

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

TIME IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S THE DIVINERS

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

1977

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks are due to Dr. P.C. Noel-Bentley, who supervized the writing of this thesis and who was unfailingly generous of his time. His patience and encouragement made the writing of this thesis possible.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the thematic use of time in Margaret Laurence's The Diviners. While time as theme enters Laurence's earlier fiction, the thematic and technical importance of time culminates in her most recent novel, The Diviners.

The first chapter looks at the ways, both thematic and technical, that time is a consideration in the earlier works. Time is of ever-increasing thematic importance over the course of Laurence's fiction, although there is minimal critical recognition that such is the case. As a brief critical survey demonstrates, Laurence's thematic treatment of time tends to be alluded to, rather than analyzed. Laurence's non-fiction reflects her interest in the nature of the relationships of past, present and future.

The second chapter discusses the treatment accorded the relationship between past and present in The Diviners. This is a fundamental aspect of the novel, structurally reflected by the alternation of time-present sequences with flashbacks. In this manner, and otherwise, Laurence demonstrates the interpenetration of past and present.

The third chapter discusses how Laurence portrays the future in organic relationship with the past and the present. The controlling metaphor of the novel--the River of Now and Then--gives focus to this central idea. Morag Gunn, the novelist protagonist, comes to live and write in terms of this vision of time, a vision within which the imagination is finally free to roam back to both one's personal and

one's ancestral past.

In the context of The Diviners the art of fiction involves the divination of the future. While The Diviners has a vast thematic range, it is structurally and thematically unified by its vision of time. The ideological framework of the novel arises from the concept of time presented; one is adjured, as Laurence expresses it, to "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future".

CHAPTER 1

THE TREATMENT OF TIME IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S FICTION

The Diviners focuses upon time, and in so doing fuses theme and technique. The central theme of the novel is time, specifically the relationship between the past, the present and the future. Laurence's highly sophisticated narrative technique variously collapses and telescopes the reality of chronological time in favour of the verity of psychological time. A preoccupation with the technical aspects of exploring the theme of time pervades the novel. While time is a theme common to all of Laurence's fiction, it is in The Diviners as nowhere else that theme and technique are forged together. From this fusion springs the narrative power and thematic variety of The Diviners. Only the seeds of this strength and abundance are sown in Laurence's earlier fiction.

This Side Jordan, Laurence's first novel, treats time exclusively as subject matter. The odd memory enters the narrative stream, but little attempt is made to manipulate narrative in order to heighten thematic effect. The same is true of The Tomorrow-Tamer, a collection of short stories that appeared shortly after This Side Jordan. The Stone Angel, the first of Laurence's "Manawaka" works, appearing only a year after The Tomorrow-Tamer, heralds an important development, for it is with The Stone Angel that Laurence becomes aware

of the problems and possibilities that the technical reflection of a thematic concern for time raises. In trying to draw the reader into the psychological world of a dying ninety-year-old woman, Laurence somewhat stiltedly sandwiches suspiciously lucid and detailed chronological flashbacks between the episodes that constitute the sequence of time present. By her own admission (see below) Laurence's first "Manawaka" novel is technically awkward. The simple use of rigidly chronological flashbacks does not fully convey the protagonist's sense of being overwhelmed by memory. The next "Manawaka" work, A Jest of God, appeared only two years after The Stone Angel, but a great change in narrative technique is evident; in A Jest of God the narration is a pure stream of consciousness. The reader is drawn deeply into the psychological world of the protagonist, and so convincing is the neurotic persona whose mind the reader is allowed to enter that it is difficult to remember that the verisimilitude is an illusion created by Laurence. In the following "Manawaka" novel, The Fire-Dwellers, the trend toward increasing narrative meticulousness is continued. As in The Stone Angel the past pervades the present. The technical means by which this is accomplished is through the use of flashbacks. In this case Laurence uses flashbacks far more judiciously than in The Stone Angel. In The Fire-Dwellers the flashbacks are short, sporadic, visually prominent and chronologically random. Their very jumble mirrors the confusion and generalized anxiety of the psychological world of the protagonist. The mess that is her mental state is thus reiterated in technical terms, in the disorder and the formal irregularity of her memories. The penultimate "Manawaka" work, A Bird in the House, is a collection of

short stories that mesh together so well that they virtually constitute a novel. The stories, in chronological order, relate the childhood memories of the adult narrator. As an adult, the narrator views from a radically different perspective the impressions that she received and retained as a child. The novel, or collection, contains little explicit discussion of this inherently dual vision; the process of the change in consciousness from childhood to adulthood is captured primarily by the careful use of narrative technique. Laurence uses a double filter. The memories are those of a child, but they are filtered through the mind of an adult narrator, so that the reader is conscious, always, of both angles of vision. As Vanessa grows older, the points of view tend to merge, and through this technique the processes of change and development are captured.

Laurence's increasing tendency to connect subject matter and narrative technique culminates in The Diviners, and the topic that occasions this fusion is time. Elsewhere Laurence states, "the past in a sense is always the present and the present is always the future".¹ In The Diviners, this idea is repeated in association with the river that is the novel's central metaphor for time. The river is real in that it is the river that Morag Gunn, the protagonist, gazes upon as she writes her novel. Yet the river is also metaphorical; the first section of The Diviners, for example, is entitled "The River of Now and Then". As the novel closes, the real and the metaphorical aspects of the river are associated with each other:

Morag walked out across the grass and looked at the river. The sun, now low, was catching the waves, sending out once more the flotilla of little lights skimming along the

greenbronze surface. The waters flowed from north to south, and the current was visible, but now a south wind was blowing, ruffling the water in the opposite direction, so that the river, as so often here, seemed to be flowing both ways.

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

How far could anyone see~~x~~ into the river?₂

The novel closes with the posing of this most basic question about time.

There is to date no consensus among critics as to what, precisely, Laurence's treatment of time in The Diviners signifies. Although critics tend to note that time does indeed play an important role in The Diviners, their critique is generally in the order of passing comment, and acknowledgement is seldom accompanied by analysis. Criticism tends to focus upon two aspects of this topic: the structural role of time in The Diviners, and the nature of the relationship that the novel establishes between the past and the present. Bernice Lever describes how time is used structurally:

The basic structure of the book is similar to that of The Stone Angel. The contemporary time sequence of The Diviners is from one of the warm weeks at the end of spring to the beginning of autumn; in the interim, Morag recalls her past in chronological snatches. These memories build on one another and gain in power through repetition. . . .₃

Lever is accurate, but fails to follow acknowledgement with analysis. Brita Mickleburgh is similarly brief in noting that headings which denote the past, like "Snapshot" and "Memorybank Movie", are "at the best superfluous, and at the worst, artificial and distracting." Mickleburgh interprets these headings as inferring the reader's

inability "to cope with the movement of a plot which alternates directly between past and present."⁴ Kenneth Hughes links the technical use of time to its thematic role:

The deliberate fragmentation of the plot with its constant flashbacks is not done simply to destroy linearity but to reveal how the past lives on in the present and must be brought into a coherent framework of values so that the linear way into the future and history may be created.⁵

Critics view Laurence's technical use of time in The Diviners in very different ways; what Mickleburgh finds distracting Hughes finds revealing. The question of the thematic use of time in this novel is answered with just as little critical accord. Lever notes, without pursuing her observation, that "The Diviners spans three generations" and that in 1974 Laurence "explained that one knows clearly only about a three-generation span - some of your grandparents' words and views, more of your parents' time, your own time in detail, and some of your children's ways."⁶ This observation shows more promise than portent. And such isolated observation does not do justice to the importance of the role of time in The Diviners. Audrey Thomas is somewhat more helpful; she accurately points out that "Although the book is set in the present. . .Margaret Laurence weaves in the past through the tales which Christie Logan and Jules Tonnerre tell Morag while she is young."⁷ Although it is recognized that the 'tales' told have an intimate connection with the factual past, Thomas only meagrely pursues the implications of this observation:

Christie's tales are bardic in language and romantic in tone. . .Jules' tales are of an equally mythic character

. . .As Morag grows in historical knowledge, she discovers that the tales are indeed fiction (albeit based on fact) but also discovers that it doesn't really matter.⁸

Thomas recognizes the influence of the 'past' (tales) in the 'present', but there is no discussion of what thematic function this technical pattern serves; the importance of Laurence's inclusion of 'tales' is not explained.

Mickleburgh states:

In the final analysis, the bond between Jules and Morag lies in the fact that both have sprung from the dispossessed: Morag's people were victims of the Highland Clearances as Jules' Metis ancestors were ruined by westward colonization.⁹

Mickleburgh's observation is useful to the degree to which it points out one of the major thematic concerns of The Diviners--the relationship of the past to the present. Unfortunately Mickleburgh's observation is severely restricted in scope and represents only, so to speak, one facet of an important theme.

Barry Cameron describes well, if briefly, the significance of the role played by time in The Diviners: "Morag Gunn, Laurence's protagonist, is also in search of ties with her ancestors in order to discover her place in the continuity of time and being."¹⁰ In his short but sound review, Cameron notes how the technical importance of time is related to the thematic treatment of time:

Laurence establishes immediately the impression that Morag is the narrator writing about herself in the third person and makes emphatic that Morag's narrative is an attempt, through the ordering effects of fiction, to make sense of her life, to give it meaning. The method of presentation also stresses the ways in which past and present, fact and fiction, history and myth, every penetrate each other,

reshaping and reinterpreting each other and, in so doing, reconstituting reality.¹¹

While Cameron acknowledges the thematic use of time as a means, the end to which he ascribes the means is inaccurate insofar as his definition is incomplete. The Diviners does explore the nature of the relationship between the past and the present, but it does so in organic relationship with the future.

To date the only lengthy critique of The Diviners is the chapter of the same title in Clara Thomas's book, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence. Thomas notes that Laurence demonstrates both "the need of any individual for a historical past to feed into his present"¹² and "the interaction of past and present"¹³. It is claimed that The Diviners'

pattern is a diagram of the interweaving of the past into the 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 his 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. This perception is the final statement of affirmation in what is a profoundly hopeful book: 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 upward, though still within the enclosing coils of the present.¹⁴

Laurence does present time as a continuum and repeatedly shows interplay between past, present and future in a tone that is on the whole cautiously hopeful. What is difficult to reconcile is Thomas's accurate if sentimental observation with her conclusion that, thematically,

tically, The Diviners

fans out finally from the simile of the great blue heron in flight to the recognition of a cosmological design, beyond time and space as we know them, containing man as one of its myriad interlocking patterns.¹⁵

Laurence does not offer an esoteric vision in which a vast cosmic plan carries one beyond time and space; on the contrary, Laurence is interested in human perception of time and space, and interested especially in experiential time. In 1970 Laurence wrote

In a poem entitled "Roblin Mills, Circa 1842, "Al Purdy has expressed it like this -

They had their being once
and left a place to stand on.

They did indeed, and this is the place we are standing on,
for better and for worse.

I remember saying once, three or four years ago, that I felt I had written myself out of that prairie town. I know better now.¹⁶

In 1972 Laurence added a further comment on these lines of Purdy:

"this is right, because this is the place we are standing on".¹⁷ These lines from "Roblin Mills" in 1974 having become the epigraph to The Diviners, it is reasonable to assume that the sentiment Laurence expresses in association with these lines--"I felt I had written myself out of that prairie town. I know better now"--is applicable to the content of The Diviners.

Thomas appears to be unaware that the epigraph establishes the importance of the relationship between the past and the present before the body of the text even begins. Laurence's interest in and attitude toward this relationship is a matter of record: she denies that "real

liberation comes from turning your back on your whole past or on your ancestral past. Rather it comes through coming to some kind of terms with it, knowing that there is a certain amount of mental baggage, which you would just as soon not carry, but nevertheless, you're stuck with it."¹⁸ She adds:

For me the past is extremely real. I can't believe that all of life is contained in today, and the past goes back a long way. I mean it goes back not only as far as one's own parents, for example, but the grandparents and the distant ancestors, and a great deal is passed on. One does change. People change from generation to generation, but they don't change totally.¹⁹

Laurence's interest in the question of time is explicit in the non-fiction and fiction alike. Even the early fiction deals with time thematically, and Laurence is on record as recognizing time as a technical problem in certain of the novels that precede The Diviners. Thus the strategic role of time in The Diviners can be considered to be an outgrowth of the previous work, a natural development, given the growing attention accorded time over the course of Laurence's fiction. The thematic importance of time begins in Margaret Laurence's first novel, This Side Jordan. The story is set in Ghana, on the eve of that country's independence. The protagonist, Nathaniel Amegbe, finds himself caught between the tribal, forest culture of his childhood and the European, urban culture that is the milieu in which he moves as a young adult. As a fledgling nation, Ghana teeters on the brink of two political realities; and in parallel fashion, Nathaniel finds himself confused in the presence of two cultural realities. He is psychologically unable to leave the culture he was born an heir to, submerge

it as he initially tries. He feels burdened by the knowledge of this inescapability:

Oh Nathaniel, how can a man forget? A man cannot forget. Deep, deep there lies the image of what the eye has lost and the brain has lost ready to command. 20

Alternately attracted and repelled by the customs, gods and mores of his forest tribe, he feels the tug of both African and European cultures. Nathaniel feels trapped because he can neither completely reject the old ways nor totally accept the new. The sense he has of being adrift is expressed in terms of time; his uncle tells him:

'Do not forsake your own people' Adjei said, gently, 'or life will be a bitter leaf in your mouth.'

