CHAPTER V

ACCEPTANCE OF HERITAGE:

THE DIVINERS
The Diviners is a culmination of the Manawaka works. It is a complex and profound novel and an exploration of the meaning of life. In The Diviners, Margaret Laurence explores in still greater depth the tour de force undertaken by Morag Gunn, the narrator-protagonist, who always felt dispossessed since her childhood and suffers from a sense of inadequacy in her present that placed her in a quandary regarding her identity. Morag Gunn, the victimized individual of identity crisis undertakes a "voyage of exploration,"
1 towards acquiring an adequate self-perception. She comprehends it by interweaving the present and the past for a satisfactory resolution of her identity. Clara Thomas describes the interweaving of the past into present in following words:

Its pattern is a diagram of the interweaving of the past into 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 its tail. Repeatedly, Margaret Laurence demonstrates that the continuum moves inexorably, but she also demonstrates that the present and the future are not relentlessly and totally predetermined
by the past. They may be modified and ameliorated by the force of faith, acted out in love ... the past is inevitably a part of us, but not the dead hand of the past, rather by faith, by grace, translated into acts of love, the inheritors may inch inward though still within the enclosing coils of the present".2

Morag Gunn finds herself an orphan deprived of any knowledge of her own family. She never considers her low-class foster parents as her parents. She develops loathsome-ness towards Christie and his wife Prin as Christie is a scavenger and Prin dresses in a socially unacceptable way. Their kindness towards Morag is established for us:

A little room, you might be safe in a place like that, if it was really yours. If they meant it.

"I want to go to sleep" Morag says.
And does that. They let her. (25)3

Christie furnished his house from the rejects of the townspeople piled upon the Nuisance Grounds: the rickety chairs, the torn curtains, and these things made Morag Gunn
to develop loathsomeness and irritation towards her parents.
Christie Logan is the first and greatest character from
Morag's past and her first and greatest diviner, though it
takes her most of her life to recognize that Christie is both
preacher and prophet:

By their garbage shall ye know them, Christie
yells, like a preacher, a clowny preacher, I
swear, by the ridge of tears and by the valour
of my ancestors, I say unto you, Morag Gunn,
lass, that by their bloody goddamn fucking
garbage shall ye chirstly well know them ....
They think muck's dirty. It's no more dirty
than what's in their heads or mine (32).

Christie Logan is a flaming, constant force in
Morag's life. He has given her a home and a love. He also
gives her the priceless gift of her ancestors and invents the
figure of piper Gunn claiming him to be young Morag's
ancestor. He bases this fiction on the historical figure of
Archie Macdonald, a pioneering figure of Scottish origin, a
fact that Morag learns Years later. Furthermore, Christie's
creation of Morag Gunn, piper Gunn's courageous wife, fulfills
an urgent need in the lonely girl's life to cling on to a
family past which would give her a sense of identity. Morag
is filled with a feeling of pride as she hears about the manner in which her Scottish ancestors had braved the seas in order to reach alien shores and provided future generations with their ground of being. The need of any individual for a historical past is like the process of adapting the past to the individual's own requirements.

If they came to a forest, would this Morag there be scared? Not on your christly life. She would only laugh and say, forests cannot hurt me because I have the power and the second sight and the good eye and the strength of conviction.

(42)

For the adolescent Morag, the need to be accepted by society is an overwhelming need. The tale of her mythical ancestors now becomes for her "a load manure" (162). She wants slough off her past and to live in the here and the now. Her rejection of Christie tales is a rejection of the marginal figure. Her marriage with Brooke skelton is a means of escape from the past. Her leaving of Brooke can be viewed as a move in the direction of discovering her identity. Her visit to Scotland and her affair with Scotsman are both an attempt discover her celtic background. But these are also a means for her to repudiate her Canadian consciousness.
However, Morag experiences a moment of revelation when she decides not to visit Sutherland, the home of her forefathers. It is Canada that is her true home, just as it was not the long dead Colin Gunn who was her actual father:

"Away over there is Sutherland, 'Morag Dhu, where your people came from when do you want to drive there?"

"I thought I would have to go. But I guess I don't after all."

"I dont know that I can explain. It has to do with Christie. The myths are my reality. Something like that. And also I don't need to there because I know now what it was I had to learn here."

"What is, then?"

"Christie, is real country, where I was born."

