Chapter II

Deconstructing Social Reality Through Professional and Artistic Expressions--

Women in Social Roles

At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life--that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions... . There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual.

(Kate Chopin. The Awakening)
In the last Chapter, I examined the different roles taken by women within the family. Only very few women were able to reconcile the restrictions posed by the family, and their urge to move out of these roles in order to find alternate identities for themselves. Some such attempts include their roles in society as professional women and as artists. This chapter has been divided into two sections where the protagonists in the fiction of Margaret Laurence and Patrick White are studied in their roles as teachers and artists.

Women as Teachers

In this section, an attempt is made to study women in relation to their professions. The professional roles add an extra social dimension to other familial and personal relationships. Both Rachel Cameron in Margaret Laurence's A Jest of God and Laura Trevelyan in Patrick White's Voss are portrayed as school teachers. This section attempts to examine how teaching, the normally accepted profession for women, is used for different purposes by the two writers. Through the intellectual pursuit of these two characters, the common factor which both the writers have managed to establish is to make the characters resist the social norms of getting married and leading stereotyped lives as housewives. Both Rachel and Laura are middle-aged spinsters. However, behind this common factor, there are also differences between Rachel and Laura in terms of their attitude towards other people (i.e., their relationships) and their roles as teachers.
Being a teacher adds an extra dimension to Rachel's roles as obedient daughter and lover. Fear, which is the most apparent and common reaction of Rachel, is established in this sphere also. Rachel's fear is best exemplified in Carol Christ's description from Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*. Christ describes "fear as the primary obstacle to transcendence" and classifies it under three heads: "fear of what other people might think; fear of being different; fear of being isolated" (*Diving Deep and Surfacing* 67). She fears the authoritarianism of Willard Siddley, the principal of her school just as she fears displeasing her mother in the familial relationship. She fears transgression of normal limits in her relationship with James Doherty, her favourite pupil. Also, she fears becoming a stereotyped spinster school teacher. The conflict and unnecessary tensions created in this sphere is due to her fear and dependency in relationships. Though this may be said of her familial relationships also, this becomes more pronounced because there is a social dimension involved in these relationships. In this section, a detailed study of these relationships is made as also comparisons with other teacher figures in Margaret Laurence, namely Nick Kazlick in *A Jest of God* and Nathaniel Amegebe in *This Side Jordan* (1960).

**Relationship with Willard**

Though Rachel revolts in her mind against social norms, these conventions are internalised in her. For instance, in an interview with Willard she becomes self-conscious that she is taller than him and consequently thinks: "I know I must not stand
up now, not until he's [Willard] gone. I am exceptionally tall for a woman, and Willard is shorter than I" (JG 7). This sort of dependency leads to her submission to all his decisions. One such instance is the strapping of James Doherty for being seen in the woods when he has taken leave from school on the excuse of being sick. Even though Rachel feels strongly that strapping will not do any good and that it is an unfair punishment, she does not say so and also justifies Willard's stand by accepting to send James to him. "I'll send him in, then" ... Willard has won. Maybe he is even right. He has two of his own. Could I be expected to know what is best?" (JG 25). At this point, she badly wants to leave the job and the school but this materialises only after she undergoes the operation for tumour and has confronted the fear of the imagined pregnancy. It is only at this point that she is able to clearly understand her relationship with Willard.

What am I to say, though? Sometimes I was happy here, and sometimes not, and often I was afraid of him [Willard], and still am, although I see now this was as unnecessary as my mother's fear of fate. What good would it do to say that? I couldn't explain, nor he accept (JG 197).

Thus, Rachel's relationship with Willard takes the form of the oppressor-oppressed relationship in the colonial situation. A parallel to this is found in the relationship between Nathaniel Amegbe and his principal, Jacob Mensah in This Side Jordan. This sort of a situation arises because of the failure of communication. Whereas Calla, Rachel's colleague manages situations by asking Willard not to make a mountain out of a molehill, Rachel does not say this in order to avoid scenes and thus is put in
tricky situations. The same is true of Amegbe.

Relationship with James

At one level, James is Rachel's favourite pupil with whom she desires to hold a mother-son relationship. At another level, James is a substitute figure for Nick. Like him, James breaks the conventions of Manawaka society. Just as Nick moves out of Manawaka society and becomes a teacher instead of taking up his father's business, James' revolt is seen in his unique choice of drawing a spaceship unlike his classmates. Again, Grace Doherty, James' mother provides a foil to all Manawaka mothers and Rachel by allowing her son enough freedom to wander about in the woods when he is recovering from an illness instead of forcing him to attend school. In trying to hide her affection for James, Rachel behaves rudely to him. As George Bowering rightly points out in his essay "That Fool of a Fear: Notes on A Jest of God":

She [Rachel] has a rather strong fear of becoming James' enemy. So she becomes his tormentor, because she also knows that if she shows her liking and admiration of him, he will be made to suffer by his classmates, who have been taught by their community to detest and ridicule tender human touch (in George Woodcock ed. A Place to Stand On 215).

