The novels of Margaret Laurence have well-defined spatio-temporal settings. They reflect the Canadian social scene in all its variety, colour and complexity. The Manawaka novels like *A Jest of God* and *The Diviners* recreate the small Canadian town making Manawaka as real as R.K. Narayan’s Malgudi. The sociocultural setting as well as the spirit of place come alive on the pages of these novels. The innermost psyche of the protagonists is revealed through their interaction with those who are emotionally related to them.

Margaret Laurence probes deeper and deeper into the causes of a woman’s suffering in the context of mystifying terrain of human relationships. In the words of Nancy Bailey, in her Manawaka novels Laurence gives “unforgettable portraits of women wrestling with their personal demons, striving through self-examination to find meaningful patterns in their lives.”

The themes of alienation and survival are central to the works of Margaret Laurence which fact is evident from the present study. She repudiates the fragmentation and alienation afflicting her society and feels that the quest for spiritual survival is a necessary antidote to it. The characters in her novels struggle to overcome alienation and achieve personal and social integration “which is imagined as a freedom to love, to share, to meet, to touch. Such a state...is our spiritual home, the human goal, the grail.” In Laurence’s Canadian novels the fictional small town of Manawaka functions as a potent symbol of both.
alienation and spiritual survival. John Lennox makes an interesting observation on the difference between small towns in North American fiction and those in Canadian fiction: “While the social mythology of the small-town is recognizably North American, the social mythology of the small town Scots is distinctively Canadian.”

Manawaka, which is one such Scots-Presbyterian town, has elements of Laurence’s home town of Neepawa but, as Laurence herself says, it is “not so much any one prairie town is an amalgam of many prairie towns. Most of all.....it is simply itself a town of the mind.”

“With its paralyzing, often hypocritical, respectability and harsh social divisions,” the town is a symbol of divisiveness. Like all other places in the world, it also contains the seeds of man’s freedom. Laurence’s Manawaka heroines try very hard to escape from it but eventually realize that Manawaka is an aspect of their own inner selves and must be confronted from “within.” According to Laurence, alienation from the self and others is caused by estrangement from one’s own past, the problems caused by language and by thinking in terms of static dualities. Alienation from the self and others is often the result of estrangement from one’s own roots and ancestors. This is so because life is mistakenly regarded as a composite of disjointed episodes rather than the “process” it actually is: “...the past in a sense is always the present and the present is always the future.” In The Diviners Laurence uses the symbol of the two-way flow of the river to express this idea.
Laurence feels that a psychological and spiritual retrospective of one's own past is essential to psychic health for

"we stand in need of our gods, and we need links with our ancestors, partly in order to determine who and what we are, to decide what we hope to become, and to know what sort of society we will try to form. Fiction... both binds us to and frees us from our ancestors."

The attempt to come to terms with the past involves freeing oneself from its stultifying aspect while at the same time seeing its true value. Like individuals, even nations need to assimilate their past without rejecting it and accept both the good and the bad parts of it. Colonial and ex-colonial, countries find this task particularly arduous as they are habituated to importing religion and culture from other countries. In the novel *The Diviners* Laurence rejects the imported as untrue and emphasizes the need to come to grips with indigenous myths, religion and culture.

All the female protagonists of Laurence experience alienation from the self and others in someway or the other, only a few learn to survive at a higher, spiritual level. Others struggle towards it while still others continue to exist in their atomized conditions. Morag has not arrived at any final stage of psychological growth for, according to Jung,
individuation is a life-long process involving repeated symbolic deaths and resurrections within the soul. The protagonists and numerous subsidiary characters in the novels of Laurence provide us with a map, a map of spiritual condition of modern Canadians with specific reference to their physical and cultural milieu. In a way, the map applies to people belonging to other nations as well for, in all cultures the vast majority remain locked in their alienated states or, like Stacey and Rachel, struggle to move from psychic anarchy and alienation to a state of spiritual wholeness while a few, like Hagar and Morag, achieve that state.

