

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

IN SEARCH OF SELF: THE STUDY OF A CENTRAL  
THEME IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S NOVEL,  
THIS SIDE JORDAN

by

HERBERT GIESBRECHT

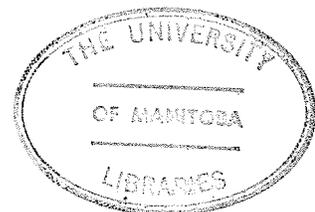
A THESIS

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the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This study is concerned with the matter of a central, or controlling, theme in Margaret Laurence's fiction. More specifically, the study attempts to establish the thesis that a controlling theme - the search of the individual for self-understanding and self-acceptance - pervades and links all of Laurence's published novels.

The study opens, in chapter one, with a brief survey of critical opinion and comment on the major themes, as individual critics have perceived them, in Laurence's novels. Such a survey reveals the emergence of a limited consensus among critics that if any one theme is central to her fiction, it is the theme indicated above. This chapter also points up certain shortcomings inherent in the approach, or procedure, of these critics (viewed as a group) and the evident need for more rigorous analysis of the novels themselves. Such inductive analysis, it is contended, should (in contrast to the approach of most of the critics here reviewed) also take account of the subjective experiences and insights of other than main characters and should show the relationship among themes, in a given novel, in an endeavour to define, if possible, the dominant theme. Several general considerations which argue for the presence of the one central theme indicated above are also introduced in this first chapter.

A second chapter, really the heart of this study, undertakes a close and detailed analysis of Laurence's first novel, This Side Jordan. The centrality of the one theme, the individual's search for self-under-

standing and self-acceptance, is argued and illustrated in terms of the crucial experiences and insights of its various characters and in terms of the precise relationship of another theme (the movement of Ghana towards independence as a nation) to this central one.

A third, and final, chapter attempts to continue the argument for the dominance of this one theme in Margaret Laurence's fiction by analyzing, in a more curtailed manner, the key experiences and developing insights of (main) characters in three later novels: The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, and The Fire-Dwellers. The study concludes with the implied contention that the critical approach underlying the analysis of these four selected novels, if applied to the other (two) novels of Laurence, would yield further evidence in support of the thesis of this present study.

## INTRODUCTION

Margaret Laurence is now generally recognized as one of Canada's most accomplished novelists. The story of such recognition may be pieced together from the pages of individual book reviews, essays in books and journals, recorded interviews with her, and even critical surveys (more recent ones) of Canadian fiction as a whole. Critics have, indeed, praised her work for a variety of reasons: they have commended her skillful management of time (historical as well as dramatic time) and of narrative voice, her vivid evocation of a particular geographical place and atmosphere, her convincing simulation of native speech and dialogue, and her sheer ability to write simple and effective prose. But most frequently they have returned, in their praise of Laurence as a novelist, to the concentrated strength and conviction of her characterization, particularly the characterization of her central protagonists. Minor characters in her novels may not always be convincingly portrayed, but about the strength and credibility of Laurence's main characters the critics have, by and large, very little doubt at all.

This insistent and intriguing concern of Laurence with the exploration of her key characters is only one of several clues which are guiding an increasing number of critics to the reasonable conclusion that her leading themes are all directly related to the individual's search (or struggle) for self-understanding, for personal growth, for a sense of personal freedom, for self-acceptance. Indeed, several critics - notably Clara Thomas and Walter Swayze - have ventured to suggest (what

I contend for more strongly in this present study, that one particular theme dominates and binds together the whole of her fiction. In any case, it is this recurring, though mostly superficial, interest in the matter of Laurence's central themes which points up the need for more thoroughgoing study of the entire question. For while the critics of Laurence often speak to the matter of her themes and (lately) even do so with a growing consensus in viewpoint, they do not often speak with the kind of critical clarity and persuasiveness which derive from rigorously inductive analyses of individual novels.

It is to this particular need for the more painstaking examination of her novels, from within, that my thesis addresses itself. This thesis does not presume, of course, to offer any definitive answers to the question of Laurence's central theme (s), but it does attempt to illustrate what I believe to be a very useful approach in the thematic study of her fiction. My procedure involves, basically, an inductive analysis of the crucial experiences and insights of the main and secondary characters and an analysis of the precise relationship of other (secondary?) themes to the main theme, in the novel This Side Jordan.