'It will not happen so.'

'You are young,' his uncle said. 'Some day you will know where you belong.'

Nathaniel grinned, and bitterness welled up in him.

'I belong between yesterday and today.'

Adjei Boateng smiled also.

'But that is nowhere.'

'I know,' Nathaniel replied. 'Yes, I know.'

(pp. 106-7)

Towards the end of the novel, just prior to the birth of his son, Nathaniel realizes that it is only by attempting to come to terms with the cultural confusion of his time that he will be able to live in peace with himself. This acceptance is symbolized by his final choice of career: he rejects returning to the forest to work for a tribal chief, and instead, chooses to remain in the city and teach at a boys' school. The headmaster of the school half-jokingly suggests that Nathaniel will be the school's "kra" or soul:

Nathaniel tried to laugh, too, but the laughter stuck in his throat. He was to be its 'kra', then, its soul, seeking perfection? Its guide in a new land, its ferryman across Jordan. All that when he did not know the way himself?

(p. 273)

For all his hesitancy, Nathaniel chooses to live in the modern way, the way that paves the road to the future; but his choice does not preclude a respect for the past. He elects to stop trying to obliterate the past that is part of his being; he comes to value the old ways (as being the school's "kra" implies) while accepting the new ones (as being a "ferryman across Jordan" implies). If the future is to hold any promise, the ways of the past ought to be valued in the context of the present. One must acknowledge the reality of the present, but at the same time, in Nathaniel's words, "There must be pride and roots" (p. 22). As Laurence explains elsewhere, "what one has come to see, in the last decade, is that tribalism is an inheritance of us all. Tribalism is not such a bad thing, if seen as the bond which an individual feels with his roots, his ancestors, his background."²¹

At the conclusion of This Side Jordan, Nathaniel names his newborn son Joshua:

He glanced at his son, and the name kept beating through his mind like all the drums of Ghana.
- Joshua, Joshua, Joshua. I beg you. Cross Jordan, Joshua.

(p. 282)

Laurence seems to suggest that valuing the past is requisite to metaphorically crossing the Jordan and reaching the "promised land" of a bright future; she comments elsewhere, "the dream-goal of the promised

land could be achieved, if not in Nathaniel's lifetime, then in his son's."²²

Though definitely a thematic concern in This Side Jordan, time is not truly a technical concern of Laurence's first novel. There is little technical reflection of the thematic treatment of time. This Side Jordan is for the most part narrated in the third person and written in the past tense. Infrequently, the narration is first person and the narrative is in present tense, when Laurence wants to convey what Nathaniel is thinking. Such passages are marked in the text by being indented and preceded by a dash. The theme of time receives little technical attention in This Side Jordan.

The Tomorrow-Tamer, a collection of ten short stories set in Africa, appeared in 1963, three years after This Side Jordan. All but one of the stories had been published previously, the earliest in 1956. As a group, these stories share with This Side Jordan the theme of the psychological, spiritual and moral stress that victimizes those caught between the old and the new Africa, between the customs, fetish priests and gods of the past and the urban, Europeanized ways of the present.

For example, in "The Merchant of Heaven" this theme is explored in terms of its religious implications:

Danso as a little boy, in the evangel's meeting place, listening to the same sermon while the old gods of his people still trampled through the night forests of his mind. The shadow spirits of stone and tree, the hungry gods of lagoon and grove, the fetish hidden in its hut of straw, the dark soul-hunter Sasabonsam --to these were added the dragon, the serpent, the mark of the beast, the lake of fire and the anguish of the damned.²³

Torment is the result of being haunted by the jealous gods of the old and the new beliefs; in this sense, the problem here is one of time. The religious metaphor is peculiarly appropriate; one is spiritually lost if one cannot reconcile the past with the present. The implication is that a sound spiritual state is accompanied by the view that time is an organic whole, a "river of now and then."

The same argument is expressed in "The Voices of Adamo". The protagonist, Adamo, is raised in a small village and, as he grows up, is taught the traditional beliefs:

Adamo's father was strong. He knew always what to do. His [Adamo's father] own father and mother had been dead for many years, but they were with him. He heard their guiding voices in the night wind. He poured palm wine on their graves, and they drank. They had never left him. When Adamo's mother and father died, they would not leave him, either.

(p. 206)

In the course of the story, a smallpox epidemic strikes Adamo's village and for the sake of his safety his parents send him to a nearby village. A year later Adamo returns to his own village only to discover that the place is deserted:

Whether his parents were alive or dead, they were gone -- they had somehow been taken away. The village to him now was deserted as it could not have been had it been empty only of tangible life. The chain that linked endlessly into the past had been broken.

(p. 210)

As in This Side Jordan, time is of great thematic but of relatively negligible technical importance in The Tomorrow-Tamer. All ten

stories are written in the past tense, although the odd portion of a story is written in the present tense. "The Rain Child" is a case in point. The structure of the story is that of a tale-within-a-tale: the narrator recollects a story which happened in the past, and is related in the past tense, but "The Rain Child" opens and closes in the present, and is narrated in the present tense. The opening, penultimate and final paragraphs are written in the present tense and bracket the tale told in the past tense. As a result, the "present" portion of "The Rain Child" has immediacy, while the "past" section has a documentary-like verisimilitude to it.

Laurence's "African" works are followed by the "Manawaka" works.

Of Manawaka Laurence comments:

The name Manawaka is an invented one, but it was one which had been in my mind since I was about seventeen or eighteen, when I first began to think about writing something set in a prairie town. Manawaka is not my home town of Neepawa--it has elements of Neepawa, especially in some of the descriptions of places, such as the cemetery on the hill or the Wachakwa Valley through which ran the small brown river which was the river of my childhood. In almost every way, however, Manawaka is not so much any one prairie town as an amalgam of many prairie towns. Most of all, I like to think, it is simply itself, a town of the mind, my own private world, as Graham Greene says, which one hopes ultimately will somehow relate to the outer world which we all share. 24

The "town of the mind" of Manawaka is the setting common to A Jest of God, all the stories in A Bird in the House, much of The Fire-Dwellers, The Diviners and The Stone Angel. The Stone Angel, the first of Laurence's "Manawaka" stories, is narrated in the first person by the protagonist, Hagar Shipley. The opening paragraph makes reference to Hagar's birth, and,

as the narration is in the first person, the final line of the novel is broken in mid-sentence by her death. The reader follows Hagar from the age of six till her death at ninety.

The Stone Angel has two time sequences: a relatively short time present sequence of several weeks duration (spring to midsummer), and a time past sequence that consists of chronological flashbacks spanning eighty-four years. The novel starts and ends in the time present. The time present sequence is written in the present tense, the time past sequence in the past tense. Six years after the publication of The Stone Angel Laurence remarked, in retrospect, that

I wouldn't go to great lengths to defend the form of the novel, at this distance, for I know its flaws. The flashback method is, I think, a little overworked in it, and I am not at all sure that flashbacks ought to be in chronological order, as I placed them in order to make it easier for the reader to follow Hagar's life.²⁵

Like the other Manawaka novels, The Stone Angel treats time in technical and thematic terms. Hagar muses that "time has folded in like a paper fan".²⁶ Elsewhere, she thinks of time as an almost palpable thing: "I may disintegrate entirely, like the flowers found on ancient young Tutankhamen's tomb, which crumbled when time flooded in through the broken door" (p. 111). Hagar initially perceives "Every day" as "so worthless really" (p. 5), and elsewhere refers to "the junkyard of my memory" (p. 213). At roughly the midpoint of the novel, Hagar still denies the value of memories of the past:

To move to a new place - that's the greatest excitement. For a while you believe you carry nothing with you - all is canceled from before, or cauterized, and you begin again and

nothing will go wrong this time.

(p. 155)

What Hagar is shown to learn in the passage of time is the mistake of underestimating the value of the past. The past is the place where one may discover one's roots, and it is not till the close of the novel that Hagar realizes the rootlessness that has been hers. Laurence comments:

The character of Hagar in The Stone Angel seemed almost to choose me. Later, though, I recognized that in some way not at all consciously understood by me at the time, I had had to begin approaching my background and my past through my grandparents' generation, the generation of pioneers of Scots Presbyterian origin, who had been among the first to people the town I called Manawaka. This was where my own roots began. Other past generations of my father's family had lived in Scotland, but for me, my people's real past - my own real past - was not connected with Scotland, and indeed, this was true for Hagar as well, for she was born in Manawaka. 27

Hagar's father, Jason Currie, tries to impress upon his children that their roots are Scottish; he quizzes Hagar and her brothers, Matt and Dan:

"The Curries are Highlanders. Matt - sept of what clan?"

"Sept of the Clanranald MacDonalds."

"Correct. Pipe music, Dan?"

"Clanrandald's March, sir."

"Right." And then with a look at me, and a smile:

"The war cry, girl?"

And I, who loved that cry although I hadn't an inkling what it meant, would shout it out with such ferocity that the boys snickered until our father impaled them with a frown.

"Gainsay Who Dare!"

(p. 15)

When Hagar's favourite son, John, is six years old she gives him the

Currie plaid-pin, which, incidentally, makes a curious reappearance in The Diviners. Hagar echoes her father in the speech that accompanies her gift, an act suggesting that the pin is a symbol of heritage:

"Your grandfather got this when his father died. That was your great-grandfather, Sir Daniel Currie...You're to look after this plaid-pin, do you hear? And not use it for playing with. The Curries were a sept of the MacDonald clan, the Clanranald MacDonald. You can see their crest on the pin - a three-towered castle and an arm holding a sword. Their motto was Gainsay Who Dare. They were Highlanders."

(p. 124)

John's enthusiasm is not equal to Hagar's; he silently pockets the pin. John does not value the pin, for he does not value the heritage that it represents, and he divests himself of the pin in a trade with a Metis friend, for a knife which also later turns up in The Diviners. As an adult he tells Hagar:

It was Lazarus Tonnerre I traded the plaid-pin to, for his knife. Probably he's got it yet, for all I know.

"Where's the knife?"

"Gone up in smoke," he said. "I sold it once, to buy cigarettes. It wasn't much of a knife."

"Gainsay Who Dare," I said.

"What?"

"Oh - nothing."

(p. 177)

John shows no interest in the past, and he blithely dispenses with the plaid-pin that Laurence establishes as the symbol of his heritage. It is therefore symbolically fitting that he dies young and that he leaves no progeny. In Laurence the past survives in the present, a fact which one ignores only at one's peril; this theme, like the Currie plaid-pin

and the Tonnerre knife, reappears in The Diviners.

Hagar comes to the degree of self-knowledge she finally attains by recognizing the meaning of her past, the past that is detailed in the chronological flashbacks of the time past sequence of The Stone Angel. She comes to realize what a travesty it is to speak of "the junkyard of my memory" (p. 213):

I must always, always have wanted that--simply to rejoice. How is it I never could? I know, I know. How long have I known? Or have I always known, in some far crevice of my heart, some cave too deeply buried, too concealed? Every good joy I might have held, in my man or any child of mine or even the plain light of morning, of walking the earth, all were forced to a standstill by some brake of proper appearance--oh, proper to whom? When did I ever speak the heart's truth?

Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched.

(p. 292)

This cri-de-coeur, coming as it does just prior to Hagar's death, expresses her knowledge and her consequent pain, and the source of both is the past.

The epigraph to The Stone Angel is Dylan Thomas's "Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Thomas is referred to again, if indirectly, towards the end of the novel. There are echoes of his poetry in the passage (cited above) that describes Hagar's final insight into the flaw that has marred her life. She asks herself, "When did I ever speak the heart's truth?"-- Thomas's "Poem in October" ends "O may my heart's truth/Still be sung/ On this high hill in a year's turning."²⁸ Thomas's "Fern Hill" has as

its last lines "Time held me green and dying/Though I sang in my chains like the sea"²⁹; Hagar thinks "I carried my chains within me." The context of the echoes of Dylan Thomas makes clear their reference to time. Whether or not Laurence intended to add to Hagar's cri-de-coeur in this allusive way is a moot question, but in any case the evocation is there and reflects the generalized presence of time as theme in The Stone Angel. These echoes also point the validity of attaching importance to the epigraph of the novel: the importance of epigraph is also seen in The Diviners.

A Jest of God, Laurence's second Manawaka novel, appeared two years after The Stone Angel. The novel is written in the present tense and narrated in the first person by the protagonist, Rachel Cameron. Like The Stone Angel and The Diviners, A Jest of God has a present time sequence that goes from spring to autumn, the time of fruition. This coincidence makes thematic sense, for in each novel the protagonist makes a painful pilgrimage to the past that results in discovery, especially discovery of the self. A psychological harvest is made.

Although A Jest of God is written in the first person, there are two significant occasions upon which the point of view apparently shifts to the third person. Early in the novel the reader learns that Rachel is thirty-four years old and a virgin. Rachel has her first affair at roughly the midpoint of the novel, but prior to this Laurence carefully details the psychological reasons for Rachel's frigidity. This portrayal includes Rachel's sexual fantasies, which are narrated in stream of consciousness, with Rachel thinking of herself in the third person.³⁰ The sudden shift to the third person from the first

person suggests that Laurence is trying to evoke the sense of detachment from the self that is associated with the non-integrated individual. Rachel is as yet fundamentally incomplete and sexually unfulfilled, and hence the use of the third person to narrate her sexual fantasies. Here, technique is controlled in such a way as to make implicit thematic comment.