(315)

Morag's years in Manawaka are climaxed and closed by her involvement in two terrible events; she is sent by Lachlan to report on the death by fire of Piquette Tonnerre and her two children. And the terrified desperate, self-induced abortion of Eva Winkler gives added strength to her
one resolve: "Nothing - nothing - is going to endanger her chances of getting out of Manawaka. And on her, own terms, not the town's" (124). She forsakes the town for the urban environment of Winnipeg and later Toronto. Her first rejection of Manawaka is because of the need to survive and then to grow. This has impelled her the forsake of self-exploration. Her journey is not a escape from home but a quest to explore the world. Roshan Shahari aptly says:

The journey is thus seen as a means of escape from the claustrophobia, confusion, and sometimes even from the comforts that home can offer. It is negation and the rejection of home. This recurring motif need not, however, be viewed in negative terms alone. ... This quest acquires yet another dimension when it becomes the artists' attempt to explore the world outside their homes, in order to create and to articulate. Finally if the protagonists want to leave their homes behind, it is to search for and discover greater freedom and independence than what they would enjoy within the boundaries of home; hence the actual journey becomes a metaphor for the journey towards selfhood."
Morag's sojourn is to be viewed as being more affirmatively a search for freedom and individuality. Her sojourn in Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Toronto in her quest for selfhood leads her first to form and then break up family relationships. Her loneliness in the relatively sophisticated world of the University of Winnipeg and her obsessive desire to appear city-bred draws her to the urbane and sophisticated Professor Brooke Skeleton. She becomes the victim of a subtle kind of dispossession. She is denied her choice of dress, coiffure, and even language. Morag's alienation from Brooke is because of his unwillingness to have a child. At first he postpones the decision, later Morag knows that he will never agree. He is too insecure in himself to wish to share responsibility for a child. Later still, she knows that she will never bring up the matter again and that in fact she does not wish to bear his child now. Their marriage is sterile and Brooks wants it so:

"Does it seem like the kind of world, to you," he says, "to bring children into?"

To that there is no answer. None. No, it does not seem like the kind of world, etcetera. But she wants children all the same. Why something too primitive to be analysed? Something which needs to proclaim
itself, against all odds? or only the selfishness of wanting someone born of your flesh, someone related to you? (201)

At Prin funeral, standing beside Christie, singing "Jerusalem the Golden," Prin's favourite hymn, she is desperately aware of the wreck of her marriage:

"Those halls of sion, the prince is ever in there. What had Morag expected, those years ago, marrying Brooke? Those selfsame hills?"

And now here, in this place, the woman who brought Morag up is lying dead and Morag's mind her attention, has left Prin. Help me, God; I'm frightened of myself." (209)

Even Brooke fails to understand her commitment to writing and tries to stifle her artistic creativity through ridicule. Her need to survive and there to grow had impelled her to reject the cocoon of unreality that her marriage with Brooke came to be. She walks out of Brooke's life and then had a three-week affair with Jules Tonnerre, her teen-age boy friend from Manawaka, who is also a victim of social and cultural alienation. This three-week affair with him allows
her to conceive the child. He leaves her free to have his child if she wishes. Then she decides to make a living by writing for herself and her child. Morag knows that she must go on, that she cannot go back:

Insane to have come here. Would have been better to have gone back to Manawaka. Christie needs her she needs a home for herself and her child, when it is born. But there is no way she can return to Manawaka. If she is to have a home, she must create it.

(239)

She goes to Vancouver, completes her first novel, Spear of Innocence and gives birth to Pique, a girl. The Vancouver years climax when Pique is five years old and Jules Tonnerre stays with them for two months. As always, Jules and Morag are bound together by the strength of their passion. On Morag's side at least, there is her deep recognition of kinship with Jules, both in the hurts he was born to and in her respect for his aloneness and victim roles. He is a half-breed. His past is a liability. Tonnerre, had once been a threat to the settlers. He resents being rejected by an ethnocentric society that considers half-breeds biologically and intellectually inferior to the
white race: "When his father died, he was denied admittance into the local graveyard because people were afraid of his half breed bones spoiling their cementry" (268). The French-Indian has no place in the white society. He remains locked in his victim's role.

Like Christie's tales of Piper Gunn, Jules recreates tales of Metis meaningfully by intentional, subjective interpretation. Margaret Laurence in this novel attempts to present the entire mythico-cultural heritage, not merely that of the white inheritance but that of native Indians and Metis as well. Clara Thomas says appropriately: "The passing on of an authentic heritage of their people is a central preoccupation of writers of today, particularly of writers of the post-colonial nations." Both Christie and Jules therefore in tales aim at survival with dignity since the present failed to provide them with any sense of distinctive identity. In his music Jules finds some opportunity for creative expression. He is a talented singer. By singing about the predicament of his people and extolling their feats of valour in the past, he pathetically attempts to transcend his victim experience:

The metis they met from the whole prairie
To keep their lands to keep them free... (341)
Morag and Jules are bound by Pique: "Sure Morag"
Jules says. "She yours all, right. But she's mine, too eh?"
(278). Their unity as a family is marked and sealed by Jules
singing to them his "Ballad of Jules Tonnerre", the story of
his grandfather and the Battle of Batoch. In the song Jules
has been able to sing his pride in his people and the pity
for them that he could never bring himself to say:

He took his cross and he took his gun.
Went back to the place where he'd begun.
He lived on drink and he lived on prayer.
But the heart was gone from Jules Tonnerre.

