Prospero to Brooke, taking on the role of Miranda. Through her involvement with Caliban, i.e. Jules Tonnerre, a relationship grounded in the activities of language, the creation of novels and songs, Morag develops her resistance to Prospero's power and plots. The critique of patriarchal authority is effected through a contrast between these two male figures. Morag's quest is achieved when she practises abnegation with her daughter. Pique is free to become her own person. Finding identity paradoxically comes in opening up the Self to the Other.
The above mentioned ideas of finding an identity, of freeing oneself from the colonial past, first germinated in Laurence's mind on reading Mannoni's work. Laurence was tremendously influenced by his work.

4.4.2.1. THE INFLUENCE OF MANNONI'S WORK ON LAURENCE’S

In the introductory chapters of this thesis, I have dealt in detail with the various African influences which can be traced in Laurence's fiction. Octave Mannoni’s work, in particular, has helped Laurence shape her last novel *The Diviners*. Laurence's interpretation of the relationship of Prospero and Caliban has been filtered through her reading and misreading of Mannoni’s *Prospero and Caliban*: a study of dependency relationships of master and slave in the context of imperialism. Here Brooke Skelton, is son of British colonial officer in India. When the Empire broke up there, he brought a form of cultural imperialism - the Great Tradition - into Canadian Universities, an indoctrination, as Morag learns that can stifle any indigenous expression. Caliban is played by a North American Indian. Through this clash of cultures Laurence stages her version of the *Battle of the Books* of the European centred cultural tradition which exerts its hegemony in Canada and valourises high culture, letters over an indigenous oral culture. According to Mannoni, to revolt against this system is not sufficient: a conceptual change must take place in a radical rethinking of the concept of universalism used to attack racism.

The question then is what will human beings do with differences? Confronting this question creatively, rather than hiding behind the traditional liberal screen of universal sameness will lead, Mannoni suggests to the ‘decolonization of the self’ to the split subject continually oscillating between sameness and difference, self and other, the subject in process. It is the emergence of the creative response to the question of difference - political, racial, sexual, as well as class differences - which is Laurence’s subject in *The Diviners*.

Thus, in slamming the door on Brooke Skelton, in combining the role of Miranda and her empathy for the Other, Morag/Laurence rewrites the canonical story. Her version involves the abdication of absolute authority the abandonment of identity and sameness, the undercutting
of magical powers of the word, in order to allow for the play of differences, to permit voices and other knowledge to circulate. When H.E is removed from power, they speak out.

4.4.3. THE IMAGE OF EUROPE IN THE DIVINERS

My primary concern in this section is with the image of Europe in Margaret Laurence’s *The Diviners* and to explore aspects of the Celtic legacy in Canada. But I should like to begin by attempting to place her work within this border context of genealogical investigation in contemporary Canadian writing.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s the upsurge of nationalism that characterises Canadian writing is particularly manifest in a quest for origins, an attempt to identify the distinctive specificity of Canadian culture by employing discourses of the past to examine the ancestral heritage. This process of exploration takes various forms, most of which are based on historiographical or archaeological models of investigation. Thus Rudy Wiebe, in *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) and *The Scorched Wood People* (1977), redefines the parameters of the Western Canadian experience by upending received version of Prairie history, which have largely been constructed by outsiders to the region, and replacing them with a version which emanates from Western sources, while Margaret Atwood and Robert Kroetsch have rejected the model of history entirely preferring an approach that is more appropriately viewed as archaeological. In *Surfacing* (1972), Atwood’s unnamed protagonist’s quest for identity involves laying bare her personal past and is enacted through her search for her missing father, whom she comes to view as ‘an archaeological problem’. Here are numerous references to prehistoric animal life, which is linked to her parents and appears to represent a conception of a unitary ‘natural’ self existing before the divisions occasioned by the pressures of culture and civilisation beginning a process of fragmentation. For example, her reference to her parents as ‘mammoths frozen in a glacier’ her saying they are ‘from another age, prehistoric ... remote as Eskimoes or mastodons’ (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 144), and her likening of a blue heron to a pterodactyl (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 63). Gradually the protagonist unearths her own personal origins and aspects of the national past, until she arrives at a point where she is presented as psychologically whole again and the various binary
division, which the text sees as typifying contemporary Canadian society, have been broken down. Kroetsch's *Badlands* (1975) is more overtly archaeological in that it actually details the progress of an expedition to uncover dinosaur bones, while at the same time using this literal digging-up as a paradigm for a quest for representatives of two ancient cultures, the Chinese and the Amerindian.

