Chapter VI

The Diviners

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The Diviners

The Diviners (1974) is the last novel of the Manawaka series. It reveals Laurence's personal quest as well as her search for the Canadian past. Laurence defines herself against modernist James Joyce drawing on The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man for her portrait of the Artist as a young woman.

The Diviners has affinities with the feminist quest novels published in the early 1970's To name a few are Erica Song's Fear of Flying, Margaret Drabble's Realms of Gold, Margaret Atwood's Surfacing and Laurence's The Diviners. In all these novels the woman seeks "freedom" from conventional roles, looks to her past for answers about the present, being influenced by the cultural and literary tradition that has formed her. The Diviners is the last novel of Laurence and the writer brings in many of the themes, images and ideas and techniques introduced in her earlier works. Many readers have felt that the five Manawaka writings should be read as fundamentally one work, a suggestion echoed by Laurence herself. “Margaret Laurence has said that she would like the five Manawaka
works to be read, essentially as one work. They are all infused with movement, process of living, adapting, aspiring, achieving and dying.”

In a similar vein “Denyse Forman and Uma Parameswaran speak of “sacramental overtones” in the cycle’s first three novels, for a search for identity which is also an indirect search for God.”

“The Diviners is concerned with nineteenth century Scottish settlers around the Red River and the indigenous Metis.” It is the story of a woman’s quest for an understanding of the human community. The life journey of Morag Gunn, for over five decades, is never for a moment regarded as a solitary quest. Laurence’s commitment to the pluralistic vision of the world is fully realised in the novel. The Diviners addresses universal concerns around the issues of race, class, gender and the environment. Laurence is concerned with the injustice, prejudice and oppression suffered by those who lack influence and power. Commenting on the religious humanism in this novel, Gabrielle Roy says: “It is a search for water, truth, identity, words, but beyond all that, for whoever or whatever compels us to endless search.”

The Diviners is a well-written novel imbued with universal meaning. Laurence suggests that certain connections exist between all human beings. They include the quest for material as well as spiritual fulfillment, the need for a bond with others. But these quests and
needs are pursued in different ways by different individuals and cultures. The protagonist’s relations with her family can be linked, to all familial experiences. At the same time, they remain unique to her personal circumstances. The novelist reveals an awareness of the necessity to locate individual and group experiences in their social, historical and cultural contexts.

The Diviners was published in the Spring of 1974. It is the summation of Laurence’s career. The Diviners was eagerly awaited by all readers familiar with her previous work. Between 1963 and 1970 she had published four novels, two collections of short stories, one travel narrative and one critical study. The high quality of this publication, The Diviners, had gained for Laurence a large and enthusiastic audience. By this time Laurence had become one of Canada’s foremost literary figures. The written and the oral accounts of the past in The Diviners are transformed over time to serve individuals in their quests for self knowledge and knowledge of others. A clear track exists between Laurence’s representation of women and the other groups in society in The Diviners.

In The Diviners the reader enters the mind of Morag in the present as she endeavours to come to terms with both the past and her ongoing experiences. William New’s comments on The Stone Angel can be applied in this regard to The Diviners:
Throughout Hagar's quest to relive the movements that have eluded her and to stave off the moment that awaits her, she thinks of her past life not as 'then' but as something interpenetrating 'now' as something ongoing as a body of moments of transformation.5

The novel is divided into five parts, and within these parts there are eleven Chapters. Part I is titled “River of Now and Then” and contains chapter 1. Chapters 2, 3 and 4, are included in Part 2, titled “The Nuisance Grounds”. In part 3, “Halls of Sion” chapters 5, 6 and 7 appear, and in part 4, “Rites of passage”, chapters 8, 9 and 10 are included. The final part bears the novel’s title “The Diviners”, and contains one chapter. Within these segments, Laurence employs a remarkable variety of narrative devices and techniques. These include photographs, dreams, movies, newspaper articles, songs, oral talks and letters. Throughout the novel, Morag Gunn, the central character, is the individual actor from whose perspective the events and actions in the novel are witnessed.