Still he lived the years and he raised his son.
Shouldered his life till it was done.
His voice is one the wind will tell.
In the prairie valley that's called QuAppelle.

They say the dead don't always die;
They say the truth outlives the lie;
The night wind calls their voices there,
The Metis men, like Jules Tonnerre. (283)

After Jules leaves them in Vancouver, Morag takes
Pique to England, partly to be close to a lively literary
scene, "because of a fantasy--Morag getting to know dozens of
other writers, with whom she would have everything in common" (294). In London, Morag's life is lonely and dominated by anxiety - about Pique, about her finances, about her ability to get her work done. She tells Pique tales of Christie Logan and Lazzarus Tonnerre which will give her child a heritage of ancestors, as Christie's tales had given to Morag. Pique has somehow inherited part of her parent's sense of loss. In Vancouver, where she grows up, she seldom sees her father who has become an itinerant singer. She misses her roots. Homeless and restless for a long time she seems neither able nor willing to adjust herself to society. Pique leaves Morag abruptly on an unspecified journey west. This, as the novel shows, is the cause of Morag's anxiety and distress. When Pique returns home after a journey of self-definition, there is antagonism between mother and daughter. Pique gives vent to her frustration which culminates in the cruel words she flings at her mother - "why did you have me ... for your own satisfaction yes. you never thought of him or me" (225). Even Pique is a victim of sense of loss. Marciernne Rocard asserts thus about these victimized individuals in following words:

If we go by Margaret Atwood's dialogue in Survival we should say that Morag, Jules, and Pique while first acknowledging the fact that
they are victims and repudiating the victim role, fail to chance their situation as long as they remain locked in their victim roles and in their anger (in what Atwood calls position three). Then the victims more or less successfully try to transcend their victim experience, to become creative, non-victims (position four), they are then able to accept their own experience for what it is.6

Art represents for Jules, Pique and Morag a way of transcending their respective alienation to come to terms with their past. In his music Jules seems to express tales of Metis. In the past he pathetically attempted to transcend his victim experience. Jules Tonnerre has passed on some of his ability to his daughter Pique who rather successfully manages to recapture through her own songs something of her French-Indian past, of that valley and that mountain:

Ah my valley and my Mountain, they're the same
My living places and they never will be tame
When I think how I was born
I can't help but being torn
But the Valley and Mountain hold my name
The Valley and Mountain hold my name. (60)
At the end we see her going to Manawaka, to her father's people. Furthermore, the union of Morag and Jules signifies a symbolic coming together of the various strands of Canadian history, namely, the Scottish-Irish, the Indian and the Mitis, and Pique, the offspring of this union, therefore represents the complete Canadian.

Morag experiences a moment of revelation. She realises that her ancestral home is Manawaka and that her father is Christie. She says, "Christie - I used to fight a lot with you, Christie, but you've been my father to me" (323). Morag's acceptance of her inherited past finally releases her from her conflictual relationship with her past. Jules and Morag exchange the precious hierlooms, the Currie plaid-pin and lazarus knife. The individual may lose the gift, but grace itself is not exhaustible.

Look ahead into the past, and back into the future until the silence ...

Morag returned to the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words and to set down her title. (370)

Jules Skinner and his sister, Piquette die physically and morally defeated through recovery and acceptance of their
inheritance. Morag and Pique eventually achieve personal fulfilment. The novel, however, ends on an optimistic note even though it starts in gloom. Margaret Laurence aptly says:

I feel that life and the world can be pretty gloomy and that people can certainly be hard and cruel to each other but I am convinced that gloom is not doom. There is hope and in most people there is a faith, a belief in the possibility of change that will come out".7

The journey undertaken by Morag leads to ultimate peace or triumph at the end of her odyssey. She acquires adequate self-perception, transforms herself into a "creative non-victim" by transcending her alienation through her artistic account. By recognizing Christie Logan as her father, Morag Gunn identifies herself with and accepts her Manawaka past, her own real past. Eventually she succeed in turning her experience of dispossession to artistic account. Morag completes the writing of her novel, The Diviners. She has 'divined' the truth that lies beneath contradictions. She has finally reached the true state of androgyny which accepts and celebrates the difference. She has returned 'home' in the most profound sense of the term. She emerges the most triumphantly individualistic of all Laurence's protagonists.
REFERENCES


3. Margaret Laurence, The Diviners, Toronto : McClelland and Stewart, 1959. The references to this text are hereafter indicated in parenthesis against the quotations themselves.