The historical and archaeological models are by no means the only ones' employed in this quest for origins. Myths of personal and family origins provide another obvious focus for such investigation, with genealogy, another discourse of the past, providing the model for this kind of search, and the tracing of individual ancestry and the construction of family trees assuming representative significance as the ancestors being traced are located as archetypal figures in the Canadian consciousness.

Recent Canadian writing frequently invokes ancestor figures in this attempt to reassess the national past. Al Purdy, Eli Mandel and George Bowering have all written poems about grandfathers. The grandfather figure emerges as a larger than life creation who challenges the conventional conception of Canada's Victorian past as stuffy and Presbyterian. Purdy, in poems like 'The Country North of Belleville' and Atwood, in poems like 'Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer', have taken the settler-past as a reference-point and attempted to show how the formation of Canadian psychologies can be related to the physical environment of Canada. More specifically still, numerous writers in the contemporary period have looked back to the settler-past to find literary precursors. Thus Atwood turns to Susanna Moodie, and Kroetsch invokes Frederick Philip Grove, while Margaret Laurence, in *The Diviners* summons up the ghost of Catharine Parr Traill, Mrs Moodie's sister and author of the Canadian Settler's Guide, as an ancestor figure with whom her protagonist Morag Gunn can engage in dialogues. In each case the delving back into a bygone age light suggests a purely retrospective perspective, but the response to the past is very much a current issue, since it provides a platform for a reassessment of Canadian identity in the present. The genealogical paradigm is employed in a dynamic rather than a static way; instead of simply asserting the existence of 'reality' of a supposedly pre-existing line of inheritance, it transforms existing notions of identity and essays the construction of new one.
This is the context out of which *The Diviners* is written. Laurence’s novel is less obviously a post-modernist fiction, but with its constant stress on the mechanics of writing its polyphonic narrative method and its multiple representations of versions of Canadian cultural identity which deviate from Eastern orthodoxies as to what constitutes Canadianness, it is equally metafictive. And it is equally concerned with transforming notions of ancestry by using the genealogical paradigm. In both texts there is an absorption with myths of place in which ‘Europe’ figures prominently.

**4.4.4. SEARCH FOR ANCESTORS AND THE PAST**

According to Laurence the search for one’s identity should begin with a search for one’s roots, one’s past. In the course of this study we have already noted that this is one theme that Laurence is most preoccupied with. Laurence tells us that the only way to freedom is by identifying one’s past. Much has been said about ancestors and the importance of the past in this chapter. This section tries to give a more complete understanding of the theme of national identity and its relevance to the concept of the past.

In *The Diviners* ‘Europe’ mainly takes the form of Morag’s Scottish origins. As an orphan who feels she has ‘come from nowhere’, (*The Diviners*, p. 289) Morag may be seen as a typically Canadian protagonist. She feels she has ‘no past’ (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 257), but paradoxically constantly searches for one. As she gets older, she becomes increasingly absorbed by images of the settler-past and in the present of the novel, the moment in which she is writing – and implicitly involving herself in another discourse of the past, autobiography – she sees herself as ‘caught between the old pioneers and the new’ (*THE DIVINERS*, p. 170), between the Catharine Parr Traills of the original settler-past and exponents of a new variation of this experience, the counter-culture generation who are returning to the land who are represented in the text by A-Okay and Maudie Smith.
Each of these elements is important in Morag’s exploration of her own past and that of Western Canada. The image of Europe occupies a particularly complex position within this process of exploration since, while on the one hand there is the suggestion of an essentially transplanted culture, Morag’s Scots origins also represent something of an alternative to the received ‘European’ constructions of Canadian identity which Morag is taught. She learns to sing ‘Oh Canada’ and ‘The Maple Leaf Forever’ and particularly loves the latter song, singing it ‘with all her guts’ *(THE DIVINERS*, p. 70) and taking particular cognisance of the lines in which the thistle, the shamrock and the rose – the various strands of British cultural identity – are seen as entwining the maple leaf. So, on this level, Scottish culture is allowed a central place within the Canadian mosaic, while in the same section of the novel the Metis are seen as being beyond the social pale.