The Diviners is the story of forty-seven year old Morag Gunn, a writer from Manawaka. It is the story of her lovers, her daughter, her neighbours, and her inner growth. Morag moves from a small prairie town to Winnipeg, Toronto, Vancouver, London and Mc Lonnell’s Landing, and Ontario, a town even smaller than the Manitoba town of
her childhood.

The protagonist Morag Gunn of Manawaka is a writer of novels. On one level the story is about the process of Morag's life when she was young, to that of a forty-seven year old lady long since divorced from Broke Skeleton, her English professor-husband. She is caught up in a tormenting concern for the eighteen-year-old Pique, the daughter of Morag and Jules Tonnerre. She is worried about Pique's restless behaviour and is struggling to write her fifth novel. She lives in the rural Ontario beside a river that, through an effect of the wind, appears to flow both ways. The river serves as an emblem of time and recollection.

The novel is composed through a counterpoint of past and present. Morag recalls her uncomfortable childhood in Manawaka, where she was raised by a garbage collector and his wife, her cultured and sheltered life in Toronto as the wife of her former English professor. She remembers her rebellion and flight to Vancouver and Britain, where she developed as a writer, her return to Canada and her roots and her lasting love for Jules Tonnerre.

In the first section of The Diviners, "River of Now and then" Morag is depressed that her teenaged daughter has escaped from her to the west leaving a note on the typewriter. The sudden departure of her daughter triggers off Morag's memory, when she ponders over the
past on looking at her old snapshots. Though they are all jumbled and in a mess, they still serve as an effective monuments of a bygone past beginning from her parent’s death. She says:

I've kept them, of course, because something in me doesn't want to lose them, or perhaps doesn't dare [...] a jumbled mess of old snapshots which I'll still be lugging along with me when I'm an old lady, clutching them as I enter or am shoved into the Salvation Army Old People's home or wherever it is that I'll find my death. (TD 14)

After the death of her parents, it is the beginning of her own journey out into the world.

In Part 2, the “Memory bank Movies” in the Nuisance Grounds presents Morag’s experience as a child in Manawaka, as the adopted daughter of Prin and Christie Logan, the town’s garbage man. Morag is ashamed of her foster-father’s profession, that of a scavenger. She suffers shame, humiliation, discrimination and in spite of the genuine affection of Prin and Christie, she feels that she is from another planet. Morag meets her classmate, a Metis Youth, Jules Tonnerre with whom she has a relationship. Jules at the end of her school life enquires about her plans for the future. Morag is ready to go away, to be free to make her own identity. She happily answers: “Going to Winnipeg this fall. To college and I’m never coming back” (TD 181). She finds
admission in the Winnipeg University. But, here again, she seems to be a homeless outsider, only eager to move away.

In Part 3, the “memory bank movies” reveals details of Morag’s life at the university. Here Morag comes across an English Professor Brooke Skeleton, son of an English school master in India. The literary discussions which Morag has with Brooke, both in the class and outside slowly lead from admiration to love. Finally Brooke proposes. They marry and settle down at Toronto. Morag realises after eight years of married life with Brooke that he confines her to a domestic schedule and attempts to govern all her activities, both physical and intellectual. It is at this stage Morag concentrates on writing her first novel ‘Spear of Innocence’.

In due course Morag becomes close to Ella, a budding poet. Ella is loving and courageous. She has great concern for Morag. Morag shares with Ella, her own desires and anxieties about her art, facts about her marital status with Brooke and in later years her depression over Pique’s activities.

Morag writes in earnest her novel “Spear of Innocence” which is accepted and published. Brooke suppresses her with his unruffled and icy manners. Morag unable to bear the male supremacy over her resumes her relationship with Jules, with whom she escapes from Brooke.
At last Morag finds her settlement in Canada in a small town called Maconnell’s Landing in Ontario province. Here she writes her novel ‘Shadow of Eden’. She happens to meet Royland here. Royland is an old diviner and is of a great moral support to Morag. He often enquires her about her deep interest in divining. He takes her along with him for divining water. He is successful. Morag at times thinks, “He was divining for water. What in hell was she divining for? You couldn’t doubt the value of water” (TD 115).

