ABSTRACT

‘Canadian Literature’ is not bounded by citizenship. There were writers before there was a ‘Canada’, and there have been immigrants and long – term visitors since, for whom Canada has been home. To read Canadian Literature closely, scholars have realized how diverse Canadian culture is. It is marked by politics and religion and is influenced by differences of language and geography. It is preoccupied by empirical world and yet fascinating because of the mystery and the uncertain.

Margaret Laurence, the Canadian novelist is one of the most impressive and accomplished figures during the sixties and seventies and no Canadian writer has enjoyed as great a degree of popularity and critical success as Laurence. Her fame however rests not with her African books, but with a series of five novels all set in the fictional prairie town of Manawaka. The theme of quest for identity is a recurring theme depicted in the post colonial fiction and it is well depicted in the Manawaka novels of Margaret Laurence.

The aim of this thesis is to highlight and focus on the theme of quest for identity in the Manawaka novels of Laurence. The protagonists’ quest for identity is the crux of her work. Her protagonists are known for their inner strength and they emerge triumphant of their sufferings. Within the limited canvas available for
expounding the thesis, the study confines itself to the five Manawaka novels.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter deals with a brief sketch of Laurence’s life and achievements and the intellectual atmosphere of her age. The theme of quest for identity in the world classics are touched upon. The historical and the socio-economic background of Canada are stated. A brief survey of the development of fiction during the period with special reference to Margaret Laurence and her technique are discussed. The protagonists of Laurence do not feel discouraged or feel isolated. The sufferings which they undergo elevate them to a higher degree of understanding and they learn to strive and prove their identity.

Chapter Two brings out the theme of quest for identity in *The Stone Angel*. *The Stone Angel* is the first of the series of the five Manawaka novels. The novel is about a ninety-year-old proud woman Hagar Shipley, who struggles to maintain her independence. In this novel the protagonist recalls, defends, question and finally understands all the events and feelings that have been important to her in her life time. Mingling past and present, she maintains pride in the face of senility. Here affinity with nature, silences her own thoughts and feelings. Through her agony of self-recognition she moderates from enormity to humanity.
Chapter Three focuses on the quest for identity in the second novel of the Manawaka series A Jest of God. This is the story of a spinster school teacher Rachel Cameron who is obsessed with her own status, her image in the community and her family. Her emotional involvement frees her from nagging fears and anxieties. She learns to accept and to live with her limitations. She moves finally to a recognition that she must and she will rely on whatever strength she can find or forge within herself.

Chapter Four analyses The Fire-Dwellers, a novel about Rachel's older sister Stacey MacAindra. It is a searching novel about life in the mid-twentieth century as seen through the eyes of a middle-aged, middle-class, ordinary sort of a woman who needs to remind herself that she should have an identity of her own, other than of wife and mother. Her inner monologues speak of her real self which longs to enjoy life at her mother's place. Outwardly she has to be conscious of her role as mother to her children. She condemns the natural fate of daughters who leave their mother's home in order to marry and give birth to children. Nevertheless she wants to establish a harmonious relationship with her children but cannot help behaving like her own mother. In her desire to become a good mother she subjects her children to the same inhibitions which she herself was subjected to.
The title, **The Fire-Dwellers**, introduces the central symbol of the purgatorial flames that Stacey must endure before she can be saved.

Chapter Five portrays the identity theme in **A Bird in the House**, which is a collection of eight short stories. Laurence calls these stories "fictionalized autobiography"; her own growth from a child’s awareness of the small tight world of family to an adolescents’ understanding of the widening circles of the world around her. The different stages of the protagonist Vanessa Macleod’s growth as an artist are brought out vividly in this novel. Vanessa’s grandfather Connor is a suppressor belonging to the patriarchal community and he enforces his authority over the women of his family. Vanessa undergoes traumatic experiences and she narrates the sufferings of her grandmother, mother, aunt and herself in the hands of her grandfather Connor. In spite of all these hurdles she is able to survive and prove her identity.

The penultimate chapter elucidates in detail, the last novel of the Manawaka series **The Diviners**. It is a novel with multifarious themes and is subjected to many hazardous situations and only at the end she realizes the value of her heritage and past. Laurence presents Morag Gunn as a person who is subjected to physical and mental subjugation in the hands of colonial imperialistic husbands. Her physical journey is, indeed a journey from apprenticeship to maturity, from innocence to experience, and from crisis to identity to a man. She is revealed as a
woman who has conquered her spirit without sacrificing her will power and self-respect.

The Seventh chapter is a summing up of the argument and conclusion. The salient features of the preceding chapters are discussed and a conclusion is arrived at. It shows how Laurence is concerned who with the identity of her protagonists do not allow themselves to be liquidated by the pressures of society but they emerge triumphant with confidence and faith. Indeed, they are not passive victims but positive victors.