The most interesting aspect of the novels of Laurence is that while expressing their socio-historic situation, she raises her highly individualized characters to the poetic universal. Her characters’ dilemmas and suffering, desires and errors, and their ability to consciously or unconsciously wound others make us as readers react to them not as fictional characters but as live human beings. This is so primarily because the profoundly religious vision of Laurence transcends party lines and ghettos. Since writers are socio-political beings like the rest of us, their fiction necessarily includes comments on their society. Value-free descriptions are not possible as the characters they create “do not live in vacuum. They live in specific place, and any writing about them must of necessity include social commentary.”

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Thus what appears to be political in their writing enters her work not because they are or are not consciously political "but because a writer is an observer, a witness and such observations are the air he breathes. They are the air all of us breathe; the only difference is that the author looks and then writes down what he sees." In this sense Laurence is "eye-witness, I-witness" who sees her work as "an act of Faith, Hope and Charity."  

Laurence, like all serious artists, hopes to increase the awareness of her readers by not denying "anything human" and by recording their perceptions in as truthful and artistic manner as possible. According to Laurence, this in itself is a political act in the broadest and best sense of the term. Laurence has often been hailed as hero of the feminist movement. Though she is certainly supportive of it and writes about feminist issues like women's dilemmas and alienation caused by their marginal position in patriarchy, she refuses to go to war against men for she believes that by doing so women themselves remain psychologically amputated.

According to depth psychologists, the human self is androgynous. Thus, a negative attitude towards men implies a rebellion against the contrasexual part of one's own inner or true self. Laurence feels that by sentimentalizing women's bodies and envisioning a women's culture which will be all loving, nurturing, and in harmony with nature. Radical, or cultural, feminists will be only creating new gender stereotypes which
will prove to be as damaging as the old ones of "Mother, Wife, Sister, Virgin, Whore, Goddess, Witch and Bitch."\textsuperscript{11} Caught in a victor-victim dichotomy, none of the women protagonists of Laurence (particularly Hagar in \textit{The Stone Angel}) is innocent, victimized one-dimensional human being. Laurence dislikes seeing either men or women as examples of gender and believes that if women have problems, so do men, as they are not members of a separate species. Adopting the stance of a moderate feminist, Laurence says

I'm 90% in agreement with Women's Lib. But I think we have to be careful here....For instance, I don't think enough attention has been paid to the problems of men have and are going to have increasingly because of the changes taking place in women. Men have to be reeducated with minimum damage to them. They are our husbands, our sons, our lovers....we can't live without them, and we can't go to war against them. The change must liberate them as well.\textsuperscript{12}

Margaret Atwood is of the opinion that in modern technological Canadian society men are psychologically more amputated than women as they have lost some kind of connection with their bodies.\textsuperscript{13} Bound by stereotypical images associated with their sex, men fear failure and consciously repress feelings which would cause them to appear "the
Solitary Weeper type." They know that for a grown up male to exhibit characteristics like "fearfulness, inability to act, feelings of extreme powerlessness, tearfulness, feelings of being trapped and helpless-he has to be crazy or a member of a minority group." Though society regards passive, helpless men as aberrations, the fact remains that men do feel passive and helpless at times.

In her article "Writing the Male Character" Atwood asserts, "the confusion and desperation and anger and conflicts that we find in male characters in novels don't exist only in novels. They're out there in the real world." Thus Mac (The Fire Dwellers), Bram (The Stone Angel), Jules and Christie (The Diviners) though not strikingly "manly", mirror men as they actually are. Laurence feels that women have to take the concerns of men as seriously as they expect men to take theirs. She also insists that women should not manipulate men and hanker after power but attempt to understand them, for a mechanical reversal of power positions transforming women from victim to victor positions leaves both the sexes trapped in static systems of dichotomies, which Atwood refers to as "violent dualities". Laurence feels irritated with critics who look for role models especially when evaluating the female characters in her novels. She is not interested in portraying ideal women but women as they really are with all their strengths and limitations. Margaret Atwood also dislikes the development of what she refers to as, "one-dimensional Feminist Criticism." In an article entitled "If You Can't Say Something
Nice, Don't Say Anything At All", she castigates women in power who "work over" women writers because they have not toed some stylistic or ideological like or other.