In The Diviners Morag’s life with her parents, Louise and Colin Gunn, is recreated in the novel through six snapshots. This is a technique which Laurence uses to recall the past. This is done through the protagonist’s thoughts about each photograph, about her parents and herself when she was a child. These Snapshots are included in the first section of the novel entitled “River now and Then”. Morag says the snapshots: “contain a portion of her spirit [...] I keep the snapshots not for what they show but for what is hidden in there” (TD 14).

The photographs are used for two purposes. First it is used to recreate the near Edenic existence of Morag with her parents. Secondly they show Morag’s capacity as an artist. These snapshots show her life within the confining limits of society. Morag is at a loss when she losses her parents. Her parent’s death shatters her innocent idyllic world. It alters her notions of God.
Morag’s quest for identity is well revealed at the end of the novel when she realises the importance of Christie. Initially Morag rejects and opposes everything Christie stands for. Later accepting Christie as her father, she is able to recognise herself. She proves her identity in her personal life. She comes across four men in her life apart from her husband Brooke Skeleton. Among these, two men assume importance through what they attribute to her self-awareness.

In the first place, Jules offers Morag the freedom to walk out of her sterile marriage with Brooke. She is free and has more time for her creative writing. She is free to have the child she had wanted. Morag’s relationship with Jules dates back to their schooldays, and it is quite mysterious.

Jules spends his time with Morag. He sings to Pique who calls him “Dad”. He narrates to her the history of his heritage. He often reminds her that she must get back to Manawaka village and attend to the needs of her foster father. Morag’s immediate response is: “I can’t go back” (TD 365).

Morag talks with Jules and learns about his heroic ancestors, Grandfather Jules, and Chevalier “Rider” Tonnerre. Christie’s gift of the hunting knife which a boy had traded with him for cigarettes symbolically unites Morag to the Tonnerre family. The knife that Jules uses to shorten his agony becomes part of his daughter’s inheritance,
along with his songs. Morag’s childhood is terminated by the fire in a Metis shack which kills Jules’s sister Piquette and her two small children. Morag cries as though pain is the only condition of human life. It is Morag’s journey from innocence to experience. It marks a stage in her development. Jules aids her by imparting the knowledge of the past which is inherited by her through him.

Morag’s relationship with Harold, a sad man in love with his former wife Chas, is brief and temporary. Her relationship with Dan McRaith, an artist, serves to show the importance of her Canadian past and the importance of family. Dan McRaith is a forty-seven year old man with seven children and a wife. He is a Presbyterian and an artist who becomes more a friend than a lover. Morag and Dan McRaith are drawn towards each other and they encourage each other’s art and discuss their personal and artistic problems.

During her visit to Scotland with Pique, the home of McRaith, Morag is pleasantly and painfully reminded of the fact that it is the land of her forebears, a soil that has given her an ancestry and heritage. She, in one of her conversations with McRaith confesses: “It is a deep land here, all right, [...] But it’s not mine, except a long way back. I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not” (TD 415). She however feels that she has no roots. Though Dan McRaith figures in the novel only for a short while, he does play quite a
significant role in Morag’s life as an eye-opener for her, leading to the realisation that “Christie is her real country” (TD 113) whenever she wanders. Subsequent to her visit to the McRaith’s, Morag discovers that Dan is essentially a homely person unlike her. Returning to London she receives the news that Christie is mortally ill. She rushes to his service and calls him father before he dies.

Morag’s relationship with Brooke Skeleton as a wife is least successful. There are at least two reasons. First she was not allowed to have a child and second she was not allowed to improve her creative talents. She becomes a successful writer because of her failure in the marriage which eventually breaks.

The picture of Brooke in the newspaper and the news about his promotion as President of the University make Morag think about him. Her meeting of Brooke as her Professor, her life with him and their divorce are narrated in the fifth chapter of the section titled “Halls of Sion.”