Like Hagar, Rachel learns in the passage of time that memories are not to be shunned. Early in the novel Rachel asks herself "How will I ever be able to forget?" (p. 48). By the end of the novel Rachel has come to better terms with her past and present and is therefore able to think of her future: "What will happen? What will happen" (p. 201). As Laurence notes,

A Jest of God, as some critics have pointed out disapprovingly, is a very inturned novel. I recognize the limitations of a novel told in the first person and the present tense, from one viewpoint only, but it couldn't have been done any other way, for Rachel herself is a very inturned person. She tries to break the handcuffs of her own past, but she is self-perceptive enough to recognize that for her no freedom from the shackledom of the ancestors can be total. Her emergence from the tomb-like atmosphere of her extended childhood is a partial defeat--or, looked at in another way, a partial victory. She is no longer so much afraid of herself as she was. 31

The protagonist of The Fire-Dwellers, Laurence's third Manawaka novel, is Stacey MacAindra. Stacey is a thirty-nine-year-old mother of four who finds it increasingly difficult to cope with the demands of her children, the reticence of her husband, the lost freedom of her youth, the threatening aspects of a world where street riots and napalm are frightening realities, and the prospect of aging. She is also Rachel's sister, and while The Fire-Dwellers is set in Vancouver,

Stacey's memories are set in Manawaka. The Fire-Dwellers is technically complex: Laurence comments:

The writing is more pared-down than anything I've written yet, but the form itself is (or so I believe) wider, including as it does a certain amount of third-person narration as well as Stacey's idiomatic inner running commentary and her somewhat less idiomatic fantasies, dreams, memories.³²

Most of the novel is written in the present tense and the first person, with Stacey as narrator. Like The Stone Angel and The Diviners, The Fire-Dwellers has two time sequences, including a time present sequence that starts in "early summer"³³ and ends in autumn. Although the time past sequence is rather small in volume, taking up a relatively unimportant number of pages, it is thematically and technically important.

The time past sequence is technically similar to the time past sequence of The Diviners. Its passages are physically drawn to the reader's attention by being set off on the page; in The Diviners the "Memorybank Movie" titles that preface flashbacks serve the same purpose. While in The Stone Angel all flashbacks are written in the past tense, in The Fire-Dwellers some are written in the present tense. While in The Stone Angel and The Diviners the flashbacks are in chronological order, in The Fire-Dwellers the chronology of the flashbacks is random. Thus in technical terms The Fire-Dwellers can be considered to be an experiment on Laurence's part, and preparatory to the more technically ordered but less thematically restricted The Diviners.

In The Fire-Dwellers the technical concern for time reflects a thematic concern, as an early flashback suggests:

Stacey Cameron, seventeen. Flamingo Dance Hall every Saturday night, jitterbugging. Knowing by instinct how to move, loving the boy's closeness, whoever he was, loving the male smell of him. Stacey spinning like light, like all the painted singing tops of all the spinning world, whirling laughter across a polished floor. Five minutes ago. Is time? How?

(p. 12)

Again Laurence's protagonist changes her attitude towards the past as she resolves, or at least learns to live with, her problems. Early in the novel Stacey thinks that she has

Too much mental baggage. Too damn much, at this point. More more more than I want. Things keep spilling out of the suitcases, taking me by surprise bewildering me as I stand on the platform.

(p. 37)

Later in the novel, as her marriage is apparently disintegrating, she thinks

-Does he hate me? If so, how long? Where did it start? Everything goes too far back to be traced. The roots vanish...They go back and back forever. Our father Adam. Leave me alone. And maybe Eve thought Okay, Sahib, if that's the way you want it, and it was after that she started getting crafty.

(p. 167)

In her agitation, Stacey overstates the case, but towards the end of the novel there is affirmation of the validity of the observation that

"Everything starts a long time ago" (p. 271).

Laurence has observed that "both Rachel and Stacey are threatened by the past"³⁴; as these sisters move toward freeing themselves from this psychological bondage, they move toward the realization that the past is the source of the present, and this realization is the beacon that illuminates their future.

. A Bird in the House follows The Fire-Dwellers by a year; it is a collection of short stories set in Manawaka. The stories are related to each other, all narrated in the first person by Vanessa MacLeod; as a group they describe the world of Vanessa's childhood and her attempt to come to terms with this world. Vanessa MacLeod, like all Laurence's protagonists, is in search of herself, and therefore is engaged in a perennially favourite Laurentian activity--the quest for an understanding of one's roots. Like the protagonists of all Laurence's novels, Vanessa is keenly aware of the problem of "mental baggage":

But after a while it did not hurt so much. And yet twenty years later it was still with me to some extent, part of the accumulation of happenings which can never be entirely thrown away.³⁵

This is the by now familiar exploration of the relationship between the past and the present. Vanessa recalls the music she danced to years ago and thinks

The music seemed the only music that ever was or ever would be. I had no means of knowing that it was being set into the mosaic of myself, and that it would pass away quickly and yet remain always as mine.

(p. 194)

All the stories in A Bird in the House are narrated in the first person

by Vanessa, the narration normally written in the past tense. The one significant exception is the opening sentence of the first story, "That house in Manawaka is the one which, more than any other, I carry with me" (p. 3), which is in the present tense. We are, then, told at once that the stories live in the older Vanessa's mind as parts of her present. Typical Margaret Laurence protagonist that she is, Vanessa's memories are initially a burden to her, for she has as yet to come to terms with her past. The stories Vanessa tells are dominated by the figure of her Grandfather Connor, whose house it is that Vanessa "carries" with her. It is not till the end of her telling that she is able to come to reasonable terms with the memory of her grandfather: "I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins" (p. 207). One is reminded of the epigraph to The Diviners: "but they had their being once/and left a place to stand on."

Two types of time enter the structure of A Bird in the House, chronological time and what might be called psychological time. The latter involves memory and is not bound by chronology. In the first and last sentence of the work Vanessa refers to her grandfather's house, the repetition of the image suggesting that the work is structured according to psychological time. Initially, though, the house symbolizes Vanessa's confusion; finally it becomes to her an image of her better understanding of self. Thus while the structure of A Bird in the House makes use of the chronological distortions that psychological time makes credible, there is an underlying chronological structure to the work. Vanessa makes progress in chronological time, but the voyage of self-discovery into the past that Vanessa undertakes involves the chrono-

logical distortion of psychological time. One progresses in linear fashion, but one must "circle" back to the past in order both to make and to understand this progression. It is well to remember that in describing Manawaka, that "town of the mind", Laurence speaks of "the river of my childhood."

The larger structure of A Bird in the House is also found in individual stories. At the beginning of "A Bird in the House", the title story, Vanessa recalls her father's talking about his memories of the first world war. The adult Vanessa describes the impressions that the child Vanessa received and retained without understanding. This conversation is associated with the child Vanessa's refusal to attend a Remembrance Day parade. The body of the story recounts the death of Vanessa's father. By the end of the story Vanessa has achieved an adult perspective of the life and death of her father, and she grieves for him "as though he had just died now" (p. 113), as later in The Diviners Morag grieves for her stepfather, not immediately upon his death but rather much later, upon her understanding of his life. As it is with this understanding that Morag is "released into mourning" (p. 403), so, similarly, Vanessa cannot grieve for her father until she understands his life. Towards the end of the story, the Remembrance Day parade is again mentioned. But, while the story closes as it opens, the structure is more truly linear; for while the first mention of the parade is associated with the unawareness of the child Vanessa, the second mention is associated with the knowledge of the adult Vanessa. Vanessa changes and grows, one measure of her progress being her changed view of the fixities that reappear in the course of her voyage of self-

discovery. Thus in A Bird in the House theme and technique start to converge; for the first time Laurence fuses theme and technique in approaching the question of time, and if this approach is here in the bud, it burgeons into blossom in The Diviners.

In Laurence's early "African" works, time is for all intents and purposes exclusively a thematic consideration. In the "Manawaka" novels and stories, Laurence becomes increasingly interested in technique; finally, in The Diviners, Laurence attacks the technical problems pertinent to a thematic exploration of time so forcefully that the technical and the thematic become one, become the very substance of Morag's story.

The two time sequences of The Diviners are both narrated in the third person by the protagonist, Morag Gunn. The time present sequence starts in mid-June and ends in autumn; the time past sequence begins before Morag's birth, with the description of a photograph of Morag's pregnant mother, and ends, joining with the time present sequence, with the forty-seven year old Morag about to finish writing the novel that the reader of The Diviners has just completed.

The time present sequence is written in the past tense, and the time past sequence, that consists of a series of chronological flashbacks, is written in the present tense. Both Brita Mickleburgh and Barry Cameron note this; Mickleburgh calls it "curious"³⁵ and Cameron remarks that

The immediacy and reality of the past for Morag is reflected in the use of the present tense in the narrative sequences in the past and in the reader's response to characters in these sequences as fully realized individuals.

The sequences in the present are written in the past tense, however, a shift that suggests a distance between Morag and the events and characters who people the present.³⁶

When Laurence's protagonists come to terms with the past they tend to start resolving their problems in the present and bettering their prospect of the future. Were Cameron accurate in his critique of the time present sequence in The Diviners, Laurence would for no apparent reason have included in The Diviners a movement that runs countercurrent to the philosophy of time presented in her other works of fiction and explicated in her non-fiction. Furthermore, neither Mickleburgh nor Cameron considers the very real possibility that Laurence is manipulating tense, a sort of technical time, in order to bolster the vision of time offered by the novel as a whole. Textual evidence suggests that Laurence's use of tense is a skillful technical reflection of the theme of past-present interpenetration, a common theme of Laurence's earlier fiction. The apparent paradox of expected-tense reversal is the technical expression of the import of the metaphor of the "river of now and then". As The Diviners draws to a close, the reader is advised to "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future" (p. 453). In a sense The Diviners is an explication of this dictum.

The remainder of this thesis shall examine how Laurence makes the body of The Diviners culminate with this dictum. Laurence's formulation suggests that such a discussion may have two major divisions: the relationship of the present to the past, and the relationship of the present to the future. In The Diviners roots need to be discovered in order to make sense of the present; the importance of the art of fiction

is that it presages the future. This vision of time is inherent in The Diviners; theme and technique come to fuse as this vision unfolds over the course of the novel.

CHAPTER II

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT IN THE DIVINERS

Mr. Henry James claims for the novelist the standing of the historian as the only adequate one, as for himself and before his audience. I think that the claim cannot be contested, and that the position is unassailable. Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and hand-writing--on secondhand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth.

Joseph Conrad, in "Henry James: An
Appreciation"

In the time present sequence of The Diviners, Morag Gunn, the protagonist, is a forty-seven-year-old writer who has published a number of novels, who worries about her teen-aged daughter, and who is in the process of actually composing The Diviners. Yet the time present sequence of the novel takes up a relatively minor number of pages in comparison to the time past sequence, and this ratio is in itself a thematic comment of sorts. In the flashbacks, Morag remembers her life from early childhood onwards, and in so doing moves toward resolving the problems that she faces in the summer of her forty-eighth year, the summer that is the span of the time present sequence of the novel.

Conrad declares that "fiction is history, human history";¹ The Diviners is the history of Morag Gunn. Yet not just Morag's "history"

is retold; Morag Gunn is the dominant character in The Diviners, but the characters that represent her parental and filial generations have important supporting roles. And even the "tribal" history of Morag, like that of Jules Tonnerre, Morag's lover from adolescence till death, is recorded in the course of the novel. The Diviners explores "human history", then, at three levels: the history of the individual, the history of the family, and the history of the tribe. Ultimately all three levels coalesce, for all are described through the sight and/or insight that Morag alone provides, and each serves the purpose of enabling Morag to come to terms with her long and often harrowing past. Laurence entitles the first section of The Diviners "River of Now and Then"; in short form, this title expresses what much of the novel deals with. The lesson that Morag learns over the course of the novel is just how this metaphor is, or how vitally important it is to remember and understand one's past. And for Laurence, one's past includes one's parents and one's tribe.

There is technical reiteration of the idea that the past influences the present, or more specifically, that the past is in a sense ever-present. As previously noted, the time present sequence of The Diviners is written in the past tense, while the flashbacks are written in the present tense. This use of tense is a technical reflection of Laurence's concentration upon the theme of past-present interpenetration; the "river of now and then", Morag observes in the opening sentence of the novel, flows "both ways" (p. 3). The structure of the flashbacks is the most prominent formal feature of the novel, and in this case, form very much reflects content. The flashbacks have separate sub-

titles, which are also in block lettering, and each is prefaced by a colon and the title "MEMORYBANK MOVIE". The word "memorybank" evokes computer technology, the cold, insensate knowledge born of the mechanical marriage of data (and pure calculation) and empirical precision. Yet the word "memorybank" is evoked only to be robbed of its normal meaning by ironic reversal, for memories are shown to be anything but precise:

A popular misconception is that we can't change the past-- everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question.