She hits him with a ruler and speaks rudely to him for drawing instead of doing sums. However, she immediately feels guilty about it: "It's so often James I speak to like this, fearing to be too much the other way with him" (JG 3). Fear of being different and indulgent towards James, prevents her from apologising to him. Though Bowering also points out Rachel's unconscious sexual attraction towards James, there is no textual
evidence to substantiate this argument.

Apart from the fear of committing any blunder in her relationship with people, another type of fear which grips Rachel very strongly is the fear of becoming a stereotyped school teacher. One such instance occurs at the beginning of the novel, when Rachel asks her students to come back to class.

‘Come along, Grade Twos. Line up quietly now.’ Am I beginning to talk in that simper tone, the one so many grade school teachers pick up without realizing? At first they only talk to the children like that, but it takes root and soon they can't speak any other way to anyone (JG 2).

It is this sort of a fear which arises out of modelling herself like a teacher, that shatters Rachel about her imagined pregnancy. She feels the shame is more because she is a teacher.

In the novel, the students function as links to Rachel's past. They are, what she was. The songs they sing when they skip is the same that Rachel had sung twentyseven years ago. Also in a way, these ‘children’ of Rachel teach her important lessons in life. She realises that her inability to possess her ‘children’ (pupils) permanently, is a trait she shares with all mothers. In the end, with the move to Vancouver, there is a hope that in future, her relationships will be more objective and less possessive. In short, Rachel (very much like Martha Quest in Lessing's The Four-Gated City) has learnt the most important lesson in life, that is, "that one simply had to go on, take one step after another: this process itself held the keys" (Carol Christ 69).

Unlike Rachel, who appears tentative in all her relationships and especially in her relationship with her pupils,
Laura Trevelyan in Patrick White's Voss is portrayed as a spokeswoman of Voss' legend and a charismatic figure capable of inspiring the young female scholars under her tutelage. As Phyllis Fahrie Edelson emphatically states in her article "The Hatching Process: The Female's Struggle for Identity in Four Novels by Patrick White," Laura "assumes the leadership of those who would contribute to the cultural and spiritual growth of Australia, [especially Mercy, Topp and Pringle] counselling a path to social regeneration through the work by the creative imagination" (232).

In the novel, Laura's introduction as a headmistress marks the passage of time after Voss' death. It also shows Laura's superiority over other women of the Sydney society. She holds the power of authority in two ways. She holds a special intellectual status as the head of the institution and also the position of knowing the truth about Voss. With this knowledge, Laura attempts to wipe out "the grey of mediocrity, the blue of frustration" (V 447) that Pringle talks of in reference to the Sydney society.

In becoming a teacher, Laura is performing two different tasks. One is to impart some intellectual knowledge to the future young women of Sydney. Thus, she is trying to give back something to society. In a way, this is a continuation of Voss' task. Just as Voss tries to widen the physical limits of the land, Laura tries to widen the intellectual horizons of an otherwise materialistic society. Laura's other task is to teach the moral and truth of Voss' legend to the Sydney society. She prevents society from weaving fabrications around the figure of Voss, thus making him a legendary character. She induces life and
blood to his figure. Laura's comment about Voss is perceptive on this point: "Voss could have been the Devil,’ ... ‘if at the same time he had not resembled a most unfortunate human being’" (V 414). Through this statement Laura emphatically stated that Voss was neither a heroic adventurer nor a devil incarnate as he is made out to be, but an ordinary human being with a vision in life.

Laura fully understands the disparity between what Voss really was and what others make him out to be. Witness, her reaction to the statue unveiling ceremony:

The schoolmistress was glad of some assistance towards the illusion of complacency. Thus, she had never thirsted, never, nor felt her flesh shrivel in crossing the deserts of conscience. No official personage has experienced the inferno of love (V 440. emphasis added).

In a matured way she allows false notions to exist where they cannot be helped. For instance, she allows Judd’s description of the death of Voss. Judd confuses Palfreyman's death with a spear on his neck with Voss' death. To Colonel Hebden’s question whether Voss has been canonized in this way, Laura says that all truths are particoloured and is at rest because she is "... convinced that Voss had in him a little of Christ, like other men. If he was composed of evil along with the good, he struggled with that evil. And failed’" (V 445).

Laura's statement emphasises her knowledge of Voss' life which cannot be tainted by other views. More importantly, Laura insists that individual views have to be accommodated alongside the facts she states. Quoting this passage, Veronica Brady makes two valuable insights in her article "In My End is My Beginning:
Laura as Heroine of Voss." Brady points out how Laura offers the hope that the inherent mediocrity "is not a final and irrevocable state," unlike Voss, who originally compelled Le Mesurier, Palfreyman and Harry "Py the sheer force of his personality" (28). Brady states that in giving the final word of the novel to Laura, White suggests "that hers is the true concept of the future" and "that the true concept of progress will not tolerate possessiveness of any kind," which is one of Voss' greatest weaknesses (29).