From the beginning it is evident that the relationship between Brooke and Morag is one in which both are acting according to their fantasies. Morag’s mysterious non-existent past and her genuine innocence are the things which attract her to Brooke. She reveals now and then to Brooke that it is not her true self that he is able to see.

Brooke wants Morag to be a blank sheet on which he could work
out his own fantasies. For Morag, Brooke offers an escape into a world of freedom away from Manawaka and from all the heritage she gets from Christie and Prin.

Such a fantasy does not last long. Morag gets bored and frustrated about their relationship. She resents Brooke calling her “child” or “little one”. Brooke refuses to allow her the required freedom which is necessary to grow as an individual. But her marital relationship with Jules offers her more freedom. Another reason for their unsuccessful married life is that Brooke always avoids or postpones any talk about having a child. He argues that the flat is small and would ask Morag to consider if the place is the right place to rear children.

Morag is portrayed in the novel as the true and concerned mother of Pique. Pique is the daughter of Morag and Jules Tonnerre. The novel opens with Pique’s disappearance from home. Morag is worried and also bothered about the kind of heritage Pique will receive from her.

Like Jules, Pique takes up singing and recreating the old myths of the Metis as her career. While Morag provides Pique, through her own experience the insight into things, Pique in turn provides a new perspective on Morag’s attitude to life and reality. Thus, the relationship which has been dominated by single individuals,
culminates in the mutual understanding of both.

Morag is depicted in *The Diviners* as an established writer with four novels to her credit. She is in the process of writing the fifth. She is constantly worried about creating a world out of words and she, like any other woman is worried about her daughter Pique.

Morag’s first novel *Spear of Innocence* is about the Heroine Lilac. At that point of life in Morag’s life, writing the novel serves as a substitute of the child that she cannot have through Brooke Skeleton. The initial tension in their marriage begins with the publication of this novel. Her second novel, *Prosperous Child* is about Mira’s development from a childlike state to that of a matured person. Brooke is the father figure and coloniser. Initially she submits to the tutoring but after attaining maturity resents the cage and escapes from it.

The third novel *Jonah* brings in Biblical associations. The metaphor is that of being swallowed by a whale and passing through the dark labyrinth and coming out alive through the grace of God. This novel fictionalises Morag’s relationship with Christie Logan, the garbage collector.

Morag’s fourth novel *Shadow of Eden* recreates the stories of Piper Gunn which Christie imparts to Morag. It is a recreation not only of Morag’s ancestral past but also of the mythical past of the country itself. The novel depicts the novelist’s familiarity with the universal
The Diviners, which is the fifth novel brings the reader to Morag’s present. It is in this novel that Morag establishes herself as a writer. She also plays more than one role—as an orphan, at the age of five, adopted daughter of Christie, wife of Brooke, lover of Jules, mistress of Dan and mother of Pique. The title of the novel is very significant. In this novel the protagonist is depicted as a person who begins in a state of innocence, progresses by her marriage to Brooke, breaks away, realises the importance of the past through Piper Gunn stories, and finally attains the final state of viewing writing as divining. Like the symbolic river that flows both ways and which is evoked at the beginning and at the end of the novel, Morag understands the past and the future in order to understand herself. “Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence” (TD 477).

According to Laurence, the Metis’ culture is of great value. This is revealed through Jules’ music. It is a medium by which Jules becomes one of the novels many diviners, digging down to the well springs of his people’s past to give it a voice. It is an effort that creates a renewed dignity for the Metis. Jules’ brother Jacques’s life provides another sign of hope. Through Jacque’s life on the ‘Galloping Mountains’, Laurence presents a vision of the Metis which shows a
continued connection and their communal values.

Pique has a desire to learn about her paternal ancestry. Jules, Pique's father is portrayed as a rebellious son, a member of Manawaka Society, a friend and a singer. Depending upon from whose perspective he is perceived his identity is constructed differently. These identities reveal as much about the perceiver as it does about Jules. Jules is to Brooke and Simson Pearl, an inferior, a member of the Manawaka society.