(p. 60)

In a sense, the compound word "memorybank" is divided in terms of irony: Laurence is quite serious about "memory", but the very empirical imprecision of memory mocks the designation "memorybank". Yet the word "memorybank" is used adjectivally in the phrase "Memorybank Movie", and the key word is "movie". Laurence repeatedly uses the metaphor of movies, or films, for mental scenarios, and especially for memory. The adolescent Morag's daydreams are entitled "Innerfilm" (p. 124). Later Morag thinks of the childhood memories that her husband, Brooke Skelton, must possess in pictorial terms: "Would it have been like that? Morag cannot ever know, not being able to see the pictures that must grow inside his head when he talks of it" (p. 216). She also wonders about the "films there in his head" (p. 266) of Jules Tonnerre, her lover.

In The Diviners Morag is the author of her lifestory. The "Memorybank Movie" designation for her own memories is a sustained metaphor: "Last night, sleepless until three A.M., long and stupen-

dously vivid scenes unfolded. Too tired to get up and write them down, she still couldn't shut the projector off for the night" (p. 169). The sequence of flashbacks that details Morag's childhood is prefaced by Morag's musing;

The films were beginning again. Sneakily unfolding inside her head. She could not even be sure of their veracity, nor guess how many times they had been refilmed, a scene deleted here, another added there. But they were on again, a new season of the old films.

(p. 28)

Laurence obviously takes painstaking care to establish movies as a metaphor for memory, and the raison d'etre of this technique involves time. Movies have sequential, but not necessarily chronological, order; as well, in a film it is possible to collapse or telescope time, regardless of the magnitude of the time period involved. In particular, it is a commonplace in film to distort clock time and chronological order for the purpose of achieving psychological verisimilitude. In this manner dreams, daydreams, and memories may be portrayed with a convincing immediacy. The paradox is that chronological distortion enables psychological realism, and it is for this reason that memories are characterized as movies in The Diviners. This concept is explicitly drawn to the reader's attention in the opening chapter, where Morag's first tide of memory is prompted by looking at old snapshots, and where the question of the reality of chronology is begged as she sorts the pictures:

Morag put the pictures into chronological order. As though there were really any chronological order, or any order at all, if it came to that. She was not certain whether the

people in the snapshots were legends she had once dreamed only, or were as real as anyone she now knew.

(p. 6)

The mechanical act of putting the pictures in chronological order is meaningless, for memory, as the novel subsequently makes clear, is independent of chronological time.

The first memorybank movie in the novel describes the five-year-old Morag's impression of the time of her parents' death by polio. After this flashback, the Morag of the present wonders

Were they angry at me often, or only sometimes? Did my father feel he'd done well with his life, or that he was a total loss, or did he feel anything? Did my mother feel pleased when she saw him come in from the barn, or did she think to herself--or aloud--that she'd married beneath her? Did she welcome him in bed, or did she make a habit of turning away and muttering she had a headache? Did he think she was the best lay he'd ever had, or did he grind his teeth in hardly suppressed resentment at her coldness? No way of knowing. Why should it matter now, anyway?

(p. 18)

Morag must search in the past for the answer to this question, and The Diviners is devoted to the discovery of the answer. What Morag learns is that the answer to the question "Why should it matter now, anyway?" is given in the epigraph to the novel: "but they had their being once/ and left a place to stand on".

Morag initially feels threatened by her past: "These photographs from the past never agreed to get lost. Odd, because she had tried hard enough, over the years, to lose them, or thought she had" (p. 5). It is not till many feet of "memorybank movie" footage later that she can admit the possibility that "perhaps the film would never

end until she did" (p. 172). And it is not till much later still that Morag can bear to acknowledge the necessity of confronting the past:

You Can't Go Home Again, said Thomas Wolfe. Morag wonders now if it may be the reverse which is true. You have to go home again, in some way or other. This concept cannot yet be looked at.

(p. 302)

By the conclusion of The Diviners Morag is capable of looking at this concept, for she has accepted and acted upon the notion. Elsewhere Laurence speaks of "the attempt to assimilate the past, partly in order to be freed of it, partly in order to try to understand...through seeing where we had come from".² By remembering her past, Morag learns to understand through seeing where she has come from; in remembering the past Morag recreates her own history, and the five sections into which The Diviners is subdivided recount the five phases of this process.

In the first section of the novel, "River of Now and Then", Morag is drawn into memory by the sudden departure of her eighteen-year-old daughter, Pique. Morag is besieged by doubts:

Something about Pique's going, apart from the actual departure itself, was unresolved in Morag's mind. The fact that Pique was going west? Yes. Morag was both glad and uncertain...Would Pique go to Manawaka? If she did, would she find anything there which would have meaning for her?

(p. 5)

In the present, Morag lives on a farm just outside the southern Ontario town of McConnell's Landing; Manawaka is the prairie town where she spent most of her childhood. In the "River of Now and Then" Morag is

shown as reconciled neither to the present (Pique's departure) nor the past, as her thoughts about her biological parents indicate:

They remain shadows. Two sepia shadows on an old snapshot, two barely moving shadows in my head, shadows whose few remaining words and acts I have invented. Perhaps I only want their forgiveness for having forgotten them.

I remember their deaths, but not their lives. Yet they're inside me, flowing unknown in my blood and moving unrecognized in my skull.

(pp. 18-19)

Morag begins by knowing that to forget is negative (it is something she wants "forgiveness" for); but she has yet to learn just how positive it is to remember. She does not know herself because she does not know her past; it is no accident that prior to the first "memorybank movie" of the novel Morag asks herself "What kind of a character am I?" (p. 12). In order to assimilate the past into the present, Morag undertakes a voyage into her past, and the first stop she must make is at Manawaka, the prairie town to which she moves upon the death of her biological parents. As a kindly neighbour tells the newly-orphaned Morag,

you're gonna be living with Mr. and Mrs. Logan, dear, in Manawaka. Christie Logan, that is. He was in the Army with your dad, honey, and he and Prin have offered to take you, seeing as there ain't none of your own relatives hereabouts. They're not what you'd call a well-off couple, but they're kind, and they got no children of their own. I'm sure you'll get on dandy with them, once you're used to it.

(p. 17)

The flashbacks of the second section of The Diviners, "The Nuisance Grounds", recount Morag's growing up as the fosterdaughter of

the Logans. Christie Logan is the town "scavenger" or garbage collector, and as such is both poor and a social outcast. Morag is treated to the meaning of the latter when, accompanied by the kindly but disreputable Christie, she arrives ready for her first day at school:

Boys' voices. Mean.

"Hey, you know who that is?"

"Sure, old man Logan. He's the --"

"Sh!" ...

"Oh shut up...He's the--SCAVENGER!"

What means Scavenger? Morag cannot ask. Christie's face is stone.

"Phew! Can't you smell him from here?"

(p. 31)

Morag quickly learns that this sort of degradation is not to be an isolated instance, and she soon joins Christie as the subject of malicious mockery. On another occasion the school-children taunt them with vicious little songs:

Christie Logan's the Scavenger Man--
Gets his food from the garbage can!

* * * * *

Mo-rag! Mo-rag!
Gets her clothes from an ol' flour bag!

(p. 38)

Morag is old enough to be hurt by these jibes, but far too young to appreciate Christie's explanation:

"Look at it this way," Christie says. "All these houses along here, Morag. I don't say this is so of all of them, now, but with the most of them, you can see from what their kids say, what they're saying. Some of them, because I take off their muck for them, they think I'm muck. Well, I am

muck, but so are they. Not a father's son, not a man born of woman who is not muck in some part of his immortal soul, girl. That's what they don't know, the poor sods. When I carry away their refuse, I'm carrying off part of them, do you see?"

No. She does not see.

(pp 38-9)

Morag's youth bars her understanding, but leaves her, nonetheless, vulnerable to the pain of social ostracism. It is a generation-time later, and after Christie's death, before Morag realizes that Christie "really could see...What did I ever see about you, Christie, until it was too late?" (p. 412).

On her first day at school, all she can do is feign nonchalance when she is mercilessly taunted for her dress, the badge of the material poverty that is the Logans', and therefore her, lot:

LAUGHTER? Why? She turns. Many laughers. All around. On the steps and on the gravel. Large and small kids. Some looking away. Some going ho ho har har.

"Lookut her dress--it's down to her ankles!"

* * * *

Her dress? What's wrong? Prin sewed it. Out of a wraparound which Prin is now too stout to wear.

* * * *

And oh

Their dresses are very short, away above their knees. Some very bright blue yellow green and new cloth, new right out of the store. You can see the pattern very clear, polka dots flowers and that.

(pp. 30-1)

Long after this incident is part of Morag's past, the psychological wound it has left remains; Morag clothes her daughter in a dress that

would not excite the contempt of the taunting schoolgirls of a quarter-century earlier:

Pique, age one, sits on the front steps...She wears a yellow dress, very short, patterned with butterflies green and mauve and blue.

(p. 315)

The suffering that Morag undergoes as the fosterchild of the town scavenger, the man the townspeople associate with the "Nuisance Grounds" or town dump, still lingers. Christie, as his name suggests, is a figure whose wisdom and humanity is overlooked by his social superiors. The paradox is that while the townspeople despise Christie and associate him with the Nuisance Grounds, it is the very people that hold him in contempt that are capable of treating human life as garbage:

"Well," Christie says, "the Lord only knows I would be better off keeping my trap shut. It was a newborn baby. Wrapped in newspapers, but it fell out. Dead, of course. Hadn't gone its full term. It was that small, like a skinned rabbit."

"What'd you do with it?" Skinner.

"Buried her. It was a girl."

"Where?" Morag cries, cries. "Buried her where?"

"In the Nuisance Grounds," Christie says, spitting into the dusty road. "That's what it was, wasn't it, a nuisance? Well, the hell with their consecrated ground."

(p. 76)

Years later, Morag recalls Christie's story when her unmarried friend, Eva Winkler, confides that she is pregnant. What crosses Morag's mind is the memory of "Christie, years ago. The parcel in the garbage tin. I buried it in the Nuisance Grounds--that's what it was, wasn't it? A nuisance" (p. 152). Morag comes to inherit Christie's

way of seeing things; she comes to love him as her true father, although she cannot make this admission until he is on his deathbed: "Christie--I used to fight a lot with you, Christie, but you've been my father to me'" (p. 396). However, Morag must mature before she can fully appreciate what Christie was or what he has meant to her. As a child she is only too keenly aware of the pain and humiliation she undergoes for being associated with him. What is glaringly apparent to Morag as she grows up is that she finds poverty detestable and social status desirable; she is a hard-working Grade Nine student because

if you work, really really work, and get educated, something will come out of it, maybe. Like being able to get out of Manawaka and never come back. Morag listens at nights to the long wailing of the trains crossing the prairies, their voices like the spooky voices of giant owls. She always feels warm and good at the sound, because she knows something which nobody else in this world knows. Which is, one day she will be on one of those trains, going to the city and maybe even further than the city. Going to the whole world.

(p. 121)

Morag conscientiously studies and saves until she is able to leave Manawaka and attend university in Winnipeg. As Morag watches the town recede from the train that carries her away from Manawaka, she thinks "There go the Nuisance Grounds, forever and ever" (p. 173). It is not till she is actually attending university in Winnipeg that she realizes that Manawaka cannot be so easily left:

The Canada geese are flying very high up in their wide V-formation, the few leaders out in front, the flock sounding their far clear cold cry that signals the approaching frost. Going somewhere. Able to go, at will. Last year she saw them and thought This time next year I'll be away too. Now she is away. Away is here. Not far enough away.

(p. 177)

It is not till almost thirty years later that Morag is able to see herself as "Morag Gunn, fleeing Manawaka, finally settling near McConnell's Landing, an equally small town with many of the same characteristics" (p. 354).

It is while Morag attends university and still believes that she can elude her Manawaka past that she meets and marries her English professor, Dr. Brooke Skelton. The third section of The Diviners, "Halls of Sion", traces the relationship between Brooke and Morag from tentative beginnings, through marriage, to final dissolution. Within the philosophical context of The Diviners the relationship is doomed to fail, for it is founded upon the mutual accord that Morag has no past. The conscientious student Morag Gunn chats a trifle nervously with Dr. Skelton, and in reply to his question "What sort of a past do you feel yours was, then?" answers

"I don't feel--I don't know, I just feel as though I don't have a past. As though it was more or less blank."
She will not--she will not--tell him about the town, and Christie, and all. Scavenger Logan. No. Not ever.

(p. 194)

When Morag asks him what it is that he likes about her, he replies "Perhaps it's your mysterious nonexistent past...I like that. It's as though you were starting life now, newly" (p. 195). Delighted at the prospect of having a relationship with Brooke, and the opportunity of using it as a means of severing herself from her past, Morag promises herself that "She will conceal everything about herself which he might not like. None of Christie's swearing" (p. 196). She does not as yet

know that in trying to obliterate her past, which is a part of her psyche, she will only succeed in wrenching herself apart. It is significantly decided immediately before the first time they make love,

"Brooke--I am happy, with you. And everything else--Manawaka and that--it's over. It doesn't exist. It's unimportant."

"That's right, my love. Don't talk about it--it only upsets you. I only want to know you as you are now."

(p. 198)

To the reader of Laurence this denial of the past is a storm warning.