Laura also questions the type of quest which Col. Hebden undertakes. Addressing Col. Hebden, Willie Pringle, the painter and Topp, the music master, she states the ultimate truth about Voss' life and legend.

"... Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind' (V 446).

Thus, she restates the need to undergo suffering in order to gain both the knowledge of the self and of the land. In a sense, Laura is repeating Voss' boast to Mr. Bonner at the beginning of the novel that he will create a map of Australia. However, the pride of Voss is here mingled with the knowledge and experience of Laura. Commenting on this passage, Veronica Brady makes an interesting observation which emphasises Laura's role as a teacher.

The cosmic order, not the individual will, prevails. Laura lives to commit herself to the celebration of this order and passes on this commission to the young people gathered about her. Their task, she tells them, is not rebellion but one of consolidation. They must "express what we others have experienced by living" ... ("The Novelist and The New World" 175-6).
This accounts for Laura's acceptance of the society she once rejected and the knowledge and wisdom which she has gained through the desert journey, enables her to live "in the midst of ordinary life" (Brady 175) albeit on her own terms.

Another important function that Laura's role as headmistress serves is to set her apart from other women and also to facilitate her questioning of the social norms. For instance, it sets her apart from Belle Bonner and Una Pringle who have totally lost their individuality in return to marital bliss. Again, unlike Rachel, who is concerned about her appearance, Laura gives no importance to it. To cite an example, she comes to Belle's party in a black dress "of a kind worn by some women merely as a covering" (V 436). As the women comment: ‘.... As if it were not enough to have become a school mistress, to arrive late at Belle's party in that truly hideous dress!’ (V 437. emphasis added). However, Laura is untouched by these criticisms.

To conclude, one can point out the most important difference between Rachel and Laura. Whereas Rachel is ashamed and afraid of the social consequences of her pregnancy, Laura boldly adopts Mercy and lets no gossip spoil her relationship with the latter. She does not unnecessarily try to explain the relationship, because she knows that it is difficult for society to accept Mercy as a child born out of her symbolic union with Voss. To the members of the Sydney society, she remains as enigmatic a figure as Voss. However, in combining understanding and love in all her relationships, as in maintaining a stern control over irrelevant gossip, she comes out as a more mature figure than Rachel. In a
sense, she directs the way to be followed by Rachel in all her relationships.

Women as Artists

The portrayal of artists as protagonists has enormous popularity in the fiction of the present century. Feminist and post-colonial theorists read such portrayals as subverting patriarchal and imperialist norms respectively. Helene Cixous' view ("The Laugh of the Medusa") that 'feminine writing' affords a clearer perception of their own sex and self to women and the various post-colonial reappropriations of Shakespeare's play, The Tempest are some instances of breaking of norms. The fiction exploring the development of writers open up metafictional possibilities. In this case, there is an exploration of the possibilities and limitations of the form itself. These are some of the commonly used theoretical aspects of the portrayal of artists in fiction. Let us consider why Margaret Laurence and Patrick White create 'artist figures' in their fiction. Four different answers are evident from a study of the artists. (i) To portray the growth into maturity of individuals (Bildungsroman) by portraying their development as artists (Kunstlerroman); (ii) to enable the women to articulate their experiences. The female artists in both the writers probe and accept the limitations of language; (iii) Some of the women gain their moments of insight through their artistic capabilities; and, (iv) the writers themselves evaluate their artistic progress through their artist figures. Vanessa MacLeod in A Bird in the House and Morag Gunn in The Diviners are the
female artists in Laurence's novels. Alex Gray (*Memoirs of Many in One*) is the only female artist-protagonist in the Patrick White canon. This section attempts to examine the development of these 'artist characters' through the four stages mentioned above.

Exploration of self is the lasting aim of the protagonists. In creating them as writers, the two writers have doubled the quest, i.e., the quest for the knowledge of the self and the quest for evolving as a writer. Laurence's statement in *Heart of a Stranger* (1976) is perceptive in this regard.

For a writer, one way of discovering oneself, of changing from the patterns of childhood and adolescence to those of adulthood, lies through the exploration inherent in the writing itself ... this exploration involves an attempt to understand one's background and one's past ... (13).

*A Bird in the House* is a semi-autobiographical collection of eight short stories. The stories are complete in themselves and are also interrelated. Unlike Morag, Vanessa is not an established writer. However, the stories explicate the seeds of artistic talent in the younger Vanessa. This is communicated to the reader through the older Vanessa as narrator. The writing talents of Vanessa can be seen in the different stories she writes as a young girl as also in her descriptions of the other family members, of nature and her attitudes towards religion, love and death. As George Woodcock rightly perceives,

Margaret Laurence has shown the lives and emotions of older people through a child's eye, until in the end the child moves into the age when those emotions become identical with hers, and the perceiver becomes the perceived (in *A Place to Stand* On 231).