Jules is a friend to Morag, a confidant, lover, her child's father, and a diviner of hidden stories. Brooke and Simon consider the non-white, non-English speaking, working class individual as inferior. Hence Jules is considered an inferior member of the societie's lower orders. Since Morag is White, English-speaking and educated, Morag's gender and class exclude her from the powerful elite. This allows her to perceive Jules in a different way. His character is always seen in the process of transformation. Individual identity, like the past, is always being revised and interpreted.

The parent-child relationship between Morag and Pique in the beginning do not attain any significance and value. But towards the end of the novel, Pique realises the importance of Morag. Pique is, at times, embraced by her mother. She attempts to deny her parent. At one point, Pique, having run away from home, ends up in a mental
hospital in Toronto after a “bad trip”. Pique, her long black hair spread over the hospital pillow, her face turned away from Morag, her voice low and fierce “Can’t you see I despise you? Can’t you see I want you to go away? You aren’t my mother. I haven’t got a mother (TD 111). Finally Pique realises the deep bond of love that connects her to her mother.

Christie and Morag’s relationship is similar to that of Morag and Pique Morag was also embarrassed by Christie, the scavenger: “You’ve never had somebody tell you your mother was crazy because she lived out here alone and wrote dirty books and had kooky people coming out from the city to visit” (TD 446).

Morag’s actions reveal her attempts to erase Christie from her existence. While narrating her childhood days to Brooke, she describes Christie and Prin as “acquaintances” of her parents, and tells, “we were never-close” (TD 210). Later the embarrassment and the denial eventually are overcome as Morag moves towards recognition of the deep bond of love that connects her to her father.

Morag’s acceptance of Christie as her “real” father is a crucial moment within the novel as well as in Morag’s growth which is the result of the acceptance of the truths of fiction and mystical realities. Throughout his life, Christie has provided Morag abundant examples of such realities. Morag later learns that there is no single, absolute
version of anything or anyone. This is very much evident by the different identities that Christie has in the novel.

Christie is a scavenger, a social misfit to the Manawaka people. To Jules “He’s quite a guy” and “worth a damn sight more than a lawyer” (TD 148). He lends a helping hand to Eva Winkler when she was in distress, taking her to the hospital, sees to the “burial” of the “unfinished child.” Later it is only Eva and not Morag who cares for Prin before her death and tends Christie’s and Prin’s gravesites.

Christie is both a source of pain and pleasure to Morag. As a child when she accompanies Christie riding in the wagon to collect the town’s garbage, she is subjected to the taunts and ridicule of her schoolmates. She hates the kids for talking like that. She also hates Christie for his way of talking. But his tales delight her and teach her much about the art of fiction. In narrating these tales Christie becomes a diviner reaching down below the surface to uncover the hidden and inner truths.

Christie in the novel is a character whose identity is multiple. Although he is perceived by some as a clown, a fool, a failure to Morag he is a hero. He is portrayed as a man of honesty, wisdom and compassion.

Action takes precedence over idea in view of the existence that acknowledges the unknown and the unknowable. This is a lesson
Morag learns from Royland, the old man of the river. From him, Morag also learns that what has been given, be it the ability to discover underground water, or to create fiction, will be withdrawn and passed on to others. The novel asserts its creator's belief in continuity amidst change.

Another aspect of writing which both fascinates and baffles Morag, is language especially words. Morag is a language conscious protagonist who tries to merge the word and the world. She gives importance to names because they define an identity. For example her daughter's name, Pique, makes one think of Jules' dead sister Piquette but it is placed within a heritage. Morag fantasises about the power involved in naming. Prin's word "Moonar" means "Something else" for Morag. She realises her power as the diviner of words which can do magic. "He was divining for water. What in hell was she divining for?" (TD 115) In these lines Morag questions the value of fiction and equates it to magical activities like divining.

Morag's works and her life are quests to know meanings for those things which remain hidden. The snapshots and the memory bank movies are ways by which she tries to recreate her past and find out what is hidden in them. Through writing she tries to create bring out the difference between reality and fiction. She tries to create fiction out of their own lives and try to understand their lives through their
fiction. This two-way process has its own advantages and disadvantages. Morag's development as an artist inevitably breaks her marriage. Finally what matters more is their reliance and understanding of their own selves. The understanding of their own selves, in the chaos of the world gives them an identity. This identity is strengthened by their artistic experience.