Good Laurentian hero that he is, Christie tries to explain the futility of denying the past when Morag visits Manawaka just prior to her marriage, but she is still too keenly eager to break with her past to heed his words:

"I have known you since you were knee-high to a grasshopper...look here, it's a bloody good thing you've got away from this dump. So just shut your goddamn trap and thank your lucky stars."

"Do you really think that, Christie?"

"I do," Christie says..."And also I don't. That's the way it goes. It'll all go along with you, too. That goes without saying."

But it has been said. The way it goes--it'll all go--that goes....

"You mean--everything will go along with me?"

"No less than that, ever," Christie says.

"It won't, though," Morag says, and hears the stubbornness in her own voice.

Christie laughs.

* * * * *

In some ways she would welcome one of their old arguments. But it is better to change the subject.

(p. 207)

Morag is not ready to acknowledge that the presence of the past is

irrefutable. When Brooke asks Morag to marry him, he mentions that a move would be involved:

"Listen, dear one. I've been offered a post in Toronto, full professor. Would you like Toronto, do you think?"

Would she like Toronto? Would she like Paradise? With Brooke, and away from the prairies entirely.

(p. 201)

Because the past is hermetically sealed in the psyche, it can no more be eluded by moving to Toronto than by fleeing to Winnipeg; and slowly, the recognition of the portable nature of the past dawns upon Morag: "Morag wants to know everything about him [Brooke], about his previous life, so that she will know all of him" (p. 215).

As the bond between Brooke and Morag starts to become bondage Morag admits to herself that she "wouldn't go back to Manawaka for all the tea in China or Assam. And yet the town inhabits her, as once she inhabited it" (p. 227). This realization is the death knell of the marriage, for the unwritten clause of the marriage contract was that Morag was to be perfectly pastless, a person with only the present to live in and for.

Morag's growing realization that she has been running from herself in trying to run from her past becomes a conscious recognition when she physically returns to Manawaka, to visit the dying Prin. At Prin's funeral

Morag sings, feeling crazily that it is all she can do for Prin now.

They stand, those halls of Sion,

All jubilant with song,
 And bright with many an angel,
 And all the martyr throng;
 The Prince is ever in them,
 The daylight is serene,
 The pastures of the blessed
 Are decked in glorious sheen.

Those halls of Sion. The Prince is ever in them. What had Morag expected, those years ago, marrying Brooke? Those selfsame halls?

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.

(p. 253)

Morag is frightened by the dawning recognition that she has been dividing herself in trying to deny her past. She returns to Toronto and Brooke, only to find that she is unable to suppress a rising tide of desire for self-expression:

Since Prin's death, and the last sight of Christie, Morag has experienced increasingly the mad and potentially releasing desire to speak sometimes as Christie used to speak, the loony oratory, salt-beefed with oaths, the stringy lean oaths with some protein in them, the Protean oaths upon which she was reared. But of course does no such thing.

(p. 255)

One page later, this is precisely what Morag does:

"Listen, Brooke--please don't misunderstand me. Only--I wish you wouldn't call me that.

"Call you what, for heaven's sake? What've I said wrong now?"

"Little one. Brooke, I am twenty-eight years old, and I am five feet eight inches tall, but there it is, and by judas priest and all the sodden saints in fucking Beulah Land, I am stuck with it and I do not mind like I did once, in fact the goddamn reverse it you really want to know, for I've gone against it long enough, and I'm no actress at

heart, and that's the everlasting christly truth of it."

(p. 256)

As the increasing dissension between Brooke and Morag starts to signal the beginning of the end of their marriage, Morag is finally able to tell Brooke "I have had a long past" (p. 257):

"It's too bad you had to go back to the town this last time," Brooke says. "You had effectively forgotten it. Now it's all risen up again, and it's only upsetting you, Morag. Can't you simply put it from mind?"

"I never forgot any of it. It was always there."

"When you first came to me," Brooke says, "you said you had no past. I liked that...."

(p. 257)

It is significant that at this critical juncture Laurence reiterates the initial condition of the relationship between Brooke and Morag; their original agreement to partition the past from the present is a condition vital to the cohesion of the relationship, rather than a point agreed upon in an idle chat of ephemeral significance.

Morag begins to feel "separated from herself" (p. 263) as she can no longer live or try to live the fiction that the present is all, although her marriage depends upon the maintenance of this fiction. Once Morag realizes that seeking refuge from the past is equivalent to becoming a refugee from oneself, her marriage to Brooke is effectively annulled. In symbolic terms the fruitlessness of shunning the past is translated into the biological sterility of the marriage: to celebrate exclusively the present is to deny the past at the expense of the future.

The fourth section of The Diviners, "Rites of Passage", describes Morag's affair with Dan McRaith, A Scottish painter who Morag

meets in London and who happens to be married. Again, the past and present are shown as interpenetrating; years after the affair, when the relationship has been reduced to a trans-Atlantic exchange of correspondence, Morag is still sharply affected by the mention of the name "Dan". When Dan Scranton, who is about to become "Pique's new man" (p. 289), is introduced to Morag, the effect upon her is immediate and painful:

Dan. Morag felt the blade turning inside the heart. Of course, millions of men in this world must be named Daniel. Still, she did not want this kid's name to be that.

(P. 243)

As Morag tells Dan McRaith in a subsequent letter, "If I could call Pique's Dan by any other name, I would" (p. 289).

Morag's marriage was founded on the suppression of the self, and one measure of the progress she makes is her ability to enter a relationship without distorting what she actually is. In the second conversation she has with Dan, she "tells him a little about Brooke, about Jules, about Pique. Even some things about Christie and Manawaka" (p. 374). This discussion occurs just before "Morag goes back to his room with him, and they make love" (p. 374). Just before Brooke and Morag make love for the first time, Morag tells Brooke that "Manawaka" simply "doesn't exist", and dismisses her past as "unimportant" (p. 198). The contrast is telling.

Morag finally feels that being with Brooke means "to be chained forever to that image of yourself which he must have and which must forever be distorted" (p. 257). Later, Morag sees that this is the

result of her initial fear and her consequent giving Brooke not herself but an image of herself. By the time Morag establishes a relationship with Dan, as his portrait of her indicates, she no longer finds it necessary to create an image of herself:

One day he shows her the painting of Morag Dhu, the only painting he has done in London and not destroyed. It is not a large canvas--quite small, in fact. It is not even just her face. Her features are in shadow. Only her black hair can be seen, and her eyes, clearly and unmistakably the eyes of Morag, angry and frightened, frighteningly strong.

(p. 379)

Whereas once Morag had tried to live as an image of herself, her image is now a separate entity that exists on canvas. The accuracy of Morag's portrait implies her freedom of expression in the relationship with Dan: the portrait symbolizes her movement toward the freedom that self-knowledge permits.

The reason for the end of the affair with Dan is as symbolically important as the cause of the termination of Morag's relationship with Brooke. Dan lives in Crombruach, Scotland with his wife and young, and the setting of the affair is London, which he visits periodically, and where Morag lives with Pique. Dan insists that he needs the environment of Crombruach in order to paint; he speaks of "my need of the place, the geographical place" (p. 382). He successfully urges Morag to bring Pique and visit him there, so that she might "see" and "understand" (p. 382). When Morag and Pique go up to Crombruach, the visit results in introductions that quickly become initiations into several inescapable truths. Morag meets Bridie, Dan's wife, and learns that

McRaith stays...because of the kind of woman that Bridie is. McRaith is not held to Crombruach just because of the place. He is held here by Bridie....

(p. 390)

Morag also sees that the visit is equally revelatory for Dan, who has never before seen Pique: Morag

sees McRaith looking at her, seeing her in a different way, the mother of Pique, the child who has been as unreal to him as Bridie and his kids have been to Morag.

(p. 389)

As Morag and Pique take their leave, Dan and Morag become "conscious of an ending which neither of them had guessed before" (p. 391). McRaith represents the old Scottish past which is not at the mythic roots of her being. As such he is Mc(son of) Raith (Wraith-ghost). Morag can no more adopt a false, Scottish past than live without one. Allan Bevan points out:

Since Morag tries to keep her past separate from her life with Brooke, her professor husband, and later with Dan McRaith, her painter-lover, she brings only part of herself to the two relationships, both more or less unsuccessful....³

Bevan is essentially correct, though it might be more precise to say that Morag brings much more of herself to the affair with Dan than she does to the marriage with Brooke. Nevertheless, Bevan's observation is valuable as it defines the common reason for the failure of both relationships--Morag's attempt, if to varying degrees, to "keep her past separate".

With the possible exception of Christie, the man who figures

most importantly in Morag's past and present is Jules Tonnerre. They are classmates as schoolchildren, although Jules

is about three years older than any of the rest of the class, which is why he and his sister Piquette are in the same class. Both having missed a lot of school. Sometimes Skinner goes off with his dad, old Lazarus Tonnerre, and disappears for weeks, setting traplines way up at Galloping Mountain, some say. The Tonnerres (there are an awful lot of them) are called those breeds, meaning halfbreeds. They are part Indian, part French, from away back. They are mysterious. People in Manawaka talk about them but don't talk to them. Lazarus makes homebrew down there in the shack in the Wachakwa valley, and is often arrested on Saturday nights. Morag knows. She has heard. They are dirty and unmentionable.

(pp. 68-9)

Although drawn to Jules, Morag has already absorbed the prejudice that is current among the townspeople. She is unaware of her predisposition, although she suffers as a direct result of the same sort of narrow-mindedness; Jules is shunned for being Metis, while Morag is similarly treated for being the scavenger's fosterdaughter. The girl Morag does not realize that she is a victim of the insidious brainwashing wrought by the social acceptability of prejudice. Unlike her former self, the adult Morag is conscious of the modus operandi of prejudice, as is made apparent by the tone of passages that describe early memories of Jules:

Miss McMurtrie leads the class in "The Maple Leaf Forever"...

Morag loves this song and sings with all her guts. She also knows what the emblems mean. Thistle is Scots, like her and Christie (others, of course, too, including some stuck-up kids, but her, definitely, and they better not forget it). Shamrock is Irish like the Connors and Reillys and them. Rose is English, like Prin... Suddenly she looks over to see if Skinner Tonnerre is singing. He has the best voice in the class, and he knows lots of cowboy songs, and dirty songs, and he sometimes sings them after school,

walking down the street.

He is not singing now.

He comes from nowhere. He isn't anybody. She stops singing, not knowing why. Then she feels silly about stopping, so sings again.

(pp. 69-70)

The adult Morag has come to understand a danger in such racial or national definitions which Laurence describes in her own voice elsewhere:

Where tribalism becomes, to my mind, frighteningly dangerous is where the tribe--whatever it is, the Hausa, the Ibo, the Scots Presbyterians, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the in-group --is seen as "the people", the human beings and the others, the un-tribe, are seen as sub-human. This is not Africa's problem alone; it is everyone's.⁴

The girl Morag has absorbed the idea that Jules is of the "un-tribe"; she thinks he "comes from nowhere". Although Morag is too young to see it, Jules is as hurt by the treatment he receives as she is by hers; years later, immediately after the first time they make love,

"That wasn't so bad for you, after all," he says.

"It was--oh Skinner--"

"Hey, could you call me by my real name, eh?"

As though now it were necessary to do this. By right.

(p. 138)

Morag comments in a letter written approximately thirty years later, "I don't know why names seem so important to me. Yes, I guess I do know. My own name, and feeling I'd come from nowhere" (p. 289).

From a shared past of victimization arises a common pursuit; on the eve of her departure from Manawaka for Winnipeg and university Jules tells Morag "I'm getting out as soon as I can" (p. 163). And it is

precisely because Jules knows from experience what Morag wants to run from that he can accurately predict what she shall run to:

"Going to Winnipeg this fall. To college. And I'm never coming back."

"Hey, that's something, eh? ... Go to college and marry a rich professor, how about that?"

(p. 165)

Morag turns to Jules upon leaving Brooke, and, as has been noted, Morag's departure coincides with her realization that the past cannot be denied. She plans to leave Toronto for Vancouver, but delays her departure in order to stay with Jules for a "couple of weeks" (p. 282). As Jules tells her, their love-making of this time is "magic, to get away" (p. 273); what Morag finds it necessary to get away from is the fantasy that it is possible to be oblivious to the past. As she tells Jules, "we [Morag and Brooke] were living each other's fantasy" (pp. 270-1). The subsequent sexual union of Morag and Jules is described as "some debt or answer to the past" (p. 271). And because this union recognizes the power of the past, it is fruitful: Piquette Tonnerre Gunn (p. 305), as Morag calls her, or as Jules calls her, Piquette Gunn Tonnerre (p. 339), is born in Vancouver several months later.

Over the course of the flashbacks, Morag shows an increasing tendency to use the perspective that time provides in order to understand her relationships. When, for example, Jules visits Morag and the five-year-old Pique in Vancouver, the bond between Jules and Morag is confirmed, and time enters the description of the sexual reunion that symbolizes this confirmation:

They make love ungently, both equal to each others' body in this urgent meeting and grappling, this brief death of consciousness, this conscious defiance of death.

(p. 342)

Ten years later, when Jules visits Pique and Morag at the farm nearby McConnell's Landing, he

will be sleeping tonight, she senses, alone in the spare bedroom, by his own wish. And yet, oddly, she realizes she is not taking this as a personal affront to herself. It is he who reaches out his hand first, now. Their hands tighten together. No explanations; merely a consolation against time.