The difference between the impressions of Vanessa as a child and
the varied impressions of the same event or person marks her growth both as a writer and as a person.

The following subsections are divided into religion, death, love and human relationships. Within each of them, an attempt is made to show the evolution of mature thought in Vanessa.

Religion

That imagination dominated Vanessa more than anything else can be seen in her replies to Grandmother Connor's questions as to what she learnt in the Sunday school. Since she had read large portions of the Bible by herself, she has no trouble in providing herself with a verse. However, she rarely listens in the Sunday school because she finds it "more entertaining to compose in [her] head stories of spectacular heroism in which [she] figured as central character" (BH 7). Such an imagination enables her to find material even in concepts like Baptism. For instance, she creates a story

in which an infant was baptised by Total Immersion and swept away by the river which happened to be flooding ... . The child was dressed in a christening robe of white lace, and the last the mother saw of her was a scrap of white being swirled away towards the Deep Hole near the Wachakwa bend, where there were blood-suckers (BH 18).

At about the same age, she rejects Noreen's conceptions of Heaven and Hell in a sceptical manner. Such an unconventional imagination leads the older Vanessa to hold the funeral service for her grandmother "in the presence only of the canary" (BH 83).
Death

Till the death of her father, Vanessa has no direct experience of death. However, she romanticises the notion of death and spins stories. For instance, answering Grandfather Connor in a rude manner, she says that her father has gone to attend on a patient who being affected by pneumonia is vomiting blood. She questions herself "Did people spit blood with pneumonia?" She does not wait for an answer but creates a fictional situation almost instantly. "Sick to death in the freezing log cabin, with only the beautiful halfbreed lady (no, woman) to look after him, Old Jebb suddenly clutched his throat" (BH 16). Similarly, as a child, the death of her grandfather only shatters her vision of him as immortal. However, twenty years later when she travels from Winnipeg to Manawaka, she realises the tough pioneering life which has hardened his authoritarianism. She realises now the immortality of Grandfather Connor for "I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins" (BH 207).

Love

Even though she is too young to understand the connotations of love, Vanessa creates romanticised versions of love stories from the Bible. One such is the story she takes from Song of Solomon about a "barbaric queen, beautiful and terrible" in love with a gifted carver. The antagonist of this story is a cruel pharaoh who sends the lover to the desert in order to carve a giant sphinx. This childish view of love changes into a mature understanding as she grows up. That is why she understands the
unrequited early love of her father and burns the girl's picture. She does this in order to preserve an untarnished image of her father. Her own unrequited love with an airman at the age of seventeen enables such a growth in understanding.

**Human relationships**

Such a mature understanding of Vanessa pervades through all the spheres of human relationships. At an early age, Vanessa is bewildered by the sadistic behaviour of Harvey, the aloofness of Piquette and the authoritarianism of Grandfather Connor. For instance, when Harvey deliberately hurts Nanuk, Vanessa's dog, she imagines Harvey in dire trouble and places herself and Nanuk in a position of strength and plans revenge. After her father's death and Piquette's death, she is able to understand Piquette's refusal to come and listen to the song of the loons. She sees Piquette's refusal in a new light. Vanessa sees Piquette as the only one who had understood the crying of the loons for survival. Similarly, it is only when she is much older does Vanessa understand the true nature of Grandfather Connor.

Vanessa's growth into understanding is three-fold. As Arnold Davidson rightly points out, "[t]he child endures *Manawaka*; the adolescent ... looks with some magnanimity ...; the older adult narrator can more fully review *Manawaka*" ("Cages and Escapes in Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House*" 99). Thus, the realisation of the constriction of relationships, imagining fantastic escapes and the later return to the place, the memories of persons and events are guidelines in the path to Vanessa's personal liberation. In a paradoxical sense, the child who
rebels against conventions is freer than the older writer because the latter is trapped by the memory and acceptance of those very conventions on which she relies to create fiction out of life.

In *The Divinners*, the reader first meets Morag Gunn as an established writer with four novels to her credit. She is in the process of writing the fifth. Though she constantly worries about convincingly creating a world out of words, she remains more like any other woman and mother concerned about Pique, her daughter.

Unlike writers ... who write for a living, Morag never changes publishers, feels her agent is neglecting her, worries about the size of other writers' advances, or has any truck with universities (qtd. in Nancy Bailey's "Fiction and the New Androgyne" 13).

Though this criticism is absolutely valid, the importance of the contexts of Morag’s novels lie in their symbolic value. In this regard, Nancy Bailey's defence is convincing.

The context revealed by the titles of Morag’s novels is ... a symbolic progression of the inner self from the light of "Spear of Innocence" and "Prospero's Child" through the darkness of "Jonah" back to the light of "Shadow of Eden" and "The Diviners" (13).

Though Morag's early literary talents are signalled through her write-ups in Manawaka Banner and the short story, published in the college magazine, literally, her present is more important in terms of creativity. The past is important for its literary value only when it is invoked in the works.