The quest for self knowledge by the protagonists and their intense desire to know the self take on psychological and spiritual dimensions in Laurence's works. The river flowing both ways which opens and closes assumes importance in *The Diviners*. The river signifies the fluid state of realising the self through the past and the future by locating Pique as a minor catalyst to Morag's growth. She is marginalised by society at an early age. She is forced to live with Christie Logan, the town garbage collector—after the death of her parents. She resents his profession and Prin's uncouth appearance.

The River image is highly symbolic. At the beginning of the novel this phenomenon introduces Pique's departure, and the apparent contrast between her daughter's way of life and Morag's own. At the beginning, the two-way flow of the river is linked with Morag's sense of order and Pique's reversal of this order by staying up at night and sleeping by day. Towards the end, the river has a cumulative force. The water at its edge is clear, while beyond, it deepens and keeps its life
hidden. River depths suggests mysteries in time for individuals, generations and nations. The novel’s ending, like its beginning, evokes the mysterious core of human experience and its unity in diversity.

The two way flow means relationships that are continually altered as events are reinterpreted. Morag’s neighbour Royland, an old man, who is a water diviner tells her of his early married life. The story incorporates several voices or view points at different times. Royland’s “transformation is from a self-righteous, aggressive evangelist, who unwittingly destroys his wife, into a kindly grandfather-figure is credible and touching.”

Morag is swayed by the mask and is impatient to get away from Christie and her Manawaka background. She wanted to enter as an acceptable citizen of society. This is the reason why she moves to Winnipeg to study in an University and also plans to marry Brooke, a respectable professor.

There are three instances which bring Morag to self-realisation or identity . First, her acceptance of Christie Logan as her father and thus accepting the heritage he has offered through his ‘tales’ as her only true heritage. Second as a writer, she accepts the limitations of the powers of the word. This knowledge is imparted to her by Royland, the water-diviner and finally the momentary insight offered by the flight of the Blue Heron.
Morag realises that Christie has given her a heritage which is truer and more real than what history has to offer. Before his death Morag manages to go to Manawaka to voice out her realisation to him: “Christie—I used to fight a lot with you, Christie, but you’ve been my father to me” (TD 420). Christie’s funeral scene is the most powerful scene in the novel. Morag insists on burying him instead of cremating him as suggested by Hector.

Royland’s divining for water parallels Morag’s own search for words. She understands that words cannot do magic or sorcery. She learnt from Royland that the grace or the gift was to be given to someone else. “The gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else” (TD 477). Royland humbly accepts his loss of divining powers, writes how he can pass it on to somebody else. “It’s something I don’t understand, the divining.” Royland said slowly: “and it’s not something that everybody can do, but the thing I don’t usually let on about is that quite a few people can learn to do it” (TD 476).

The sight of the Great Blue Heron, a species facing the threat of extinction, offers a visionary insight to Morag when she goes out fishing with Royland. In the vision of the heron, Morag glimpses the perfection she has been seeking in her life and art—serenity, certainty and mastery. The heron symbolises wholeness, the cycle of life and death:
A slow unhurried takeoff, the vast wings spreading, the slender elongated legs gracefully folding up under the creature’s body. Like a pterodactyl, like an angel, like something out the world’s dawn. The soaring and measured certainty of its flight [...] and disappeared into the trees above a bywater of the river” (TD 380).

Clara Thomas brings out the significance of the blue heron and she comments:

Morag is uplifted and reassured by the sight of a great blue heron. The description of this bird functions in The Diviners as an epic simile, flashing its meaning back over what has gone before and forward across what is to come. It is an image of acceptance and affirmation, central to the resolution of The Diviners and to the final and cumulative meaning of all the Manawaka novels.7

Pique also decides to journey back and work for the welfare of her people in Galloping Mountains. Thus she offers Morag the realisation that “Her quest for islands had ended some time ago, and her need to make pilgrimages had led her back here” (TD 380).