Women of my generation were told not to fly or run, only to hobble, with our high heels and our panty-girdles on. We were endlessly told: thou shalt not. We don't need to hear it again, and especially not from women. Feminism has done many good things for women writers, but surely the most important has been the permission to say the unsaid, to encourage women to claim their full humanity, which means acknowledging the shadows as well as the lights.18

She rightly assures that it makes no sense “to silence women in the name of Woman”19 The women protagonists of Margaret Laurence are not “relegate to the shadow-lands of either/or. They proclaim, if anything, their right to be fully human, to nurture without being Earth Mothers, to curse without being witches, to suffer without being Little Nell the lovable Victim, to copulate without being the Scarlet Woman.20 Aware of “the dangers of dictatorship by ism,”21 Laurence steers clear of rigid adherence to one stylistic theory or another. Like most serious artists, Laurence is not interested in trying out new forms for her own sake but in creating them. She admits that she encounters numerous
problemas quando evoluindo formas apropriadas para seus livros. Em seu artigo "Gadgetry or Growing: Form and Voice In The Novel," Laurence diz que ela enfrenta numerosos desafios ao tentar encontrar uma forma "que permita que um romance revele-se, uma forma através da qual os personagens se respiarem."

Atwood compara o desafio com o jogo 'Pick up Sticks':

...like in the game......you take up sticks, drop them, and then you have take turns trying to move the sticks without moving any of the others. The problem with writing a novel is that if you move one single thing in it, everything else moves.

As formas que finalmente evoluem obrigam o leitor a "fazer a ficção, ao invés de digerir passivamente.

Na sua artigo "An End to Audience" Atwood enfatiza a relação dinâmica leitor-texto quando diz, "É minha crença que o processo de leitura é parte do processo de escrita, a necessária conclusão sem a qual a escrita não pode ser dita.

Esta reconhecimento "disloca os conceitos de autoridade pessoal e significado absoluto em favor de uma abordagem mais aberta e pluralista e dá origem a um processo infinito de leituras revisionistas."

Laurence encoraja seus leitores a recriar sua ficção com base no seu próprio identidade ou personagem:
'Life-to-text' interactions find readers using their knowledge of the world and their experience... to make sense of texts, while 'text-to-life' interactions involve readers using textual knowledge to make sense of their lives, themselves socially constructed texts.\textsuperscript{28}

According to Atwood, "each piece of writing changes both the writer and the reader."\textsuperscript{29} Well-keeping with this view, Barbara Goddard says that the act of reading "is not just a deciphering of codes, it is a gesture of self-inscription. Filling in the gaps, the reader reproduces a life line. Self-actualization en process."\textsuperscript{30} Like Laurence herself, we as readers start living emotionally with the characters she creates and experience "with" them the need to revision our patterns of existence from their point of view. Our movement towards self-knowledge commences when we join the characters in rejecting polarities, peeling back the social onion-skins and intuiling the archetypal nature of our essential selves. After prying open the clamshells of alienating pride and propriety, we are encouraged to unify the warring aspects of our inner and social selves, see ourselves as strong yet fallible, acknowledge the essential humanity of others, show regard for all things great and small and experience a healing sense of peace which follows understanding. Such soul-searching broadens our consciousness and we grow to realize that

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...within the reality of our universal inadequacy, uncertainty and blindness lies a limitless capacity to reach out to one another, to hold one another, a limitless empowerment which is available and accessible directly in our finite limited condition.\textsuperscript{31}