Elsewhere, however, the suggestion is that English and Scottish cultural traditions are poles apart and the Celtic world finds no place in the Canadian myth. Thus, when Christie finds Morag learning Wordsworth’s ‘Daffodils’, he opposes it with James MacPherson’s Ossian poems, showing her the Gaelic text and lamenting that he cannot read the language himself, while castigating the English for not admitting the authenticity of the Ossian verse. More generally, his tales of Piper Gunn present an alternative to school learning in the sense that they are an expression of a vibrant oral storytelling tradition. In this respect Scottish culture is seen as having an affinity with the Metis culture in that both are presented as having been marginalised by mainstream Canadian Establishment values. Christie’s tale of Piper Gunn are paralleled by Jule’s tales of Rider Tonnerre, a mythological ancestral figure from the Metis past. This connection is confirmed by a number of thematic correspondences, of which dispossession is perhaps the most significant. The dispossession of the Metis is conveyed in various ways: on the historical and public level, in comments on the fate of Louis Riel and the status of rebel and traitor accorded to him in official version of Canadian history; on a more personal level, in the denial of a burial place in the town cemetery to Jules’s father Lazarus, which leads Morag to comment: ‘The Metis, once lords of the Prairies. Now refused burial space in their own lands’. *(THE DIVINERS*, p. 268) The dispossession of the Scots is most obviously seen in the way the text portrays the events which led many of them to migrate to Canada, the Highland Clearances. These form the starting point for Christie’s tales about
Piper Gunn and the theme of dispossession is explicitly underscored when Morag refers to one of the paintings of Dan McRaith, her Scottish lover while she is in London, by the title ‘The Dispossessed’.

Not surprisingly, then, Morag’s background as an orphan, her early awareness of the repression of aspects of Scottish and Metis culture and her absorption as a writer with the way language constructs identity, an important motif from the opening pages of the novel onwards, all create the desire to explore her ancestry. The genealogical quest comes to a climax when she decides to go to Britain and it continues to be important in the final sections of the text, which describe her life after her return from Britain.

She goes to Britain, partly attracted to London as ‘a centre of writing’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 331) and partly to visit Sutherland, the area of Scotland from which her ancestors came, though she is unsure what she may ‘learn’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 331) from this. She thinks of this journey as a ‘pilgrimage’. (THE DIVINERS, p. 369) Once in Britain, she procrastinates over going to Scotland and eventually when she does go with Dan McRaith, her decision to do so is motivated as much by desire to see what his family is like as to visit Sutherland. She stops short of her goal, unable to give a precise reason for so doing, but saying it has something ‘to do with Christie’ and concluding, ‘The myths are my reality’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 390). So the ancestral homeland is seen to be important as a mythic notion, a mental construct rather than an actual geographical location and the coming to terms with this mythic part of oneself becomes more crucial than any actual completion of the roots journey. She leaves Scotland saying, ‘It’s a deep land here... but it’s not mine except a long, long way back’ (THE DIVINERS, pp. 390-1). She decided that her home is ‘Christie’s real country. Where I was born’ (THE DIVINERS, p. 391) and when, shortly afterwards, she learns that he is seriously ill, she decides she is going ‘home’. ‘Home’, then, comes to signify the place of one’s Canadian origins, in this case the small prairie town of Manawaka, not the European place from which one’s ancestors came. And when Morag tells tales to her daughter Pique, they are tales about Christie, not Piper Gunn. She too values the oral tradition, but creates her own version of it and it is a distinctively Canadian one.
So the legacy of the Scottish experience is explored and rejected on a literal level, but its mythic significance is still valued and continues to inform the remainder of the novel after Morag's return to Canada. The final sections of *The Diviners* are concerned with a fusion of Scottish and Metis heritages, most obviously in the way in which Pique, Morag’s daughter by Jules, attempts to embrace both sides of her ancestry. Significantly, Morag’s marriage to the English Brooke has been a sterile one, but she has a child by Jules. The text suggests the union of Scottish and Metis strands holds out the possibility of a new multi-cultural identity for Canada in which English origins will no longer play a major role.