Morag’s identity gains importance when she faces direct encounters with death and sex. Her first knowledge comes to her aid when her parents die of infantile paralysis. Later as a reporter of a
Manawaka newspaper, she is asked to report the deaths by fire of Piquette Tonnerre and her children. At the end of the novel she senses closely the end of Jules.

Just as death is revealed to Morag in its varying shades so is her knowledge of sex. Morag’s attitude to sex is more open and overt than that of any other protagonist of Laurence. She shares her virginity with Jules while she is in Grade Eleven. This bond strengthens and grows during the next thirty years till Jules’ death. For an outsider like Morag, Jules is also an outsider since he is a half-breed. It is this strong bond with Jules which brings her to Jules when she decides to walk out on Brooke Skeleton, her professor-husband. Her encounters with Harold and Chas teach her the fleeting nature of such unions. Morag’s frustration with Brooke (for her inability to have his child), and her eventual walkout is aided by her affair with Jules and the birth of their daughter, Pique. Morag’s encounter with Dan McRaith makes her realise the importance of family and place.

Jules visits Pique and Morag, when Pique is young. He shares responsibility for her life and asks her to go up to Galloping mountains where his brother Jacques lives. Jules passes on his knife to Pique as his share of his heritage to her. Where Morag’s journey is away from Manawaka, Pique’s takes her to her own people.

Morag’s psychological development occurs as a series of
formations and resolutions of structure of desire around different ‘sites of presence.’ As a child, she finds consolation in Jesus because “he is friendly and not stuck-up” (TD 187). Only after Morag is not chosen to sing a solo in the Christmas Eve service does she realise that Jesus is mediated through an institution that discriminates along class, gender and race lines. She then turns to other narrative such as tales of Piper Gunn. This is similar to her marriage to and divorce from Brooke. In Brooke she looks for the ultimate meaning of her life and “will do whatever he wants her to do” (TD 213). To gain Brooke, she loses temporarily her own history and identity. Later through Jules she restores her identity:

Jules’s visit restores to Morag a sense of a self, beyond Brooke’s construction of her, and she realizes that this construction is function of Brooke’s own problematic mental life and ultimately of the British imperial ideology that scarred Brooke’s childhood.8

Laurence's protagonist undertakes quests in order to realise the self. Women in her novels begin by being frustrated and dissatisfied with the roles assigned to them by their society. Thus, the spiritual quest involves the breaking of habits, of seeking approval, of trying to please parents, husbands, friends, children, lovers, but never themselves.
Laurence depicts her protagonists as going back to the past in order to understand the present and shape the future. The past is not only the personal past of the individual concerned but also the ancestral past of the society and the nation.

As in Laurence's other fiction, Morag's discovery of identity is presented in parts, in terms of movement from one dwelling to another. The loss of her parents and her home thus begins her journey from innocence to experience. She, throughout her life, seeks out various places to call her own. But finally she recognises that such “islands” of safety are unreal and false.

Morag, later in her life, comes to know that her roots of identity are not found in Scotland. She returns to Canada to take up residence on another river. This river, which never lost its ancient power becomes the novel’s central metaphor for the continuum of all time and experience, for acceptance of that which cannot be known or controlled.

Though the plot in The Diviners is built on the quest of the mother for the daughter, the real quest of the mother and the daughter is for the lost parenthood as well as their nationhood and they create their nation and their selves through the creative word. The novel portrays a journey towards the west by both—but the mother returns ‘home’ at the end and the daughter goes west. The concept of home as well as nation is made both problematic and more comprehensive.
Though Morag undertakes a journey to Scotland, she chooses not to go to Sutherland where her people came from. She realises that myths are her reality and the land of her ancestors was Christie's real country where she was born. When she tells her daughter that they are going back home Pique is puzzled. The home is here and now and there is a movement beyond ethnicity into a created nationhood.