(p. 424)

Morag is now able to bear remembering thinking of loving Jules variously as a "defiance of death" and as a "consolation against time"; reality may now be confronted, with the resultant insight deriving from the process of assimilating the past.

In the first section of the novel "Something about Pique's going, apart from the actual departure itself, was unresolved in Morag's mind" (p. 5). Because writing The Diviners necessitates active memory, and therefore the assimilation of the past, the writing of the novel is associated with Morag's resolving her ambivalence toward Pique's incipient independence; by the time that a large proportion of the novel has been written, Morag is capable of asking herself

Would Pique's life be better or worse than Morag's? Mine hasn't been so bad. Been? Time running out. Is that what is really going on, with me, now, with her? Pique, harbinger of my death, continuer of life.

(p. 290)

Given Morag's growth toward conciliation with her past and therefore her present, it is not surprising that the symbols of heritage first appearing in The Stone Angel--the Currie plaid-pin and the Tonnerre knife--reappear at the conclusion of "Rites of Passage". Morag has the Tonnerre knife, a gift from Christie; he had acquired it from John Shipley, Hagar's son, in exchange for a package of cigarettes. Jules has the Currie plaid-pin, a gift from old Lazarus, who had long ago received it from John Shipley in exchange for the Tonnerre knife. Morag and Jules exchange the knife and the pin; in symbolic terms, Morag has earned the right to inheritance by learning to understand the value of the past:

Morag goes to her bookshelves and gets out Christie's The Clans and Tartans of Scotland. Leafs through it, trying to find an illustration of this particular plaid pin.

* * * * *

"Here it is", Morag says. "It's the Clanranald Macdonalds...Their motto was My Hope is Constant In Thee --those are the words on the pin. Their war cry was Gainsay Who Dare."

* * * * *

My Hope is Constant in Thee. It sounds like a voice from the past. Whose voice, though? Does it matter? It does not matter. What matters is that the voice is there, and that she has heard these words which have been given to her. And will not deny what has been given. Gainsay Who Dare.

(p. 433)

Morag has come to see the implication that Manawaka is, in a sense, a town of the mind: it shall be, she realizes, "inside my head, for as long as I live" (p. 353). As an adolescent she had been willing to deny

her past in order to escape it through Brooke; as a young woman she had found it possible only to share part of her past with Dan; by the time that she has almost finished writing The Diviners she hears the sound of a voice from the past, and having "heard these words which have been given to her...will not deny what has been given".

It is an understanding of past-present interpenetration that illuminates the present. Towards the end of the novel, Pique, her voice "tense with pain" (p. 421), tells Morag that at school

this guy, a real smartass, came up and started making these passes at me...when I more or less told him to get lost, he said Aw come on, don't give me that shit--you know half-breed girls can't wait to get fucked by any guy who comes along.

(p. 422)

Morag quite naturally responds with anger and pain, but the salient feature of her reaction is that she evokes both Jules's and her own past experience of a similar order. The conflation makes the present incident understandable, and therefore possibly a trifle more bearable:

"Your dad had a lot of comments passed about him and his family, when he was a kid, I remember...With me, it was comments about Christie being the Scavenger, the town garbage collector, and about me wearing--at least in grade school--long droopy dresses like floursacks. I always thought I was going to spare my child that kind of pain. I haven't though. It's different, with you, but it's the same."

(pp. 421-2)

Thus, as the penultimate section of The Diviners draws to a close, Morag is able to use the perspective of the past to shed light upon a benighted aspect of the present, a hard-won perspective which is the

result of Morag's having accepted the pain and the pleasure that are stored in her "memorybank movies".

The fifth and final section of The Diviners, "The Diviners", is written totally in the time present. Flashbacks are conspicuously absent, for, as Bevan notes, "Morag has re-lived the past that is now assimilated in the present."⁵ In the first time present portion of the novel, Morag looks at the river and sees her friend and neighbour, Royland,

fishing for muskie. Seventy-four years old this year, Royland. Eyesight terrible, but he was too stubborn to wear glasses. A marvel that he could go on working. Of course, his work did not depend upon eyesight. Some other kind of sight. A water diviner. Morag always felt she was about to learn something of great significance from him, something which would explain everything. But things remained mysterious, his work, her own, the generations, the river.

(p. 4)

Laurence gives the reader a hint that the sense of incipient revelation Morag associates with Royland is to be shared; Royland is said to be seventy-four, and in the preceding paragraph but one, it is stated that Morag is forty-seven. Thus on only the second page of the novel, a link of sorts is forged between Morag and Royland.

In the geometric centre of the novel, Royland satisfies Morag's longstanding curiosity about his heretofore unmentioned past:

"I was a preacher...One of your real ripsnortin' Bible-punchers...I thought I had the Revealed Word. God was talking to me, sure as hell, and probably to no one else. At meetings I used to give 'em real fire-and-brimstone... Must've been a godawful sight, eh? I never saw it. I mean, I never saw it that way. I was married...I was death on every such thing as drink, tobacco, dances,

cards, lace curtains, any dress that looked like anything but a gunny sack, and so on...My wife led a life which was filled with nothing pleasant in any way at all. I even quit making love to her. I burned, yeh, but virtuously...she never stood up to me. If she tried, I brought her down with my speech and...the back of my hand. Yep. I thought it was a blow for the Lord...
 ...she finally took off...She had a cousin in Toronto, and I finally traced her through him...She was living in a terrible dirty room, alone...saw as soon as I laid eyes on her, what I'd done. I begged her to come back home...She said...she wanted to go and see her cousin and his wife, first, and she promised she'd be right back to pack. Didn't see her again until I set eyes on her in the morgue. Drowned herself...She was scared of me. Scared to come back. Scared not to come back.

* * * * *

Began to see--not all at once, mind you, but gradually--that I'd been crazy as a coot, before. Reasons for that, but too many to explain now. I was brought up by an aunt who--well, it wasn't really her fault, either. You don't know how it is for other people, or how far back it all goes. Anyway, I found I could divine wells, so I came back and settled here.

(pp. 240-1)

Within minutes Pique joins Royland and Morag, and affectionately exclaims

"You're great, Royland. Really great. Hey, you know something? You made a big mistake in not getting married. You should've had grandchildren. You'd make a fine grandad. You know that?"

Please. Pique--no. How many times had Morag, over the years, made similar jocular remarks?

But Royland could take it. He merely smiled. Maybe you did reach a point in life, after all, when such chance references no longer could break you into pieces. Roll on, that day.

"Well, Pique," Royland said, "I always thought I was kind of like that to you."

"You are," Pique said.

(pp. 241-2)

The point of having Royland recite the parable-like tale of his hellish

past in the geometric centre of The Diviners is to emphasize that he is the only character who has come to terms with his past. At this point all Morag can do is realize what the man has done, and hope to follow his example.

At the opening of the novel, Morag wonders what she shall learn from Royland; at the close of the final chapter, Royland tells her of his loss of the gift of divining, and that a mutual friend, a man in his twenties, has the potential to become a diviner:

The inheritors. Was this, finally and at last, what Morag had always sensed she had to learn from the old man? She had known it all along but not really known. The gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else.

(p. 452)

It is with the acceptance of this knowledge that Morag becomes one of the diviners, for she has divined her past in order to understand and accept the present, the present that is in the process of being bequeathed to the inheritors, the most prominent of which is Pique. And it is Pique's departure that triggers the train of memory that constitutes the majority of the body of The Diviners.

The first sentence of The Diviners is "The river flowed both ways" (p. 3); on the last page of the novel, Morag observes that "the river, as so often here, seemed to be flowing both ways" (p. 453). In short, the "river of now and then" initially represents only the confusion of cross-currents to Morag; finally Morag realizes that the river only appears to flow both ways. Ultimately, an understanding of the relationship between the past and the present is the beacon that

illuminates the future, and, since such an understanding cannot possibly be regressive, the river must only seem to flow both ways. But the initial illusion is necessary, for it serves the purpose of capturing in a simple, single, strong metaphor the reason that Morag undertakes the trip into her own history. And the grail won by this odyssey into the past is the dictum "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future, until the silence" (p. 453).

The following chapter shall discuss how Laurence connects the idea of an individual's past, or history, to the idea of art, and how the relationship of these concepts generates the idea of the role of the artist as prophet, or the diviner of future time. Past, present and future are able to compose an organic continuum because the myths of the immediate ancestors, the distant ancestors, and the tribe are seen as an integral part of the history of the individual. The Diviners is the history of Morag Gunn; but Morag, "like every other human being, is a funnel into which history has been poured".⁶

CHAPTER III

DIVINATION OF FUTURE TIME IN THE DIVINERS

As the reader follows Morag Gunn's writing of The Diviners in the present, the past is delved into at three distinct, if ultimately coalescing levels: the history of the individual, the history of the family, and the history of the ancestors, or tribe. As an individual, Morag Gunn's present is understandable in terms of her past. As a novelist, Morag can be seen to draw upon not only her private past, but the past of her family and the history of her ancestors as well. Of the four novels that Morag writes, the first two, Spear of Innocence and Prospero's Child, draw primarily upon her private life; the third, Jonah, also based upon Morag's past, has for its protagonist a prototype of Morag's stepfather; and the fourth novel, Shadow of Eden, draws upon Morag's vision of her ancestors. Thus an increasingly wider history is channeled into Morag's art, and Laurence is careful to exhibit the process. As this broader past is funneled into Morag's work, there is a fusion of documented history and human history. And as Laurence finally adjures "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future" (p. 453), it is possible to view Morag's artistry not only as the quest for the past, but also the means for divining the future.

The course of Morag's composition of her novels roughly corresponds with each major phase of Morag Gunn's life covered in The

Diviners. The first of these, Spear of Innocence,

Morag begins writing...almost unexpectedly, although Lilac has been in her mind for some time. She has no idea where the character has come from. She has never in her life known anyone remotely like Lilac Stonehouse, the fluffily pretty girl from a lumber town who lights out for the city. An old story, but in this case (hopefully) somewhat different, because Lilac's staggering naivete is never presented as anything but harmful, and in fact it damages not only herself but others. Innocence may well be the eighth deadly sin.

(p. 225)

Morag may have "no idea where the character has come from", but a previous description of Morag's childhood fantasies gives the reader a clue:

I remember those imaginary characters...Peony, not unnaturally, had curly blonde hair, the opposite of mine, and sweet little rosebud lips like those on the unreachable dolls in Eaton's catalogue. Rosa Picardy, my alter ego, I suppose, was somewhat sturdier.

(p. 12-13)

Although Morag believes she has never known a "pretty girl from a lumber town who lights out for the city", she herself has left the small rural town of Manawaka for the city of Winnipeg, with all the great expectations that, it is implied, Lilac shares:

Morag listens at nights to the long wailing of the trains crossing the prairies, their voices like the spooky voices of giant owls. She always feels warm and good at the sound, because she knows something which nobody else in this world knows. Which is, one day she will be on one of those trains, going to the city and maybe even further than the city. Going to the whole world.

(pp. 120-1)

Lilac is said to have an "innocence" that is damaging both to herself and others; this concept is simultaneously a true and distorted perception with reference to Morag, specifically with regard to her relationship with Brooke Skelton. Brooke tells Morag quite early in their relationship:

"You know, love, you have a quality of innocence that's very moving," he says. "I don't mean naivete. I mean genuine innocence. I'm not like that. I've lived too long for that, and in too many places. But it's a quality I love in you."

She wants to tell him she is not like that, either. She also had lived too long for that. The state of original grace ended a long time ago.

(p. 196)

This disjunction is a source of the future discord between Brooke and Morag, a discord that progressively leads to friction between them, and the fracture and final dissolution of their relationship. Out of his own needs, Brooke loves the "genuine innocence" he thinks Morag has; and out of her needs, Morag tries, with decreasing desire and success, to let both him and herself believe that she is indeed his image of her. Ultimately, she is unable and unwilling to maintain this pretense:

How could you withdraw from the terrors of the cave in which he lived almost always alone? But what if remaining there meant to be chained forever to that image of yourself which he must have and which must forever be distorted?

"Brooke--I remember. And I'm sorry. I think I lied to you, without meaning to, right from the first."

"You didn't lie, love. You couldn't. Not you. You were without guile. That was the reason I loved you."

"Brooke, I haven't been without guile since I was four years old. I didn't think you'd care about me if I let you know, that's all. I mean, let you know about my own darkness, that comes on sometimes."

(pp. 257-8)

Morag feels compelled to try harder and harder to make their relationship a more open one, but in doing so the emotional frame of reference necessary for their relationship is eroded.