Almost all the protagonists confront the traditional form of religions. The reason for this, arguably, is that Laurence views religion as a factor that binds women to conformism in much the same way as other social conventions. Thus, going against orthodox religion is a necessary step for the move towards the liberation of the self. There is an evolution from conformism to orthodox religion to a secular and personal form of religion. Thus, whether the protagonist breaks away from or conforms to religion, the final outcome is to gain a truer sense of one’s identity. Describing the growth in identity as something akin to self-realization, Sandra Djwa justifies “the rejection of false gods as enabling the individual to win through to the true spirit which can inform the flesh which the now lifeless convention has denied.”\textsuperscript{32} The gods in whom women have belief is a mysterious god glimpsed through a secular path and by coming to terms with the dark side of one’s personality. Thus, the novels neither moralize about good or evil nor present an abstract doctrine, but open to “the modern consciousness the neglected springs of life, the sources of a full and kindled consciousness, in separation from
which the soul is crippled and incomplete." Laurence may be termed "religious” only in her intention to reveal “the clarity of being” hidden from individual.

Women characters play a vital role in the novels of Margaret Laurence. Her heroines are determined in making a choice between the courses open to them. They either take the path of alienated Sizhenitsky or else plunge headlong into an encounter, unmindful of the outcome. In such instances, the woman protagonists of Laurence break out of the roles society has prescribed and find power in novel roles that they create for themselves which unite images of masculine and feminine power. The allusion to Rachel, Stacey, Hagar and Morag requires us to view the modern heroines as new avatars, archetypes of women who reject standard feminine roles in order to accomplish significant social actions like Ibsen’s Nora, Euripides’ Medea, etc. The novels of Margaret Laurence are pointers to attempts made by the creative writer to envisage a golden future, a world of deeper perceptions. They, in fact, look beyond, cartograph new horizons of existence, and formulate a society which they think would respond to the urges, aspirations, dreams, myths of human kind, and woman in a phallocratic world. The novels of Margaret Laurence are not a construct of fancy and fantasy of the phallocratic notion of Utopia, but they envisage a whole world in sympathetic terms. Their worlds are neither hype-real nor surreal but emerge as synonyms of reality. Laurence’s concepts of “living space” grapple with issues
related to the betterment of humanity of fe/male. But with phallocratic notions and impediments coming in the way, the fecund society which she portrays through her novels would remain handicapped. She also sees a glorious vision which reinforces her volition. Her attempt is to restructure sexual colonialism in society, to line up to the highest aspiration of human kind, which proves to be a beacon light to posterity-by not only indicating the phallocratic methods of [fe]male objectification, but also presenting women characters in their works, who in variegated ways defy such methods of male objectification.

When the female protagonists are examined within the view of their roles in the family, as daughters they are in perpetual conflict with their parents and are often compared with their socially successful sisters. As wives, some of them are portrayed committing adultery. Stacey MacAindra and Morag Gunn may be cited as examples. On the one hand, the adulterous affairs emphasise the loveless and incompatible marriages made by the women. On the other hand, it can be argued that the portrayal of adultery is a form of questioning and rebelling against the social norms which insist on chastity for women. On a psychological level, the adulterous affairs are ways by which the “real selves” of the protagonists are revealed.

As mothers, we can group them under three categories; successful, partially successful, and total failures. Favouring of one child over the other is a trait shared by some of the protagonists. Hagar’s favouring of
John over Marvin may be compared to May Cameron's differentiation between Stacey and Rachel. Further, for women like Hagar Shipley, motherhood is a biological fact. It is interesting to note that women like Rachel who do not experience biological motherhood have an intense experience of motherhood as something emotional.

Margaret Laurence insists on the physical ugliness of the protagonists and none of her daughter-figures are extraordinarily beautiful by social standards. However, Laurence establishes the passing away of beauty with age and the acceptance of it with grace as marking the growth in maturity. Stacey is well aware of her beauty as a young girl in Manawaka. But she realizes her physical bulkiness in the present which provides a striking contrast to her daughter Katie's natural beauty. Thus, her final words in the novel are a plea to "mutate into a matriarch." Similarly, Morag, who begins by being conscious of her long beautiful legs and who takes beauty treatments, grows into maturity in accepting Pique's natural grace and agility. In spite of her pride in her good tastes, Hagar is conscious of her grotesque bulk in the present. In the case of Rachel, her self-criticism about her "scarecrow" appearance and ungainly movements grows into an acceptance of the very same factors at the end of the novel.

