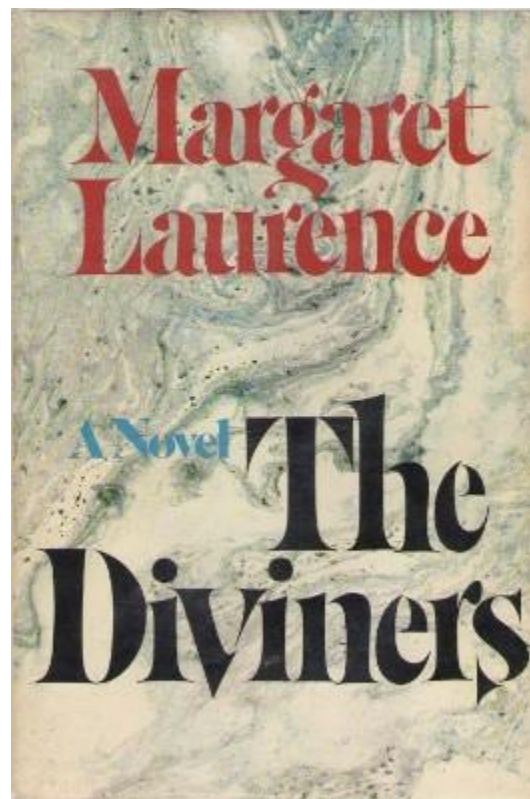


Self-Discovery in Margaret Laurence's  
*The Diviners*

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**Abstract**

Canadian Literature has the search for national individuality. The Canadian quest on identity crisis rapidly moves with a great deal of importance and forcefulness. There is a diligence of the forces and factors that have undermined the efforts to make up the mind from the dilemma of identity. The search of individualization of Margaret Laurence's heroines provides a platform to think with the sense of discontinuity and displacement caused by the colonial experience in Canada. It engenders a sense of inadequacy and insufficiency which affected the acquisition of an adequate whole identity. *The Diviners* has Morag as its heroine who cross a number of hurdles in her life to discover her own self.

**Key words:** Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners*, replicate, individuality, depression, identity

## Fictional Autobiographies

Margaret Laurence occupies a unique position among the women writers of Canadian fiction. She observes the dilemma of the question for identity and takes efforts to discover in fictional terms and styles to consider the women's problems. Her novels are usually thoughtful with the woman's or nation's identity. They also replicate the wide apprehension for the position of women in society and the parallel increase in the longing to develop and emphasize a individual search for Canadian identity. As Barbara Hehner says: "*The Diviners* comes to grips with currently debated issues much more explicitly than Laurence's previous fiction: the search for a Canadian Identity, the discrimination encountered by women, the unjust treatment of native people, and even ecology, find a place in the novel (Hehner 41)

Laurence's Manawaka novels *The Stone Angel* (1964), *A Jest of God* (1966), *The Fire Dwellers* (1969), and *The Diviners* (1974) may be described, as, fictional autobiographies' and has given remarkable portraits of women fighting with their personal determination through self- assessment to find significant prototypes in their lives. Her characters, in the opening of the novels, might be victims but by the end they refuse to become victimized. "in their dilemmas, her characters move us through four generations of the history of this country ... through two world wars and the depression to the contemporary setting" (Clara Thomas, 1976). Their state of backwoods is altered into a state of completeness by their journey, which is often seen as a means of escape. The real way of life becomes a symbol for the journey towards self-discovery and an approval of their inheritance. Laurence's nature portrays the lives of several generations settled in and around the town of Manitoba. She lights up the past of people in order to bring a decorum and stability to the lives of men and women in the current generation providing an act of compensation, by contributing a position in social history and a ground for some sort of cultural stability with a strong mission.

### *The Diviners*

*The Diviners*, Margaret Laurence's last novel in the series of Manawaka fiction has been applauded by many critics as the most exceptional accomplishment in her profession. The novel is about Morag Gunn, who is born in small-town Manitoba who lost her parents at a young age. The novel is divided into five sections – "River of Now and Then," "The Nuisance Grounds," "Halls of Sion," "Rites of Passage," and "The Diviners". The "River Now and Then" and "The Diviners" surrounds the three leading sections of the book. "The Nuisance Grounds" examines Morag's present that comes to peak in two phone calls. In "Halls of Sion," Morag apparently escapes from Manawaka

and from her parents only to search for her own roots. In “Rites of Passage,” Morag has exposed her life down to the bare prerequisites and sets out on the search for “vital truth”

### **Morag**

Morag was brought up by the town scavenger and his dim wife. She goes to University in Winnipeg to escape the life she was brought up into. In the University she marries her Professor and also she becomes a writer. Morag leaves her husband he refuses to let her become a mother and doesn't persuade in writing. After her separation Morag meets her childhood friend/lover and lives with him and has a baby. She raises the baby on her own in Vancouver, London, and McConnell's landing. When her child leaves, she feels lonesome and starts searching for her own roots – where she has come from. Finally, she finds out the reality that her ancestry is nowhere but in the same place where she was brought up.