*4.4.4.1. SCOTLAND*

In the touchstone passage in Canadian writing, Morag Gunn, still looking for a centre of origination, goes to Scotland, wondering where she might find a sense of her true ‘home’. This is where I shall begin my exploration of this subject again connected to the subject of national identity, a search for the past.

‘Away over there is Sutherland, Morag Dhu, where your people came from. When do you want to drive there?’ Morag considers. ‘I thought I would have to go. But I guess I don’t after all’. Why would that be?’ ‘The myths are my reality. Something like that. And also, I don’t need to go there because I know now what it was I had to learn here.’ What is that?’ ‘It’s a deep land here all right,’ Morag says. ‘But it’s not mine, except a long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not.’ ‘What is, then?’ ‘Christie’s real country. Where I was born.’ McRaith holds her hand inside his greatcoat pocket. Around them the children sprint and whirl.

Of that decisive moment of her subsequent repudiation and identification within and against Scotland, Kroetsch comments: ‘Morag Gunn is there but she isn’t there, she isn’t there but she’s there.’ It becomes interesting, then, to consider the nature of the relationship between Laurence’s elaborate registration of Scottish reference and allusion and this final mark of recognition and reorientation. But before we do so, it is worth reminding ourselves that such
figurings of Scottish, or more accurately Highland, antecedent in process of self-definition is far from being solely a Canadian phenomenon. George Orwell recalls how, at this appalling preparatory school, his younger self was subjected to a carefully nurtured rich man’s cult of Scotland: Ostensibly we were supposed to admire the Scots because they were ‘grim’ and ‘dour’ ('Stern' was perhaps the key word), and irresistible on the field of battle. More significantly, the face which Scotland itself turns to the rest of the world is frequently a Highland face. Given the ethnic and geographic composition of Scotland, it is quite extraordinary that a Scottish identity is more often than not invoked in terms of Highland ways and Highland virtues. And yet 'the history of Scotland since the Reformation reads in many ways as a sustained confrontation of the Highlands and the Lowlands'. While it may be true that every country has its minorities, its lost opportunities and its disappearing traditions, it is also undeniable that few cases match the ways in which the Scottish imagination is so dominated by the figure of the Highlander. From her North American perspective, Laurence challenges this dominance, imagining a Canadian processual memory, first, in terms of the Highland myth, and then in terms of a more immediate and domestic imaginative archaeology.

Some characteristics of these Highlands extensions into Laurence’s Canadian territory are made explicit in her classic essay ‘Road from the Isles’.

No one could ever tell me whether my family had been Lowlanders or Highlanders, because no-one in the prairie town where I grew up seemed very certain exactly where that important dividing line came on the map of Scotland. I decided therefore that my people had come from the highlands. In fact they had not ... Whatever of the Old Country had filtered down to me could roughly be described as Mock Scots. The Scotland I had envisaged as a child had been a fantasy... This experience is in some sense as true for the home-dwelling Scot as it is for the emigrant diaspora. Walter Scott himself, in a series of articles of the Quarterly Review was compelled to acknowledge the spuriousness of the historical basis claimed for the Scottish origination myth.
[Scotland's] inhabitants believed themselves, and by dint of assertion persuaded others to believe them to be one of the most ancient nations in the world... This error was no mere transitory ebullition of vanity, but maintained and fostered by reference to diverse respectable tissues entitled Histories of Scotland. The more recent creation of an independent Highland tradition, in which Scott was to play an important role, and the imposition upon the whole Scottish nation of the new tradition, with its outward show of badges and the related paraphernalia of a tartan gallimaufry, was the work of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