The concept of time as the healer results in the cementing of bonds in Laurence's fiction. Thus, Morag reaches an understanding with Christie, and Stacey with her Husband Mac in the man-woman
relationship. As mothers, Morag and Stacey strike an understanding with Pique and Katie. What Nancy Bailey posits for Stacey may be applied with equal validity to the others, i.e., their capacity to break "the cycle of women's lives 'lived too long in both depression and fantasy while our active energies have been trained and absorbed into caring for others.'"[^34]

Laurence tackles the sexual encounters with ease. There are constant references to the sexual act as a confirmation and a reassurance of communication and understanding between individuals. As Ronald Labonte points out, though Laurence differentiates between love and lust, "sexual touching is the *sine qua non* in human contact because it alone pierces the appearances, the abstract images of ourselves which we project for the world to marvel at."[^35] Though Hagar believes that love should be "tender as lavender sachets," it is the acceptance of her sexual arousal to Bram that finally leads her to her self-knowledge. Similarly, Morag encounters a patriarchal "giver" in Brooke, lust in Harold and Chas, comfort in Dan MacRaith, and perfect understanding in her love-making with Jules. Commenting on Laurence's ability to integrate sex and sexuality, John Moss observes that "universal problems of human experience are seen and rendered in terms of sexual roles in her characters."[^36] On the one hand, such descriptions mark the insider's view Laurence has in writing about the intimate experiences of her characters. On the other hand, the sexual behaviour of Laurence's women is "inseparable from their total
experience of themselves." What they rebel against is the role-playing and gendering by society. Thus Morag, who walks out of her sterile marriage with Brooke and is permissive in her love affairs, takes it on herself to be a good mother to Pique.

Women's quest for self-realization is very often frustrated by the rigid norms of institutionalized religion. Almost all the female protagonists in Laurence view Christianity as an obstacle to their quest. Such a view is a direct reflection of the view of the writer regarding orthodox religion: "I don't have a traditional religion, but I believe there's a mystery at the core of life." The statement quoted vividly expresses the attitude of the writer and her protagonists to the traditional religion. The statement further reveals the use of religious frames by Laurence to explicate the ultimate reality or what she calls "the mystery at the core of life." It is the same mystery that impels the protagonists to move beyond the cocoon of their existence in an attempt at self-realization. The varying attitudes of the protagonists range from Hagar's open defiance in The Stone Angel, while Rachel Cameron displays a certain amount of scepticism. What begins as parody of faith by Stacey Mac Aindra in The Fire-Dwellers results in a total absence of religious faith in Morag Gunn in The Diviners.

In A Jest Of God, Rachel views God as a Cosmic Comedian taunting people for His perverted sport. This position leads her to reject both her mother's church and Calla's Tabernacle. From this position, she
moves to an understanding which follows St. Paul’s dictum, “If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.” (141 Her new found wisdom accommodates compassion not only for men but also for God. While Hagar’s attitude is one of outright irony, Rachel at least puts up with it outwardly for fear of displeasing others.

The protagonist of *The Fire Dwellers*, Stacey, is more liberal in her attitude to religion than all the other protagonists. For her, God is another individual or her own masked self with whom she can hold conversations in order to get out of the confusion of daily life. She is so deeply immersed in her roles as wife and mother that she cannot get out of them to devote her time to religion. Even Matthew, Mac’s father, who talks about religion, is seen only as a diversion and she frequently tries to protect her children from his awkward and delicate questions. She constantly pleads God to safeguard the interests of her children and husband, in a similar fashion.