### **Brooke Skelton and Morag**

Morag escapes from her parents to search for her own roots. In her search she meets Brooke Skelton who feels that Morag is more attractive and appealing because she seems to have no past and she is original. The relation of Morag with Brooke comes to an end when Morag realizes that she is not able to live in two eternal stationary worlds that Brooke prefers. He wants to live in the world that discards the history and not accepts the upcoming life in the shape of a child.

### **Jules Tonnerre**

Morag leaves Brooke and discovers Jules Tonnerre, in so doing she tries setting up continuity between her past in Manawaka, to her present life, and her future. She also leaves Jules and she carries the child she has wanted in her life. She cannot find her own individuality, thus trying to be conventional herself into the person that she thinks people will like better. “She tries to be whoever/whatever he wants her to be: as a wife, a lover, a writer”. (Laurence, 60). She is simply trying to be whatever it is that she thinks would please the others around her, instead of searching for her own self. She searches for an answer in the memory; “The aeons ago memory. The child saying I'll just go up and see my mother and father, now, for a minute. And Mrs. Pearl, holding tightly to the child's wrist, saying No you don't; they're too sick to see you; they don't want to. They had wanted to see her; they had not wanted her to see them. The gaps in understanding, the long-ago child wondering to what was being kept from her wondering why they did not want to see her” (Laurence, 356). Morag's desire to understand what she was not able to understand as a child is clearly shown in the lines.

The affair with Jules Tonnerre which lasted for only three weeks resulted in the birth of a girl baby who is named after Jules' dead-sister Pique. Morag moves to London to give attention to her literary career after the birth of Pique.

As the novel moves more into her life, it's obvious that she had concealed her identity for a very long period in her life. This is seen in her marriage with Brooke and then their separation. Morag has a feeling that Brooke was the one who made her what she required to be and she used him to defend her from the reminiscences of her past. However, when she finds that she can't just be a camouflage and that people in her past are significant she feels relaxing with Jules and comprehends that she has been a protection in herself from herself. After they have relationship she understands that she doesn't belong to reconcile down with a man who needs her and she wants her own self to be something that she is responsible for, "“What I'm going to do,” Morag says “is, I'm taking off.’ ‘You think you can?’ ‘I have to. It's complicated, but I have to.’” (Laurence, 223).

### **A Stranger in Her Own Place**

Morag is presented as a character who often feels herself a stranger in Manawaka. Her poverty always makes her feel ashamed and she is embarrassed by Christie and Prin. She acquainted with a silent friend in Jules Tonnerre, a youth in her school. They walk and talk and, ultimately, she has her first physical relationship with him. Jules is never permanent in her life, he moves in and out of her life, never staying for long. Jules tells Morag the tales that he had heard from his drunken father Lazarus which are entirely different from that of the stories told by Christie. Morag realizes that the truth has different version and the stories of Christie no longer impress her even though Heroism exists in those stories.

### **Searches for Her Identity**

Morag wanders from place to place in search of a home, which she at last realizes she must make for herself in Canada. She also searches for her identity as a woman, mother and writer and as an individual in a community. She swears never to return to Manawaka but Morag understands that she must come back to the place she never considered and she had left behind. The land Christie has created for her. When she finds out that he is dying she returns home and she admits to Christie, that he has been a real father to her.

In this novel, Morag is trying to find out who she is; she uses photographs to help demonstrate who she is. Yet another significant idea to consider in the book is the past vs. present. The novel opens up with the words “the river flowed both ways” this is important because it essentially sets up the whole novel by conversing how the past and present are important but it’s also vital when considering Morag’s identity, she lives her entire life by trying to return to the past challenging to figure out what her true self is. One of the important and relevant themes of *The Diviners* is that of stories and how these echo the human life. Morag connects very strongly with the stories of her ancestors in Scotland, the stories that comprise her own life, and the stories she writes for and about herself. Morag is also intently interested in the inaccuracy of experience and stories to reflect what really happened.

Morag is an established writer, but her dedication is not easier than before. She is also a single woman with a growing daughter whose own characteristics must be respected. She used to think words could do anything. This sense of lack of a significant identity makes her agree to a voyage of journeying across time and space towards acquiring an adequate self-perception and that represents the novel. It is the past that shows the present its own face. An assessment of the past is not an easy matter of recovering for Morag. She has problematized the genuineness of her past by a frequent invention of her lived past and modified it to her needs. It is Morag’s relation with her inherited past, responsible for her inability to come to terms with her present. She can determine her present crisis only when she begins to accept and value her legacy in its true outlook.

### **Intertwining Narratives**

Margaret Laurence deliberately and clearly intertwines in a well-built nationalist objective through Christie’s tales of Piper Gunn and Jules’s tales. *The Diviners* is not just a story of a person’s journey towards self-discovery; but it is also a story of many people of a Canada. Both Christie and Jules are marginalized and substandard human beings, insulted and kept away by the society. The present fails to provide them with any sense of a typical identity. Morag’s acceptance and re-evaluation of her inherited past finally releases her from conflict with her past. The image of the river flowing both ways at the beginning of the novel again appears at the end of the novel symbolising both past and present. Morag, sees the necessity of achieving such a total presence as that of the river is necessary for an integrated and whole identity. Like the river Morag too achieves a self realisation by incorporating the past into the present.

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