Morag's first novel *Spear of Innocence* is about the heroine Lilac. The parallel to this character can be found in Morag's childhood friend, Eva Winkler, both of whom undergo painful abortions. In her article "Consolation and Articulation in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*" (Colin Nicholson 145), Lynette
Hunter points out how Fan Brady, Morag's landlady, is a mirror image of Lilac. In the novel, Morag asks 'Does fiction prophecy life?' Here is an instance when it does.

It is important to note that the writing of the novel serves at that point of Morag's life as a substitute of the child she cannot have by Brooke Skelton. The initial tension in their marriage begins with the publication of the novel. In Prospero's Child, the heroine Mira, is an obvious reference to Miranda. The story evolves around the growth of Mira from a childlike state to that of a mental maturity when she rejects all barriers. The parallels to Morag's life are very clear. Brooke, like Prospero, is the father figure and coloniser. Morag, like Miranda, initially submits to the tutoring but after attaining maturity resents the cage and escapes from it. The third novel Jonah brings in Biblical associations of being swallowed by a whale and passing through a dark labyrinth and coming out alive through the grace of God. This novel fictionalises Morag's relationship with Christie Logan, the garbage collector. Like Morag, Carol, the heroine resents the fact that her old man is an outcast in society. In a symbolic reading, the novel is a study of the heroine's acquaintance with the dark forces of the self before an ascent into realisation.

Shadows of Eden re-creates the tales of Piper Gunn which Christie imparts to Morag. It is a re-creation not only of Morag's ancestral past but that of the mythical past of the country itself. This novel shows the novelist's understanding of the universal truths of life. The fifth novel which is obviously The Diviners brings Morag's present, Her life after divorce
from Brooke and after having a child by Jules is brought into focus.

The five novels of Morag are important in many ways. They not only establish Morag as a writer but also further her development in life in which she 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 titles of the novels assume a lot of significance. In them, Morag begins in a state of innocence, and moves on progressively to being tutored by Brooke, to break away and become an outcast, to having a glimpse of the Eden of the past which comes alive through the Piper Gunn stories to a final state of viewing writing as divining. At this point, the creator and the created merge. Like the symbolic river that flows both ways and which is evoked at the beginning and the end of the novel, Morag divines into the past and the future in order to understand herself. "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence" (D 453). It is this silent moment in which she achieves a state of grace that she returns once again "to write the remaining private and fictional words" (D 453).

Just as Morag fictionalises her past experiences as also re-assess them, Alex Gray in Patrick White's Memoirs of Many in One attempts to revisit her past by writing her memoirs. The lexicon defines memoirs as "record of events set down from personal knowledge and intended as material for history or biography." It is important to take note of the words "history" and "biography" in the definition, for Alex's search traverses from the personal
to the impersonal or universal. For instance, Alex begins the search to find out "What I [she] need[s]?" (MMO 18). In order to assess her present need, she goes back to the past to "find out whether the lives I have lived amount to anything" (MMO 35). Alex also thinks that writing offers a possibility "to pause indefinitely to absorb the beauty of life instead of escape from its ugliness" (MMO 40). At the same time, she considers writing to be her refuge to escape the custody and prove her innocence (MMO 59). This statement implies Alex's past and present at a stroke. In the present, it is Hilda's custody which she resents. It is also the custodial binding by her past misdeeds. From this state of the personal, Alex moves on "to discover--by writing out--acting out my life--the reason for my presence on earth" (MMO 157). Unable to find peace in family (in relationships) or religion, Alex uses writing as a weapon to find the frame that fits her (MMO 49).

One way by which she tries, though unsuccessfully, to pin down her identity is through her outback tour as an actress. There is an ambiguity regarding the authenticity of Alex's theatrical tour. The reader wonders whether the tour is real or a figment of Alex's imagination. Hilda remarks that even if the tour took place in Alex's mind, "it should have got theatre out of her system" (MMO 141) but the editor, Patrick White is not so sure. In spite of the ambiguous nature of the tour itself, Alex's stint as an actress serves an important purpose in the memoirs. At this point, it is crucial to compare Alex with another actor in White's fiction--Basil Hunter in The Eye of the Storm. Unlike Basil, who is unable to perform the role of King Lear, Alex
performs the role of Cleopatra with much ease, or at least she makes it out to be. But more than the performance, the reader wonders about the old woman for whom the theatre roles are mere manifestations of her own life. This, for instance, is evident in Alex's revelling in Cleopatra's voluptuousness as a way of countering her "Demirjian mother-in-law" (MMO 134). Similarly, she sees her own production "Dolly Formosa and the Happy Few" as a means to battle "with art and life" (MMO 136). It is also Alex's way of coupling sexuality with life and art. Thus, she believes that her production is a way of countering the boring performances of Shakespeare. Even though the production is a flop, it can be seen as a substitution of imperial culture by the indigenous. Arguably, this is a form of post-colonial subversion of artistic norms.