The technical aspects of the fiction of Margaret Laurence often deal with images, symbols, quest motif, journey metaphor and the use of stream-of-consciousness techniques through interior monologues and first person and third person narrators. The two main techniques are doubling of characters and the concept of Time. The double in itself is quite a common technique in literature, and Laurence uses this technique for several purposes. The main aim is to dramatize the “intra—
psychic" conflict of the protagonists effectively. Doubling also affects the disparity between the true and false identities of the characters. Several other related techniques used to bring about doubling are: use of mirror images, dream symbolism, multiple narrators, and flashback and flash forward techniques. There are a few general characteristics in the type of fragmentation/doubling, which is both implicit and explicit; multiple and dual; and by multiplication and division. In the novels of Margaret Laurence the use of implicit fragmentation includes the division of Shipley-Currie personalities of Hagar in *The Stone Angel*, Cameron-MacAindra sides of Stacey in *The Fire-Dwellers*, and Gunn-Skelton facets of Morag in *The Diviners*. This implicit method, in turn, accounts for the predominant use of interior monologues and first person narrators in Margaret Laurence.

Doubling by multiplication is another category of fragmentation characterized by several persons striving to define a particular concept or attitude. There is one instance in Margaret Laurence of the use of doubling by multiplication. In *The Diviners*, Colin Gunn, Christie Logan and Royland serve as father-figures. All these characters contribute to Morag’s realization about her ancestral and creative heritages. Christie Logan and Royland also function as guiding spirits of Morag. Both function as diviners in the novel. Doubling by division is rare in Margaret Laurence. One example is the various men in Morag’s life. There are noticeable differences between Brooke Skelton, Harold, Chas, Dan
MacRaith, and Jules Tonnerre. All except Jules fail her. Her relationship with Brooke is sterile and is marked by his authoritarianism. To Harold and Chas she is nothing but woman and that too in a very physical sense. For Dan, making love is an extension of speech, comfort and reassurance, all of which he constantly needs. On the other hand, though Jules and Morag come together at long intervals, there is a complete giving and understanding between the two.

Coming to Margaret Laurence’s use of masks, guises and disguises, Hagar in *The Stone Angel* always chooses pure silks and suitable colours, like lilac. Her good taste is also evident in her criticism of Doris’ choice like dark brown silks. Later, when Doris comes to meet her in the hospital, Hagar first notices only the inappropriateness of Doris’ dress.

She’s wearing her gray silk suit....How like her, to get dolled up just to visit a hospital. The bouquet on her hat nods foolishly. She’s got terrible taste in hats, that woman. They’re always loaded with artificial flowers. Her head looks like a green house full of tuberous-rooted begonias, petals of all rosy shades, flesh and blush and blood. (278).

Hagar displays her interest in dresses almost till the end, for she notices what each one wears. She also strikes a bond with Sandra Wong by
sharing a dab of perfume. Stacey, in *The Fire-Dwellers*, also shares these traits with Hagar. However, she soon realizes the absurdity of the whole thing on seeing the stark contrast offered by her daughter, Katie:

In a green dress Katie MacAindra simple and intricate as grass is dancing by herself. Her auburn hair, long and straight touches her shoulders and sways a little when she moves. She wears no make up. Her bones and flesh are thin, plain moving unfrenetic, knowing their idioms.

Stacey MacAindra, thirty-nine, hips ass and face heavier than once, shamrock velvet pants, petunia purple blouse, cheap gilt sandals high-heeled, prancing squirming jiggling. (127)

Another type of guise is the mask of the role the characters play. An extreme adaptation of it can be seen in Rachel Cameron. She herself detects the "simpering tone" in her voice so typical of primary schoolteachers. This device of mask/guise/disguise is used by Laurence to emphasise the essentially grotesque nature of existence.