We could conclude by saying that Laurence's prolonged evocation of the traditional apparatus of the Scottish romance of origins was itself triggered by a radical act of existential decentring. 'I always knew', she wrote in 1970, 'that one day I would have to stop writing about Africa and go back to my own people, my own place of beginnings'. In a retrospective prefatory note to 'Road From the Isles' she adds the reflection, 'I came to a greater understanding of the Scot's clan system through a certain amount of knowledge of the tribal system in Africa. In Margaret Laurence's transatlantic intervention we witness a successful challenge to, and to a greater or lesser degree, represent the Victorian past that has exercised such an important influence on the shaping of modern Canada, and in each case the escape from, the bondage of a historicism in which Canadians became the validation of somebody else's history. Laurence's historical fiction looks, rather, to an act of severance and to a literary declaration of Canadian independence.

4.5. THE CREATION OF PIQUE: AN ANSWER TO THE PROBLEMS DISCUSSED IN THE DIVINERS

Pique, Morag's child, is the child of Canada's founding races and symbolizes Canada's future. Challenges for a new generation of women are also suggested through her. Pique is sometimes sentimentalized. Her search for self and identity seems narcissistic at times and is in fact symbolic of Canada's search for identity. Pique's restlessness reflects contemporary problems like ecology and environment.
Morag’s conviction that conditions for her daughter’s generation are infinitely more difficult than they were for herself is convincing:

“When I was her age, beer was thought to be major danger. Beer! because it might lead to getting pregnant. Good god, Royland... The word seems full of more hazards now. Doom all around (THE DIVINERS, p.22).

Laurence’s statement that Neepawa was “Beben writ small, but with the same ink”, or Hagar’s that the plagues go on from one generation to another is close to the vision found throughout the Manawaka cycle.

Pique’s restlessness reflects contemporary social problems. Morag links it with threats to the environment from pollution and other man-made horrors: “No wonder the kids felt themselves to be children of the apocalypse” (THE DIVINERS, p.4). River-slaying now appears to Morag’s imagination as a crime worse than murder. Pique, who lacks the ambition Jules noted in Morag, mocks her mother : “Do. do. Always that. Do I have to do anything? Don’t worry I’ll get a job” (THE DIVINERS, p. 195). Her freedom is a catalyst for the repressed anger of solid citizens, who resent her life style. Pique feels their anger, when she hitch hikes with a guitar. In Ontario , she has been taunted for having Indian blood, and for having a mother who fails to fit a conventional social slot. The old patterns recur, Morag thinks. She remembers similar humiliations and wishes she could spare Pique.

Like the river, Pique is drawn in two directions. She inherits two mythologies. Her ancestors, represented by Jule’s songs and by Christie’s tales as retold by Morag, contain her future and her past. Music is the medium for Pique’s generation. She treasures the Metis ballads from her father and writes one of her own that begins with “There’s a Valley holds my name”.

She was named after Jules sister Piquette, who dies in the shack fire. At the novel’s end, Pique intends to join the communal life of her Metis uncle’s family at Galloping Mountain. This journey “Home”, like the rest of life, is backwards/forwards process. Pique hopes to share in their life and contributes to it for an unknown period. Her generation accepts unstructured
situations. Pique is the child of Canada’s founding races (Indians, French, Scots and English) and symbolizes Canada’s future.

Thus we see that *The Diviners* spans three generations. The Puritan workethic homilies continue in this fifth book to influence the characters into feelings of guilt or failure which result in remarks addressed to God. Hagar Shipley’s Scottish tie pin and motto “Gainsay who Dare”, which she thought were lost in John’s trade to a Tonnerre, now get valued by Morag. Lazar Tonnerre’s hunting knife is restored to his grand-daughter, Pique, who will one day inherit that pin, too, and Christie’s book, ‘The Clans and Tartans of Scotland’. Pique leaves her mother to settle near the Galloping Mountains to help her Uncle Jacques Tonnerre raise orphan Metis children. Morag attempts to have Pique avoid being hurt in the ways that she had been as a child.

This impossible task leads Morag to conclude that:

“One of the disconcerting aspects of middle age was the realization that most of crises which happened to other people also ultimately happened to you.” (*THE DIVINERS*, p.44)

Morag troubled child of two cultures emerges as a budding artist who can create songs and give love. Pique can be seen as a symbolic answer to reconciliation for Canada, which should treasure and preserve what it has.