Another aspect of writing which both fascinates and baffles the artist figures is language (especially, words). Interestingly enough, Morag, Vanessa and Alex are all language-conscious protagonists who desperately try to merge the word and the world in spite of knowing the limitations of language. Over the earlier preference for silence and distrust of words to express experience, in these novels (A Bird in the House, The Diviners and Memoirs of Many in One), the artist figures attempt a direct confrontation with words. This tendency marks a shift from the earlier novels which is made possible because Morag, Vanessa and Alex are writers. However, the tussle with words take on different forms in these three novels. For instance, Morag gives importance to names because they define an identity. Thus, her
daughter's **name**, Pique, is not only an act of **recognition** of Jules' dead sister Piquette but also placing the name within a heritage. Also, naming gives Morag, what Theo Quayle Dombrowski calls the "Adam-like **power**" of naming God's creation for the first time ("Word and Fact: Laurence and the Problem of Language" 59). Like Vanessa's childish pleasure in creating a name for her Grandfather, Morag fantasizes the power involved in naming: "Imagine naming flowers which have never been named before. Like the Garden of Eden. **Power! Ecstasy!**" (D 170). Vanessa and Morag also seek to go beyond the intended meaning of a word. Theo Quayle Dombrowski classifies this as an attempt to "create their own reality" (59). The inability to grasp the existing meanings of words is seen in a series of questions asked by Vanessa and Morag as children beginning with "What means ....?" The explanations sought for, include words like depression, drought, cord, scavenger and recess. At a later stage, the phrases "Great Bear Lake," "Rest beyond the river" and "Slowly, slowly horses of the night" achieve "another, a different relevance" for Vanessa. Similarly, Prin's word 'mooner' means "something else" for Morag. For Alex, God is the "Almighty Poulterer" who plucks at human "**goose-flesh**" (MMO 114). In Alex's case such alternate descriptions are instances of, what Veronica Brady terms, the 'unnaming' and 'violations of language' ("Glabrous Shaman or Centennial Park's Very Own Saint? Patrick White's **Apocalypse**" 77). With such 'unnaming' comes the acceptance of the limitations of language.

Morag realises her power as the diviner of words which can do magic or sorcery only occasionally. "He was divining for
water what in hell was she divining for?" In these lines, Morag questions the value of fiction and equates it to magical activities like divining. Morag also realises the limitations of language to conjure the exact image or situation. As she herself puts it:

The swallows dipped and spun over the water, a streaking of blue-black wings and bright breast-feathers. 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 words could do anything. Magic, Sorcery. Even miracle. But no, only occasionally (D 4).

At the beginning of the novel, Morag wonders that "things remained mysterious, his [Royland's] work, her own, the generations, the river" (D 4). Her works and her life are quests to know the meanings of those things which remain hidden. The Snapshots and Memorybank Movies are ways by which Morag tries to chronologically re-create her past and find out what is hidden in them. Through writing, Morag tries to demarcate clearly the difference between reality and fiction. She questions herself at a certain point in the novel whether the word "liquid bronze" would be enough to depict the colour of the river. She continues:

Probably no one could catch the river's colour even with paints, much less words. A daft profession. Wordsmith. Liar, more likely. Weaving fabrications. Yet, with typical ambiguity, convinced that fiction was more true than fact or that fact was in fact fiction (D 25).

It is the acceptance of the blurred line of demarcation between fact and fiction that leads to realisation. In her book, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, Clara Thomas refers to Morag as a watcher in terms of her life and profession. What is more
important is that Morag "is far from calm, but she is becalmed. She is not powerless to act, but at this point in her life the opportunities for dynamic action do not exist in her relationships with others. They only exist when her work is going well, in the act of writing her fiction" (135).

In the case of Alex, the acceptance takes the form of rejecting art as a reference point. For instance, on the opening night of the performance of "Dolly Formosa and the Happy Few" Alex senses that:

I am waiting to perform some act expected of me in the context of a play, dream, my own life whichever ... I reach a point where I believe the cue will never be forthcoming. I must act of my own free will (MMO 167-8).

Acting on her "own free will" results in her rejecting her given dialogue "I am the spirit of the land, past, present, and future" (MMO 150) and voicing out "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (MMO 151). Veronica Brady suggests that this mistake is not a mere bungling of dialogues but marks a turn against her creator-protector (Patrick White) and the "riff-raff audience" i.e., "the parasite students and academics who eat out your liver and lights your heart" ("Glabrous Shaman" 73).

Vanessa, Morag and Alex try 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, (tragically and) inevitably breaks her marriage. On the other hand, the tragic circumstances of life kindle the understanding and creative talents in Vanessa. Alex's artistic attempts lead her through
mazes as different as religion and sexuality. On a final analysis, what matters more is their reliance and understanding of their own selves. As a young child, Vanessa reports: "I could not really comprehend these things, but I sensed their strangeness, their disarray. I felt that whatever God might love in this world, it was certainly not order" (BH 59). It takes a lot of time and considerable experience for them to realise the chaos of the world and the hidden order amongst the apparent chaos. This understanding gives them their identity which is strengthened by their artistic experience.