In Laurence's fiction dream symbolism and fantasy elements serve to emphasise the inner lives of the characters which are markedly different from the roles they play. They also focus on the gulf between the inner and outer selves of the characters. These devices operate in the
erotic fantasies of Rachel and Stacey. Whereas, in *A Jest of God* dreams and fantasies operate to bring out Rachel's repressed sexual instincts, in *The Fire-dwellers*, they bring out Stacey's longing for an idyllic world free of everyday chores. The opening chapter of *A Jest of God* closes with sexual fantasy. Rachel does not see her dream-lover's face clearly. She only sees his body distinctly. Immediately following this is her dream of a mortuary where she sees silent people "lipsticked and rouged, powdered whitely like clowns."(19) These two dreams show clearly her revolt against the tabooed topics of Manawaka society—love and death. Though escapist like Rachel's, Stacey's fantasies cover a wider range. They include elements of science fiction when Stacey imagines the galaxy as controlled by a scorpion-tailed flower-faced film buff. Science fiction is combined with erotic fantasy when she imagines Zabyul, a planet with a very advanced technology. She imagines herself to be transformed into a beautiful young woman who would make love to a handsome "galactic pilot." At other times it is a desire to lead a carefree life with her husband Mac. Other devices which bring out the techniques of doubling/fragmentation are the use of mirror images and of multiple narrators.

The last of the doubling and bonding devices used in *A Jest Of God* is the recurring use of mirrors. Hagar Shipley in her old age still sees the youthful Currie self reflected in the mirror. As Clara Thomas rightly points out, "only her (Hagar's) body has aged; her spirit is indomitably
young, tough, and brave." In River Street, on her way to Calla and the Tabernacle, Rachel sees herself reflected dimly in the windows of the locked and empty stores. In the bus station, hearing that Nick has left town, she sees first, a girl "holding her face close to the mirror as though she wanted to enter it like Alice and go through into an image world," and subsequently, she sees herself, reflected in the long wall mirror, running. (159) In a world of double, the two halves, male and female, whether within an individual or as individuals, belong together, the two needs should satisfy each other. But "if you think you contain two realities, perhaps you contain none." 

Margaret Laurence emphasizes the importance of time both in the form and the content of her novels. Time, is not chronological but circular thus encompassing past, present and future in one continuum. This shifting of emphasis away from the linearity of time constitutes the modernity and psychological weight of her novels. The commonly used techniques to bring out the concept of time are the use of memory as a mode of linking the past with the present and the related techniques of flashback and flashforward. Another technique is to begin the novel in medias res, thus focusing on the present with hindsight of the past and foresight of the future. Laurence uses innovative techniques as in The Fire-dwellers and The Diviners. The use of river image in The Diviners to denote the flow of time and life and its implications in all the novels of Laurence.

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According to Nicholas Berdyaev, there are three categories and corresponding symbols for describing time. The first type is "Cosmic time" symbolized by a circle, which refers to the endless recurrence of things: night following day, season following season, the cycle of birth, growth and decay. In short, it is the circular character of human and natural experiences. The second type is "Historical time" symbolized by a horizontal line and referring to the course of nations, civilizations, tribes though time. Likewise, an individual has a linear as well as a circular relationship to time. That is, the individual takes part in the historical and cosmic occurrences. The third type is "Existential time" symbolized by a vertical line, referring to a notion of time which is mystical or religious in nature. This concept of existential time is actually an extreme form of individualism, or in Berdyaev's words, "personalism," and presupposes the individual's ability to free himself from either cyclic or historical time.

The graphic image in Margaret Laurence is the Yoruba symbol of the continuum of time, the three interflowing circles of the serpent swallowing its tail. The Yoruba belief that "the dead, the living and the unborn literally inhabit the same time and same place"\textsuperscript{40} is echoed in the Manawaka work where "history proceeds simultaneously along the linear, horizontal and syntagmatic paths of the Western consciousness of time and paradigmatically along a vertical, African axis"\textsuperscript{41}

The main purpose accomplished by all three categories of time mentioned above is to establish the simultaneous presence of time at
various levels. The novels of Laurence have this quality in her treatment of the past which is not only individual past but encompasses the past of the nation and the ancestral or mythical past of the land. For instance, *The Stone Angel* treats not only Hagar's personal past but the pioneering past and the Scottish Presbyterian values of Canada through Jason Currie's past and the mythical past through the clan motto and war-cry of the Curries and finally the Old Testament Biblical past through references to Abraham, Agar, and Jacob. *The Diviners* scans through the Gunn and Logan heritages through Christie's stories, some Snap shots and Memory-bank Movies and the early pioneering past of the country through Morag's imaginary conversations with Catherine Parr Traill. It divines the Metis heritage through Jules' songs and finally combines all these by bringing together the Currie plaid pin and Tonnerre knife.