*The Diviners* ends on a decidedly optimistic note with Pique accepting her twin ancestry, having found her place in Canada. Morag has an Ontario farm home where friends can visit and yet has enough solitude in which to keep writing. Morag is left, then, in an ideal type of writer’s location, similar to Margaret Laurence’s own home.

“Tomorrow the weekend will begin, and friends will arrive. We’ll talk all day and probably half the night, and that will be good. But for now, I’m content to be alone,
because loneliness is something that doesn’t exist here, in this best place of mine.”

The novel concludes with Morag ready to ‘set down her title’, and ready to write the novel, and the links between ‘title’ as ‘claim’, deed to property, and ‘authorship’ - an ‘author’ is one who gives existence to something, a begetter, father or founder - suggest that making a home is part of gaining authority.

Morag attains an authority which is customarily male and which authorises her to originate - in Laurence’s conflation of epic pattern and Kunstleroman - to make ‘something new’. By creating Pique Morag has proved that there is hope for individuals in particular and for nations in general. Through this novel she is specifically talking about Canada’s future. Laurence concludes that although our present and our future is governed by our past, it is not the dead hand of the past. Survival with hope, grace and dignity is possible.

*The Diviners* is one of the most criticised works. Novelist Marian Engel, who reviewed *The Diviners* for *Chatelaine*, remembers reading the proofs with the excitement that is generated by a major work... its greatness was there like an object... Unlike the Vanessa MacLeod stories, *The Diviners* is untidy...65 Clara Thomas also finds the structure epic in intention and techniques. Laurence’s longest, most complicated prose narrative incorporates traditional epic conventions such as stories of heroic battles, lists, heightened descriptions, oral techniques 66. The essential unity of technique and vision has been discussed by critics as diverse as Jean-Paul Sartre and Wayne Booth. *The Diviners* illustrates this literary axiom particularly well. The creative vision that underlies the work is located in Laurence’s understanding of the way in which humans experience time. Simple-minded notions (such as the one-way flow of time, or the idea that individual pasts consist of clearly verifiable sets of events) are invalidated. In *The Diviners*, the technical brilliance of voice and place, the handling of narrative, and the structuring of human experience are correlatives for the vision: an understanding of time as a living river incarnate in human generations, *a river which flows two ways.*
Although *The Diviners* is Laurence’s most political work, it is also her most spiritual one. With this novel, Laurence closes the Manawaka cycle.

NOTES

1. *The Diviners*,

2. Clara Thomas, *The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence*, p. 168

3. Margaret Laurence, quoted in Marci MacDonald, “The Author: All the Hoopla Gets her frazzled”, interviews with Margaret Laurence in *The Toronto Star*, 18 May 1974, p.5.


5. ibid., p.228.

6. ibid., p.134.


8. Not without its own melodramatic leaning to E. A. Poe’s ‘The Racen’.


10. A blindness evident in some of the residents of Laurence’s own area who tried to ban *The Diviners* itself; see Patricia Morley, *Margaret Laurence* (Boston: Twayne, 1981) p. 133.

11. And indeed, in the exchange of the plaid pin and the knife, ties up loose ends in Laurence’s Canadian novels.


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24. Margaret Atwood, “Face to Face”, *An interview with Margaret Laurence in MacLean’s*, May 1974, p. 44.


32. Michel Fabre, Words and the World: *The Diviners* as an exploration of the Book of Life’ Canadian Literature vol. 93, Summer 1982, pp. 60-78

33. see Duplessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending*, pp 84-104.


36. the term is used by many critics including Ellen Moers, Literary Women (New York, 1979)


40. Margaret Atwood, Surfacing (London: Virago, 1979) p. 46.

41. ibid., p. 9.

42. This theme is discussed in the article 'Beyond History: Margaret Atwood’s surfacing and Robert Kroetsch’s Badlands’, in Shirley Chew (ed.), Re-vision of Canadian Literature (Leeds: Institute for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, University of Leeds, 1985), pp. 71-87.


56. Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, p. 3.

57. Ibid., p. 158.