Spear of Innocence is written during the disintegration of Morag's marriage. The character, Lilac, is conceived as Morag is plagued with the results of her own apparent innocence; as Morag writes the novel her consciousness of the harmful results of "innocence" becomes increasingly acute. Thus not only does the passage above describing Lilac focus upon a radical problem in the relationship between Brooke and Morag, but it illustrates the processing of this 'raw material' into art. The essence of Morag's marital discontent is taken and a version of it shown in her novel in full display; Morag shows at full advantage, in the creation of Lilac, the potentially injurious effects of a quality normally considered to be positive. Irresponsibly used innocence, like fire, is dangerous--and Morag, via Lilac, knows it. With this knowledge, Morag is able, in a sense, to prophesy the future in her fiction, as she later realizes:

Morag is fascinated. Does fiction prophesy life? Is she looking at Lilac Stonehouse from Spear of Innocence? Fan Brady, though, hasn't got Lilac's naivete. Fan is tough in the spirit, wiry and wary in the soul. She is not really like Lilac at all, of course. She is almost the opposite. And yet, looking at Fan now is almost like looking at some distorted and older but still recognizable mirror-image of Lilac. There is a sense in which Fan has that same terrifying innocence, expressed in different ways.

(pp. 309-10)

In this case, Laurence explicitly suggests that the art of fiction, which is derived from the past, forecasts the future; an implicit

reiteration of this suggestion is also found in connection with Spear of Innocence.

One evening, while Brooke would like to go to a movie, Morag "would like to go back to Chapter Three. Lilac, going to work in the seedy nightclub, Crowe's Cave, for the first time, hasn't been presented properly" (p. 226). Later, after returning from Manawaka and Prin's funeral, Morag thinks:

Now, and somewhat oddly, considering the awfulness of the house on Hill Street, the apartment in Toronto seems more than ever like a desert island, or perhaps a cave, a well-lighted and beautifully appointed cave, but a cave just the same. Could one say cave if there were windows?

(p. 254)

The cave image links the apparently incongruous "Crowe's Cave" nightclub and the "beautifully appointed cave" or apartment Morag shares with Brooke. Lilac and Morag share a cave environment, in one sense physically and by extension emotionally; while Lilac's cave is a seedy nightclub, Morag's cave is the physically satisfying but emotionally arid ("desert island") environment of the apartment. Thus the cave image denies the "fact" of appearance and gets straight to the "fiction" of reality.

In another passage describing both Morag and Spear of Innocence,

Lilac has aborted herself in a way that Morag recalls from long ago. And yet it is not Eva for whom Morag experiences pain now--it is Lilac only, at this moment. Morag finishes the episode, moves away from the typewriter, walks around the apartment, smoking, trying to shed the tension instantly, which is impossible.

(p. 229)

Brooke comes home to find no dinner in sight and Morag shaken; she explains:

"It's just that I've reached a kind of crucial point. I mean, with the novel."

Brooke laughs, relieved.

"Is that it? Heavens, I thought you'd been suddenly stricken with something serious."

I have. I have. But she does not say this. Odd --if you had a friend who had just aborted herself, causing chaos all round and not only to herself, no one would be surprised if you felt upset, anxious, shaken. It is no different with fiction--more so, maybe because Morag has felt Lilac's feelings. The blood is no less real for being invisible to the external eye.

(p. 230)

Morag denies the equation of Lilac's abortion with Eva's--yet does not deny, presumably deliberately, that the horror and pain she experienced at Eva's abortion is totally unrelated to Lilac's experience. The real incident has fed the artistic one, but the fiction has taken on a life of its own, complete with its own vascular system. It is unlikely that Morag could have erased her reaction to Eva's abortion entirely from her memory: "'I didn't mean to tell you. It ain't your worry. But --oh Morag, I'm two months gone'" (p. 151). And later, Morag remembers:

Christie, years ago. The parcel in the garbage tin. I buried it in the Nuisance Grounds--that's what it was, wasn't it? A nuisance.

Morag and Eva walk home together. Eva shivers, cries a little but not much.

And aborts herself that night with a partly straightened-out wire clotheshanger.

(p. 152)

Just before Morag writes about Lilac's abortion, she thinks, "How much of Lilac's childhood remained with her? All. It always does" (p. 229).

The passages cited dealing with Eva, Morag and Lilac, taken as a whole, suggest that while the factual reality is germinal to the fictional reality, the reality of the fiction has a tendency to become as actual as its 'real-life' predecessor. While fiction is fed by fact, the fiction recompenses its generating fact by providing an enduring distillation and reflection of its predecessor--and is therefore of a literally both real and unreal nature.

It ought to be noted that Spear of Innocence is a carefully chosen title, for Laurence assigns more than one connotation to it within the context of The Diviners. On one level, the idea of the title refers to the potential of innocence for harm. What the phrase "spear of innocence" further implies is the harshness of this harm, by evoking the aggressive, thrusting action associated with "spear" and linking it to "innocence". There is also the association that Morag makes:

"Spear of Innocence", Morag interjected irritably. What a rotten title. How had she ever dreamed that one up? But let's at least get it right, lady. Stick, ye gods. Freudian error. Same could be said of Spear, probably.

(p. 24)

This title can also be associated with the crest of the Logan clan, which is "A passion nail piercing a human heart, proper" (p. 48). Ironically enough, this does not only refer back to "spear of innocence" in a Freudian sense; in addition, "The dust jacket for Spear of Innocence shows a spear, proper, piercing a human heart, valentine" (p. 261). Again, the strong but flexible bond between fact and fiction is evident. The echo of Christie's voice, introduced by the evocation

of the Logan crest, is to ring with increasing strength in Morag's later novels.

In a letter to her friend Ella, Morag describes the second novel she writes, Prospero's Child:

The novel progresses, slowly. It's done in semi-allegorical form, and also it has certain parallels with The Tempest. It's called Prospero's Child, she being the young woman who marries His Excellency, the Governor of some island in some ocean very far south, and who virtually worships him and then who has to go to the opposite extreme and reject nearly everything about him, at least for a time, in order to become her own person. It's as much the story of H.E. I've always wondered if Prospero really would be able to give up his magical advantages once and for all, as he intends to do at the end of The Tempest. That incredibly moving statement --"What strength I have's mine own, Which is most faint--" If only he can hang onto that knowledge, that would be true strength. And the recognition that his real enemy is despair within, and that he stands in need of grace, like everyone else--Shakespeare did know just about everything.

(pp. 329-30)

Prospero's Child is parallel to The Tempest both in its setting of an oceanic island and its vital concern with the island's Governor figure. There is further similarity in the naming of Prospero's daughter; Morag's name for Prospero's child, "Mira", is obviously a direct derivation from Shakespeare's Miranda.

In her letter to Ella, Morag acknowledges the debt of Prospero's Child to The Tempest; however, it is not so much the actual tale of The Tempest to which Morag is indebted, as the experience that has dramatized for her with painful clarity certain aspects of The Tempest. In their own way Brooke Skelton, Morag, and Jules Tonnerre remake the tale of Shakespeare's play. When Morag first meets Brooke,

she thinks "he is a prince among men" (p. 189). As their marriage becomes increasingly tension-fraught, Morag is pulled back to Manawaka as her foster-mother is dying, and during the singing of a hymn at the funeral service Morag realizes that a youthful fantasy was the foundation of her marriage: "Those Halls of Sion. The Prince is ever in them. What had Morag expected, those years ago, marrying Brooke? Those selfsame halls?" (p. 253).

Morag's metaphor for Brooke is quite apt. One line of evidence for its appropriateness is his identification of himself as a pro-imperialist:

"Is it better now, there [i.e. in India]?"

"Not a damn bit better," Brooke says bitterly.

"Worse, if anything, I should think. Whatever anyone may say of it, the passing of the British Raj wasn't the answer."

"But Brooke--surely you can't believe it was right for them, the British, even for you, to have lived there like that, in that way, house and servants, while--"

"Little one," he says, very gently, "there is no real justice in this world. I don't say it was fair. It was just the best that could be done under the circumstances, that's all."

(pp. 216-17)

The sentiment is later repeated:

"Brooke, why don't you get a teaching job in India?"

He shakes his head.

"No, little one. I couldn't go back. It's all changed too much. I wouldn't know it. I wouldn't feel at home there any longer."

(p. 227)

Thus Brooke is in the broadest sense the "factual" counterpart of the

"fictional" Prospero/Governor sort of character; he is both an intellectual and emotional imperialist. During the scene in which their marriage crumbles, Morag "sees for the first time that he has believed he owns her" (p. 278). Even after Morag has left him, he continues to believe that he owns her: she writes a letter "telling him that she is now using her own name. His letter is addressed: Mrs. Brooke T. Skelton" (pp. 294-5).

However, to understand Prospero one needs Caliban, and to understand Brooke one needs Jules. Brooke does not file for divorce after Morag's adultery with the Metis Jules; he starts divorce proceedings only after she announces her pregnancy. It is because Morag is perceived to be a possession that her pregnancy, particularly by Jules, cannot be accepted by Brooke--and for precisely the same reason that Prospero cannot allow or even imagine Caliban's fathering of Miranda's child; as John Wain puts it,

Caliban, allowed to live in Prospero's cell, has made an attempt to ravish Miranda; when sternly reminded of this, he impenitently says, with a kind of slaver's guffaw,

Oh ho! Oh ho! --would it had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.

Our own age, which is much given to using the horrible word "miscegenation", ought to have no difficulty in understanding this passage. Quite apart from an understandable wish not to have his daughter ravished by anyone, Prospero could hardly maintain his rule over an island whose inhabitants were partly Caliban's and partly his own.₁

Thus it is perfectly understandable that in later years, when Brooke and his new wife visit Morag, the latter feels compelled to "show off Pique" (p. 336), her child by Jules; Pique is not only a charming little girl

but also a living symbol of the fact that her mother has "gone native", so to speak, and rejected in every possible sense the "white man's burden". It is no accident that Morag associates Brooke with Kipling (p. 194). Kipling's fiction, to quote Jeffrey Meyers, "shows how completely Kipling believes in the colonial mission"²; and in his work there is indirect reference to one James Brooke, an Englishman whom the Malay Sultan of Brunei made "Rajah and gave him Sarawak"³, as a reward for aid in the suppression of a rebellion.

Prospero's Child constitutes a sophisticated demonstration of the relationship between fact and fiction, past and present, and enters a dimension of this relationship that was relatively unexplored in Spear of Innocence. Both of these novels-within-the-novel demonstrate the transformation of Morag's experience in and into her fiction; but in addition, Prospero's Child makes a strong statement about the prophetic nature of art in relation to life. It is the replay of the Prospero-Miranda-Caliban story, as lived by Brooke, Morag and Jules, that vitally represents the power of fiction to divine the future. Laurence, or at least Morag, seems to suggest, and illustrates with skill, that this is the paradoxical case: the real is embodied by the unreal. Prospero and Brooke are similar figures, as to some degree are Caliban and Jules, and it is their essential similarity that enables the smooth and deliberate blending of the characters in The Tempest, Prospero's Child, and The Diviners, a blending that is aided and demonstrated by the technique of having a novel-within-the-novel (Prospero's Child) about a play (The Tempest) about a novel's characters.

The third novel that Morag writes,

whose title is Jonah, is the story of an old man, a widower, who is fairly disreputable and who owns a gillnetter in Vancouver. He fishes the mouth of the Fraser River and the Strait of Georgia when the salmon run is on. It is also about his daughter Coral, who resents his not being a reputable character. Jonah inhabits Morag's head, and talks in his own voice. In some ways she knows more about Coral, who is so uncertainly freed by Jonah's ultimate death, but it is Jonah himself who seems more likely to take on his own life in the fiction.

(p. 366)

Once again, Morag's roots account for the source of her fiction. At the time of writing, Christie, like Jonah, is old, a widower, and--at least in the eyes of the pillars of the community of Manawaka--disreputable. Like Coral, Morag resents the fact that her father is not a "reputable character": "He [Christie] drives her to the CPR station in the old garbage truck. She thanks God it is night" (p. 173).

Morag thinks it probable that Jonah will "take on his own life in the fiction"; elsewhere she tells Pique:

He had very blue eyes, Christie did, in those days, and when he was telling a tale, his eyes would be like the blue lightning and you would forget his small stature, for at those times he would seem a giant of a man.

(p. 367)

There is no question that the character of Jonah is strongly based upon Christie. As is the case in Morag's other novels, however, characterization is not a matter of strict duplication from life; in the process of transformation from life to literature, from the events of the past to the stories of the present, Morag captures the essence of the characters in question and their interplay. Jonah is created not in Christie's image but in his spirit, and the same is true of the

relationship of Morag and Coral. The young Morag, like Coral, finds that the disrepute of her father poses a problem. It is not till Morag is distanced from her childhood, at least in terms of chronological time, that she can identify with Christie: "Would there be a special corner of heaven, then, for scavengers and diviners? Which was Morag, if either, or were they the same thing?" (p. 212).

Morag's sense of identification with Christie is made apparent in her fourth novel, Shadow of Eden, of which she comments in a letter to Ella, "Odd--the tales Christie used to tell of Piper Gunn and the Sutherlanders, and now this book deals with the same period" (p. 418). The "tales" Morag refers to are invented for her, as a child, by Christie; she has already been orphaned once, and Christie is far too loving to have the child doubly dispossessed:

He sits there, thinking. Soon he will begin. Morag knows what it says in the book [The Clans and Tartans of Scotland] under the name Gunn. It isn't fair, but it must be true because it is right there in the book.

The chieftainship of Clan Gunn is undetermined at the present time, and no arms have been matriculated.

When she first looked it up, she showed it to Christie, and he read it and then he laughed and asked her if she had not been told the tales about the most famous Gunn of all, and so he told her.

(p. 48)

Thus Christie creates an "ancestor" (p. 48) for Morag--Piper Gunn.