Though the progress as an artist itself serves as a means for coming to terms with the self, there are also certain heightened moments of grace enhancing the insights of the protagonists. One such instance is Morag's spotting of the flight of a "Great Blue Heron."

Once populous in this part of the country. Now rarely seen.

Then it spotted the boat, and took to flight. 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 of the world's dawn. The soaring and measured certainty of its flight. Ancient-seeming, unaware of the planet's rocketing changes ... unknowing that it was speeding not only towards individual death but probably towards the death of its kind (D 357).

This vision makes Morag realise that 'her quest for islands' had ended and that Pique's has begun, simultaneously with Morag's own attempt "to write the remaining private and fictional words" (D 453). Like the heron, Pique's Tonnerre heritage also faces extinction. However, there is a hope kindled in Pique's journey to Galloping mountains just as there is a "measured certainty" in
the flight of the bird. J.A. Wainwright considers the passage as Laurence's conviction that "the artist must investigate the relationship between her art and her life" ("You Have To Go Home Again: Art and Life in The Diviners" 293). Wainwright makes an apt comparison between Morag’s vision and the contrast between Harry's delusion and the leopard mentioned in the epigraph of Hemingway’s "The Snows of Kilimanjaro."

If Hemingway only implicitly equates artist and leopard, Laurence weaves the image of the artist's quest and task into her novel by linking Morag's creative thoughts and accomplishments to the beauty, integrity, and mortality of the heron's flight (293).

Alex's moment of grace takes place during her outback tour as Dolly Formosa when she sees a vision of light.

I walk on into the plain beyond, a carpet of dust, almost a mattress. A few ghost trees console the revenant I have become. Small birds skitter across the desert, larger ones rise by grace of a stately basket work of wings... . I cannot see his face, because it is gilded by the sun's glare, but sense that it is smiling, and know that it must be as dark as the smooth dark kneeling thighs. I can feel the stream of understanding which flows from this miraculous Being, bathing my shattered body, revitalising my devastated mind (MMO 138-9).

The contrast made between the small and larger birds goes back to Alex's search for a derelict mystic and not the Almighty God as also her acting of Dolly Formosa and not the immortal Shakespearean creations. Veronica Brady considers the vision as a rebellion against "false notions of goodness, against the lassitude which imposes limits, the so-called morality which is merely the instinct for self-protection" ("Glabrous Shaman" 75). Further, the protean nature of Alex's roles and the flexibility they offer is well brought out in her statement that her "naked body conjures up the archetypes of birds, serpents, insects, many
of them fiendish in their savage beauty, all hatched out of Dolly Formosa's teeming brain" (MMO 137). Commenting on a similar statement by Atwood's protagonist in *Surfacing*, Carol Christ makes a perceptive observation and to quote her:

> The protagonist recognizes her body as both revelation and incarnation of the great powers of life and death... . The female experience of the transformation of... body... is perhaps the most complete human incarnation of the great powers. The protagonist's vision of the universal transformative energy... is reflected in her characteristic perception of the fluidity of the boundaries between objects, animals, plants, humans (Diving Deep and Surfacing 47-8).

Such experiences pave the way for the quest for authentic selfhood.

So far, we examined how writing (art) enables the protagonists to come to terms with their pasts and to realise the limitations of words to express their experiences. In fact, these are some of the concerns shared by any metafictional narrative, which "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Patricia Waugh. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* 2).

Patricia Waugh points out how metafiction flaunts and exaggerates the instabilities of the real world and language, which, in turn, question and relativize each other. She likens the relativization process to Bakhtin's concept of "dialogisation" (5). Both Laurence and White have displayed their worksheets to the readers through *The Diviners* and Memoirs of *Many in One*. Michel Fabre draws attention to the title *The Diviners* which is emblematic "in a meta-fictional sense, since it sums up the reading of the novel
as process" ("Text, Mini-Text and Micro-Text" 171). This reading includes not only the fictional works of Morag but also other works such as Clans and Tartans of Scotland, 60th Canadian Field Artillery Battery Book, Ossian’s Poems and The Canadian Settlers’ Guide. There are also some instances of meta-metafictional elements. One such instance is Laurence’s account of Morag's novel Prospero's Child. Ildiko de Papp Carrington sums it up as the writing of "a novelist separated from her husband writing about a novelist separated from her husband who has written about a woman separating from her husband" ("Tales in the Telling" 158).