Margaret Laurence begins her novels in *media res*. The novels open in the present and then swings back and forth. Only in *The Stone Angel*, memories of the past are chronological.\(^{42}\) Even here, as in other novels, memory works by association. Thus, Hagar's lilac dress reminds her of lilacs which bloomed in the Currie courtyard. The rhymes sung by children while playing remind Rachel of her own childhood. Mac's angry words remind Stacey of her father's angry words to her mother. Brooke's photograph published in the paper reminds Morag of her own married years with him. The main device used by Laurence to bring out the thoughts of the individual is through interior monologues.
Apart from self-reflexive analysis of their own actions and words, all the heroines even address their partners silently. These are italicized in the text. Thus, the reader encounters such phrases as "Bram, Listen—," "Nick, listen—"and Listen, Mac—:" In *The Fire-Dwellers*, Laurence has used audio-visual techniques and fantasy elements. As Miriam Packer succinctly sums up, in her article "The Dance of Life: *The Fire-Dwellers*,"

Form is intricately related to content in this novel. The indented memories, italicized fantasies, private thoughts preceded by a dash, capitalized news from the media, narrator's comments in ordinary type, and actual conversations in ordinary type create a page which is visibly cluttered and untidy just as in Stacey's life and her inner passion..."43

In her illuminating article "*The Fire-Dwellers: Circles of Fire*," Sharon Nancekivell makes detailed analysis of Stacey's dreams, memories and fantasies to show how the novel follows the heroic quest pattern demonstrated by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*. Nancekivell's conclusions are perceptive. "The novel unfolds laterally and cyclically, progressing forwards and backwards simultaneously through many levels of time and psyche" (158). A graphic representation of Stacey's memories, fantasies and dreams reveals "a recurrent pattern of peaks and valleys" (166) which indicate the reaffirmation of "the cyclic
continuum of life" (167). Quoting Campbell, Nancekivell emphasizes "this idea of circles turning within circles" which indicates "the cosmogonic cycle which is normally represented as repeating itself, world without end" (167).

In *The Diviners*, there are a variety of devices to convey the past apart from the image of the river. They are snapshots, Memorybank Movies and Innerfilms apart from Christie's tales, Jules songs and Morag's tales to Pique. Laurence's preoccupation with time is seen in the dedication "To the Elmcot people—past present and future and for the house itself—with love and gratitude." Michael Fabre makes interesting connections between the epigraph and the novel.

The three-fold time reference hints at the river of now and then; the 'house' hints at the log cabin erected by the Coopers at McConnell's landing; and Laurence's "love and gratitude" parallels Morag's final thankfulness for her heritage and roots.44

The knowledge and experience of the present enables Morag to re-visit and re-assess the past, whereas Pique's future course is directed towards a movement in the past, that of joining her living ancestors. Such an attitude towards time enables Morag as well as other Manawaka heroines to probe the past in order to understand the present. As Morag rightly points out: "...a popular misconception is that we can't change the past—
everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revisiting it" (60). Thus, Morag's reconstruction of the Snapshots is more fictive than real. Thus, the past is not a 'given' existing 'out there,' but a psychological reality which can be revisioned or changed. On the other hand, by an honest re-assessment of the past, Hagar, Rachel and Stacey are able to change the course of their present and future. Thus Margaret Laurence is not an innovator of particular techniques but uses suitable variations of available techniques in her fiction to explore the predominant theme of self-realization in its spiritual and psychological aspects.
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