Piper Gunn, he was a great tall man, a man with the voice of drums and the heart of a child and the gall of a thousand and the strength of conviction.

(p. 49)

According to Christie,

It was in the old days, a long time ago, after the clans was broken and scattered at the battle of the moors, and the dead men thrown into the long graves there, and no heather ever grew on those places, never again, for it was dark places they had become and places of mourning. Then, in those days, a darkness fell over all the lands and the crofts of Sutherland. The Bitch-Duchess was living there then...

(p. 49)

It is this mercenary figure that declares "All the lands of Sutherland will be raising the sheep, says the she-devil, for they'll pay better than folk"; she does not feel "shame or remorse over the people scrabbling on the rocks there like animals" (p. 49) as a result of the enclosures. It is Piper Gunn who rouses the dispirited people:

Why do you sit on these rocks, weeping? says he. For there is a ship coming, says he, on the wings of the morning, and I have heard tell of it, and we must...go with it into a new world across the waters.

(p. 50)

Yet the dispossessed crofters are too timid to undertake the venture until Piper Gunn pipes them onto the ship that will take them to the land where their future lies:

And when the plank was down and the captain hailing the people there, Piper Gunn began to walk towards that ship and his woman Morag with him, and she with child, and he was still playing "The Gunns' Salute."

Then what happened? What happened then, to all of them people there homeless on the rocks? They rose and followed! Yes, they rose then, and they followed, for Piper Gunn's music could put the heart into them and they would have followed him all the way to hell or to heaven with the sound of the pipes in their ears.

(p. 51)

Christie explains in a subsequent tale that "the first catastrophe was that ship had a bloody idiot as captain...he landed the christly vessel...away up north there, at the wrong place" (p. 83), and as a result the people wintered on the shores of Hudson Bay:

they ate all manner of strange things, and it was a time of misery, but they stayed because they had the heart in them. And in the spring they walked. Yes, they walked to the place where the supplies would be. It was a long long long way. It could've been maybe a thousand or so miles, then.

(They walked? A thousand miles? They couldn't, Christie.)

Well, it might not have been quite the thousand, but it was a christly long way. And through the snow and muck and that. And who led them? I ask you, who led them? Who led the men and women and the children on that march? Piper Gunn. Himself. He led them with his pipes blaring, there. He was a man six feet nine inches tall, a mighty man of God.

(pp. 84-5)

As David Williams concisely explicates,

Mortified by Christie's oddity and hoping beyond hope to escape Manawaka altogether, she [Morag] dismissed Christie as a fraud, then wrote off his legends as "a load of bad manure" (p. 162). Only when she comes herself to tell Pique the "Tale of Christie Logan" does Morag admit to a gift of second sight:

When he told me the tales about Piper Gunn, at first I used to believe every word. Then later, I didn't believe a word of them, and thought he'd made them up out of whole cloth.

(What means whole cloth?)

Out of his head--invented them.

But later still, I realized they'd been taken from things that happened, and who's to know what really happened? So I started believing in them again, in a different way.

(p. 367)

Different versions....Believing in a different way....It is an acceptance of the "double vision" and another dimension of reality.⁴

By the time Morag comes to write Shadow of Eden, she recognizes that the art of fiction is akin to the art of making human history of documented history; as she expresses it in a letter to Ella,

Christie used to tell of Piper Gunn and the Sutherlanders, and now this book deals with the same period. The novel follows them on the sea journey to Hudson Bay, through that winter at Churchill and then on the long walk to York Factory in the spring. Christie always said they walked about a thousand miles--it was about a hundred and fifty, in fact, but you know, he was right; it must've felt like a thousand. The man who led them on that march, and on the trip by water to Red River, was young Archie Macdonald, but in my mind the piper who played them on will always be that giant of a man, Piper Gunn, who probably never lived in so-called real life but who lives forever. Christie knew things about inner truths that I am only just beginning to understand.

(p. 418)

Morag's novels are the result of making art of an individual's history; Christie's tales are the product of making art of ancestral or tribal history. In Morag's description of Shadow of Eden, these types of history finally coalesce.

Morag's fourth novel deals directly with the relationship between fact and fiction, and does so by retelling tales. The tales of Morag's past are revived; the tales told by Christie in pride and pain are reborn in a fresh form. Morag's admission, "I like the thought of history and fiction interweaving" (p. 418), can be linked to her conviction that

A popular misconception is that we can't change the past-- everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question.

(p. 60)

Morag is "convinced that fiction was more true than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction" (p. 25). Therefore it is logical that Morag should value Christie's tales, and pass them on to her daughter; for Morag, these fusions of fiction and history embody the historical truth, and the value judgments these tales propound are demonstrated to be both real and inheritable. For example, as a child Morag listens to Christie say

The Bitch-Duchess...cast a darkness over the land, and sowed the darkness and reaped gold, for her heart was dark as the feathers of a raven and her heart was cold as the gold coins, and she loved no creature alive but only the gold.

(p. 49)

Pique, Pique who has been raised on Morag's tales of Christie and Christie's tales, tells Morag "My dad gave me some songs...That was the best thing he gave me" (p. 234).

As a child, Pique listens to "Morag's Tale of Lazarus Tonnerre", and after receiving a description of Galloping Mountain in the course of the tale, announces "I'm going there someday" (p. 369). As an adult, Pique tells Morag, "I'm going to my uncle Jacques' place at Galloping Mountain" (p. 438). Once again fiction is depicted as a form of prophecy: Pique's intended action is foretold in her mother's telling of a tale about her grandfather.

Thus in the context of The Diviners, tales, like novels, are woven of both fact and fiction; furthermore they involve both history (and therefore the past) and prophecy (and therefore the future). The fact that Morag is an artist must not be overlooked: in this novel,

the art of fiction mediates between the past and the future, for in culling the truth from the documented past one realizes the importance of the epigraph, "but they had their being once/and left a place to stand on." Finally, it is in the realm of art--the art of Christie's tales, Morag's novels, and Laurence's The Diviners--to divine past, present and future in accordance with the dictum "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future" (p. 453).

CONCLUSION

The nature of the relationship between the past and the present is a thematic concern from Laurence's earliest fiction until and including her most recent novel, The Diviners. Even in Laurence's early "African" works, the perspective of past-present interpenetration is brought to bear upon all sorts of conflict; sexual, theological, and cultural problems arise for characters who find themselves unable to live according to past customs yet incapable of living with present ones. The tendency in the "Manawaka" works is to develop the theme of time per se: more and more attention is paid to the nature of the relationship between past, present and future. Laurence's non-fiction reflects this development.

As Laurence becomes more technically adept, there is a movement toward reflecting the thematic concern for time in technical terms. This movement culminates in The Diviners, where theme and technique virtually fuse with regard to time, the most salient technical feature being the inclusion of "Memorybank Movies". Time is the theme that unifies the vast scope explored in The Diviners. As time present and time past interludes are alternated, the protagonist, Morag Gunn, comes to confront her past. In so doing she comes to realize that the present is to be understood in terms of the past that precedes and generates it. In short, she learns the lesson taught by the epigraph to the novel: "but they had their being once/and left a place to stand on". The "river of now and then", the controlling metaphor of The

Diviners, though ultimately seen to flow one way--straight into the future--appears simultaneously to flow both ways, as the protagonist finally realizes: one can "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future" (p. 453).

The protagonist, a novelist who is in the process of writing The Diviners, is shown to synthesize a vision in which past, present and future form an organic continuum. In this respect, the fact that the protagonist is a novelist is important, for the art of fiction is presented as a form of divination, a craft that enables one to divine the future. Four of Morag's works, or novels-within-the-novel, are described in the course of The Diviners. In writing the novel, Morag initially draws upon her own past, then that of her "history" in terms of her family, and finally her ancestral past. With the writing of each successive novel-within-the-novel more of the past is considered; and as the past is more thoroughly considered, the future becomes more foreseeable. Finally, Pique, Morag's daughter and as such a harbinger of the future, is likewise seen as a product of her own, her parents' and her ancestral past.

While in the course of The Diviners the thematic use of time is extensive, and establishes a firm basis for the dictum "Look ahead into the past, and back into the future", a number of patterns make the point. Unfortunately space does not permit the examination of all of these. The tales told by Lazarus Tonnerre and Christie Logan are picked up by Jules Tonnerre and Morag Gunn respectively; finally their child, Pique, inherits these tales. The tales change slightly with each generation, and a close reading suggests that given their context in

the novel, these tales and their evolution in telling hint at the nature of Laurence's view of history--or to be more precise, the relationship between documentary history and human history.

Another important pattern not looked at here is formed by the four Tonnerre songs that appear in the course of the novel. "The Ballad of Jules Tonnerre", "Lazarus", "Piquette's Song" and "Pique's Song" are more than interesting variations in the narrative flow--among other things, they constitute a genealogy starting with Jules Tonnerre's grandfather and namesake, and subsequently going from Lazarus, Jules' father, to Piquette, Jules' sister, and finally to Pique, Jules' daughter. The importance of these songs is suggested by their reiteration: they are literally repeated in an "Album" that follows the body of the novel. The repetition of these songs might be considered to function as an epilogue. Certainly these songs of the past could be considered to be a fitting epilogue, given the nature of the relationship between the past, present and future established in the course of the novel.

NOTES

Chapter I

¹Margaret Laurence, "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," in Creation, ed. Robert Kroetsch (Toronto: new press, 1970), p. 61.

²Margaret Laurence, The Diviners (1974; rpt. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1975), pp. 452-3. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

³Bernice Lever, "Manawa Magic", Journal of Canadian Fiction, 3, No. 3 (1974), p. 94.

⁴Brita Mickleburgh, "The Diviners", The Fiddlehead, No. 104 (Winter, 1975), p. 112.

⁵Kenneth James Hughes, "Divining the Past, Present, Future", Canadian Dimension, March 1975, p. 45.

⁶Lever, p. 96.

⁷Audrey Thomas, "A Broken Wand?", Canadian Literature, No. 62 (Autumn, 1974), p. 90.

⁸Ibid., p. 90.

⁹Mickleburgh, p. 114.

¹⁰A. Barry Cameron, "The Diviners", Queen's Quarterly, 81 (1974), p. 639.

¹¹Ibid., p. 639.

¹²Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. 142.

¹³Ibid., p. 149.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 168.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁶Margaret Laurence, "Sources", Mosaic, 3 (1969-70), p. 84.

¹⁷Margaret Laurence, "A Conversation About Literature: An Interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton", Journal of Canadian Fiction, 1, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), p. 67.

¹⁸Margaret Laurence, "Margaret Laurence", in Eleven Canadian Novelists, ed. Graeme Gibson (Toronto: Anansi, 1973), p. 203.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 204-205.

²⁰Margaret Laurence, This Side Jordan (1960; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. 104. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

²¹Margaret Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences", Canadian Literature, No. 41 (Summer 1969), p. 13.

²²Ibid., p. 12.

²³Margaret Laurence, The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories (1963; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), pp. 60-1. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

²⁴Margaret Laurence, "Sources", Mosaic, 3 (1969-70), pp. 81-2.

²⁵Margaret Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences", Canadian Literature, No. 41 (Summer, 1969), pp. 13-14.

²⁶Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (1964; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 90. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

²⁷Margaret Laurence, "Sources", Mosaic, 3 (1969-70), p. 81.

²⁸Dylan Thomas, "Poem in October" in Collected Poems: 1934-1952 (1952; rpt. London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1971), p. 97.

²⁹ Dylan Thomas, "Fern Hill", in Collected Poems: 1934-1952 (1952; rpt. London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1971), p. 151.

³⁰ Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (1966; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 18-19 and p. 59. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

³¹ Margaret Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences", Canadian Literature, No. 41 (Summer, 1969), p. 14.

³² Ibid., p. 15.

³³ Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (1969; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), p. 31. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

³⁴ Margaret Laurence, "Sources"; Mosaic 3 (1969-70), p. 83.

³⁵ Margaret Laurence, A Bird in the House (1970; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 201-2. Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

³⁶ Mickleburgh, p. 112.

³⁷ Cameron, p. 640.

Chapter II

¹Joseph Conrad, "Henry James: An Appreciation", in Notes on Life and Letters (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1921), pp. 16-17.

²Margaret Laurence, "Sources", Mosaic, 3 (1969-70), p. 81.

³Allan Bevan, "The Diviners", Dalhousie Review, LIV, No. 2 (Summer, 1974), p. 34.

⁴Margaret Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences", Canadian Literature, No. 41 (Summer, 1969), p. 13.

⁵Bevan, p. 362.

⁶Alan Rudrum, "Philosophical Implication in Laurence's 'Women in Love'", Dalhousie Review LI, No. 2 (Summer, 1971), p. 250.

Chapter III

¹John Wain, The Living World of Shakespeare: A Playgoer's Guide (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1964), pp. 229-30.

²Jeffrey Meyers, Fiction and the Colonial Experience (Ipswich: The Boydell Press, 1973), p. 5.

³Ibid., p. 7.

⁴David Williams, "The Indian Our Ancestor: Three Modes of Vision in Recent Canadian Fiction". First presented at the Twelfth Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for American Studies, "Native Peoples of North America", at the University of Manitoba, October, 1976. I am indebted to Dr. Williams for making this paper available.

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