Patrick White's Memoirs of Many in One is a self-reflexive narrative. But it is a metanarrative with a difference, for White is writing against writing. The important question which the novel raises is regarding the reader and writer of the novel. Within the novel, Alex is the writer and White, the reader. For the Memoirs itself, White is the writer and we are the readers. Thus, the boundaries separating the editor and author are often collapsed. Veronica Brady terms such a collapsing of narrative boundaries as "the game" or "the dance" which goes on of its own accord, the to-and-fro movement between Patrick and Alex, dream and matter-of-fact, absurdity and frivolity, life and death, writer and reader. It has no goal beyond itself to bring it to an end but goes on renewing itself, generating its life from the interplay of opposites ("Glabrous Shaman" 75-6).

Such an interplay, allows interpretations like Axel Clark's reading of Gray as "half White" ("Patrick White: A Whiter Shade of Gray" 4) and Ron Shepherd's review of the novel as a "self-parody of a scholar manque" in an "attempt at self-objectifica-
tion" ("Editor or Author" 43).

Having ascertained the convergence of the writer and character who is a writer, it is worthwhile to consider how Laurence and White use such conventions (or breaking of conventions) for different purposes. With The Diviners, Margaret Laurence seems to have reached an affirmative acceptance of art and its limitations. The novel also marks the culminating point for both Morag and Laurence. Morag sets down the title and begins the novel which the readers and Laurence have just finished. In her article "Margaret Laurence's The Diviners: The Uses of the Past," Gayle Greene compares The Diviners to Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook in that they are "self-begetting" novels which end in the beginning (in Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence 180). This is seen in the novel opening and closing with Morag's contemplation of the river which flows both ways. Thus, what began as the merging of the perceiver and the perceived in A Bird in the House leads to the merging of the creator and the created in The Diviners. Such a merging of Patrick White and Alex Gray is found in Memoirs also as is evident in White's remarks within the text. Alex "might have created me, and I her" (MMO 180). Towards the end of the Memoirs, White remarks that

While I I --the great creative ego--had possessed myself of Alex Gray's life when she was still an innocent girl and created from it the many images I needed to develop my own obsessions, both literary and real.

If she had become my victim in those endless scribingings which I was faced at last with sorting out, I was hers through her authoritarian bigot of a daughter.

We were quits, oh yes, but never quit of each other (MMO 192).
Thus, White, the creator goes on living while Alex, his creation is dead or is only living through the memoirs. However, White has been stripped of his powerful authority as Creator and Protector by his creation. Witness, Alex's dismissal of Patrick, the self-appointed "spirit guide":

Now that I am free to write, shall I ever dare begin to sort out my disordered thoughts? It is a frightening prospect... . If Patrick were here he could guide me. No, I must do it myself. Patrick guide! Patrick cannot guide himself, that's why he's taken to carrying a walking stick (MMO 174).

By referring to him variously as "Born Mother Superior," "failed artist" and "Old Patrick," Alex includes and dismisses him at her will. As Veronica Brady aptly summarises,

She [Alex] writes him into the memoirs, summoning him when she wants him and then dismissing him, and relegating him to a very minor part in her world, even closing her door on him and turning the key... . He waits for her, and thus waits for himself, and is ultimately, if not the master, at least the survivor ("Glabrous Shaman" 73).

Thus, both the power of art and the potential of the artist are questioned. Unlike the other artist figures, Alf Dubbo (Riders in the Chariot) and Hurtle Duffield (The Vivisector), who attain their respective visions through their art, Alex's memoirs keeps the choice of realisation open to herself and her creator. This, perhaps, is an excellent example of the reversal of roles of the 'subject' and 'object' in a narrative. Further, the Memoirs also questions the validity of the solutions offered to life and reality through love, art and religion in the earlier novels. For Alex, love, art and religion are additions to her existing roles in life. Thus, the goals of the texts are "dispossession,"
"unrealisation" and "a negation of reference" ("Glabrous Shaman" 72-3).

Identifying such goals leads us to a common reference point towards which both The Diviners and Memoirs move, namely, the renunciation of magic involved in art. This is done through reference to Prospero's renunciation of his magical powers in Shakespeare's The Tempest. Morag initially questions whether Prospero can actually renounce his powers but realises later through Royland's loss of divining power that "the gift was a gift in the first place, not an inalienable possession" (Margaret Atwood in A Place to Stand On 27). However, Alex's shooting at the audience and her death signals White's exposure of the theatricality of our lives or as Brady puts it,

the duality, even duplicity, which is the basis not only of art but of life itself and which makes us uneasy and often unwitting accomplices of the truth of illusion and illusion of truth ..., suggesting that after all; "... we are such stuff/As dreams are made on, and our little life/Is rounded with a sleep" ("Glabrous Shaman" 74).

Though The Diviners and Memoirs are works of metafiction, there is a difference in attitude and treatment by Morag and Laurence and White and Alex respectively. This difference can be accounted for by applying Linda Hutcheon's distinction between modernist and postmodernist metafictions. Though The Diviners uses postmodernist techniques such as fragmentation and parody, it reveals "a modernist search for order in the face of moral and social chaos" whereas Memoirs reveals "a postmodern urge to trouble, to question, to make both problematic and provisional any such desire for order or truth through the powers of human imagination" (The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction 2).