My study opens (in chapter one) with a brief survey of critical opinion concerning the presumed themes of Margaret Laurence's novels. This survey is intended to indicate both the degree of diversity and the measure of agreement among critics with respect to the matter of Laurence's major themes, and also to reveal certain shortcomings in their approaches (viewed as a group) to the subject at hand. The main body of my study (chapters two and three) argues for the centrality of one theme in Laurence's fiction: the individual's search for self-understanding and

self-acceptance. The argument is carried forward in terms of a close and detailed study, according to the approach indicated above, of This Side Jordan (Laurence's first, and much-neglected novel) and a more curtailed study of three later novels: The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, and The Fire-Dwellers.

This central and controlling theme is one which reflects a constant and salient concern in Margaret Laurence's personal (private) experience and one which reflects her own characteristic way of looking out upon, and interpreting, the experiences of people around her. It may be a thoroughly familiar, even commonplace, theme for a novelist to work at, and criticism could be levelled that its very prominence bespeaks a certain imaginative impoverishment in Laurence as a writer. Other Canadian novelists like Hugh MacLennan, Morley Callaghan, Gabrielle Roy, and Rudy Wiebe, it could be argued with some conviction, incorporate a wider variety of distinct and diverse themes in their fiction than Margaret Laurence seems able to do. Yet the fact remains that with her modulated and generally convincing treatment of this one broad theme, and of integral facets within it, Laurence continues to attract readers and to evoke the commendation of numerous critics. To deprecate Laurence's thematic interest and concern by describing it as too narrow and restricted in scope is therefore to miss both the essential point and the distinctive worth of her fictional achievement.

CHAPTER ONE: IN SEARCH OF A CENTRAL THEME IN THE FICTION OF MARGARET  
LAURENCE: A REVIEW OF CRITICAL OPINION

There can be little doubt that Margaret Laurence is coming into her own as an accomplished and highly appreciated Canadian novelist of our time. Not only the literary and academic honors which have been accorded her during the last few decades but also the increased critical attention being devoted to the explication of her individual works and to the question of her stature among Canadian novelists, attest to this fact. Although, admittedly, no critical study of Laurence which might be justly described as definitive, in scope and penetration, has yet appeared, Clara Thomas' book, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, which builds upon and amplifies earlier studies of her,<sup>1</sup> represents at least a first and somewhat tentative step towards such a study. Thomas' book, it is to be hoped, will challenge other more penetrating critics to attempt such a study.

In 1977 many of the shorter critical essays on, and interviews with M. Laurence, prepared during recent years (1960 - 1975), were gathered up by William H. New for the "Critical Views on Canadian Writers" series in a collection entitled simply Margaret Laurence. What these critical voices, whether in consideration of a specific novel or short story or in consideration of some aspect of Laurence's fictional art as such, proclaim together (with very few exceptions) is that here is a writer with major talent whose creative roots and inspiration are deeply anchored in the Canadian context and whose strong and persistent concern, and achieved

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<sup>1</sup>Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975). Earlier studies of hers include Margaret Laurence (Canadian Writers, Number 3). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969 and "The Novels of Margaret Laurence", in Studies in the Novel, Volume 4, Number 2 (1972), 154 - 64.

success, lie with the exploration of the inner lives of individuals rather than with the delineation of large-scale social or historical settings or with the skilful structuring and unfolding of suspenseful plots. What these critics and reviewers seem less commonly agreed upon, or else seem less capable of defining for themselves and others, is the precise kind and level of artistic success which Laurence has achieved in particular novels, and the precise themes which are embodied in her novels' constant concern with the troubled experiences of individuals who endure, learn from, and somehow survive these experiences. It may, of course, be premature for us to expect the sort of definite and assured conclusions on these matters which only the resolving perspectives of time can, as a rule, bring to us. Still "the new must be tested and appraised," as Stanley Read reminds us, "long before the passing of the traditional century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit."<sup>2</sup> Or it may also be the case that we are asking too much of a novelist who has always remained more interested in the exploration and unfolding of human character as such than in the explication of very specific themes. Laurence's open confession, in her 1969 article, "Ten Years' Sentences",<sup>3</sup> that she has never yet decided on a theme before commencing to write a novel seems to suggest as much, although other remarks of hers can be brought forward which argue for a sense of theme emerging and developing early in the course of her actual writing.