Morag’s discovery of identity is presented, in part, in terms of movement from one dwelling to another. Her inner journey towards love and understanding of both herself and others is paralleled by an outer journey which is associated with various residences in which she lives. Along with the Logan house, is an important apartment which she inhabits with Brooke:

Now, and somewhat oddly, considering the awfulness of the house on Hill street, the apartment in Toronto seems more than ever like a desert island, or perhaps a cave, a well-lighted and beautifully appointed cave, but a cave just the same. Could one say cave if there were windows? [...] May be tower would be a better word for the apartment. Crestwood Towers is in fact the name it bears on the flossy brass plate outside the thick plate glass doors [...] though. The lonely tower. Self-dramatization. Rapunzel. Rapunzel, let down your long hair. (TD 275)
The novel ends with the image of a river that flows both ways. The image of the river is a symbol of the passing of time, and the changes it brings. Morag becomes aware of the inevitability of the passing of time, and the changes it brings. All moments in time—past, present and future though different, are connected to one another. The river is always there and it is never still. Laurence also believes that a connection with nature is necessary for human fulfilment and survival.

Clara Thomas observes:

> It is a complex and profound novel, an exploration of the meaning of life, a quest, and finally the affirmation of a life's meaning. It's 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 [...] 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.³

The person who magically finds life—whether that diviner be like Royland searching for existence in his songs—gains that ability through an apparent relinquishing of ego. The purpose of a diviner is to explore
the unknown, to live with appreciation of gifts rather than with questions. As Royland says to Morag, “It works [...] I don’t reckon I really need to understand it [...] I just gotten do it.”

The final section of the novel, The Diviners is set entirely in the present. Having reviewed and replayed her life from her ancestral past to her present, Morag is now able to relinquish guilt about the past and accept, that while time moves inexorably forward, past, present and future remain intertwined and continuous. Interestingly the last italicized words in the novel make this point directly: “Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence” (TD 477). Thus life is shown as a continuous process.

The structure of the novel is unique:

Clara Thomas 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.

Another feature of the novel is its doubleness. It is Laurence’s fictional autobiography. Morag Gunn, the protagonist and the focus of the narration, is herself a novelist and her life has many parallels with Laurence’s own. Morag the mythmaker-novelist does what Laurence does: She invents an identity for herself using the cultural materials
provided by “diviners” such as her foster father Christie Logan. Neilten Kortenaar observes:

Morag, who rejects an identification with the imperialist and identifies with the indigenous, the dispossessed, and the land of her birth, embodies the national identity that Laurence herself advocates. Morag [...] writes a novel called “Prospero’s Daughter” that is a post colonial revision of “The Tempest”, Morag the embodiment of Laurence’s own myth has herself lived a revised version of Miranda’s story.12

The protagonist Morag Gunn triumphs by giving her daughter what she herself did not have—a name that will define her completely. Morag Gunn existed before Christie’s stories gave her meaning. The birth of her daughter, has been preceded by stories. So her daughter has an identity of her own.

Morag as a writer deals with multi-cultural aspects, such as the difference between the rich and poor, men and women and so on:

Morag Gunn’s quest for understanding of her role as a writer takes place in a world in which tensions between racial, ethnic and religious group persist, in which gaps between rich and poor, men and women, are undeniable, and in which each person has a story to tell.13
Morag through the creative spirit of writing solves her doubts and uncertainty about her identity. She attains a better understanding of life and she becomes financially free. She enjoys the complete freedom of being a woman and finally becomes a great matriarch. She is like the modern woman who in her quest for self-discovery breaks all forces and conventions and progresses towards a spiritual rebirth.

Commenting on the female hero’s quest Barbara Godard observes:

The female hero’s quest for authenticity or individuation leads, not to the formation of a new community, but to a new order centered on the individual [...] Annis Pratt observes in fiction: if the hero of the quest in prose romances is, female, she returns, not to lead a new collectivity, but rather to confront a traditional society as an enlightened individual.14

Morag in the end comes to terms with her past, ancestors and accepts Christie as her father. Her quest for roots and identity is fulfilled. Through her creative imagination she has found the serenity to accept the things which she cannot change. She is seen as a woman who has conquered her spirit without sacrificing her will power and self-respect.