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<sup>2</sup> Stanley E. Read, "The Maze of Life: the Work of Margaret Laurence," Canadian Literature, Number 27 (Winter, 1966), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences," Canadian Literature, Number 41 (Summer, 1969) 4.

Since it is with the matter of a central and controlling theme in Laurence's fiction as a whole that this paper is primarily concerned, it will be appropriate for me to begin with a rapid review of what critics who otherwise agree, at the most fundamental level, that Laurence's artistic strength lies in the portrayal and revelation of individual character, have suggested are the various themes of her novels. If we use New's widely-ranging collection of essays (referred to above) as our principal reference point,<sup>4</sup> we note that in fact few critics and reviewers have considered the possibility of common or recurring themes in Laurence's fiction. The majority of them have confined their attention to the review of one work with occasional side glances only, sometimes, at other novels. Most have restricted themselves, moreover, to a discussion of main characters only (two or three at most), in the novel under review, and have not investigated the matter whether the theme, or themes, they suggest as dominant ones in that novel are further reinforced or amplified by the experiences of other (secondary) characters. One can readily understand why this should be so in the initial stages of study of a contemporary writer like Laurence and I make the point here, not to castigate these critics, but simply to emphasize that such restrictive approaches tend to inhibit one in the search for underlying or common themes in any writer's total work. Several critics, however, have ventured to survey Margaret Laurence's fiction as a whole, with respect to

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<sup>4</sup>William H. New, editor, Margaret Laurence (Critical Views on Canadian Writers Series). Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977. Nearly all of the critics and reviewers referred to in the above review of critical comment on Laurence's themes are included in New's anthology. The page numbers appearing (in parentheses) in the body of my thesis except where otherwise noted, refer to the relevant pages of New's book.

basic themes and common motifs, that is, and to them we refer last of all in the following review of critical comment.

Stanley Read links This Side Jordan, Laurence's first published novel, to her collection of African short stories, The Tomorrow-Tamer, with regard to theme. It continues the broad theme, he remarks, which unites the short stories: "the dying of the old way of life and the birth of the new" (p.48). Read renders this very general indication of theme more precise by commenting upon the common search of the main characters (both African and white), amid the confusing changes around them, for a life of dignity, security and meaning. Henry Kreisel, in his discussion of "The African Stories of Margaret Laurence," describes the broad theme of This Side Jordan as the "birth of self-awareness" (p.108) in the confused search of individuals for independence and freedom, and therefore as a "variation on the theme of self-discovery" (p.109). Kreisel does not elucidate Laurence's development of this theme, however, beyond its immediate reflection in the experiences of one character, Nathaniel Amegbe. He is not unaware of the 'birth of a nation' theme (Ghana), but considers it to be a secondary theme in the novel.

William H. New, in an essay concerned with The Stone Angel, makes passing reference (p.136) to This Side Jordan; he points up the search of its main characters (Nathaniel Amegbe and Johnny Kestoe) for their "own kind of independence." Although New deems This Side Jordan - and most other critics who have compared this novel with Laurence's later work would agree - inferior to the later novels, he recognizes its thematic significance in the anticipation of a recurrent theme. Sandra Djwa, in a comparative study of the fiction of Sinclair Ross and Margaret Laurence,

also refers briefly to This Side Jordan. She comprehends the novel as another parable illustrating the "growth of the human spirit into self-knowledge and freedom" (p.72), but grants more distinct moral and religious significance to the theme, as unfolded in the novel, than do either Read or Kreisel.

Joan Hind-Smith, whose more extended study of Margaret Laurence, in Three Voices, is rather more biographical than analytical in focus and thrust, does not attempt to define the theme(s) of This Side Jordan at all, but simply acknowledges the fact that the novel, when it first appeared, "marked the emergence of an important new writer."<sup>5</sup> G.D. Killam, in contrast to Hind-Smith, offers a very close reading of the novel - perhaps the most penetrating essay written to date - in his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition (1976) of This Side Jordan.<sup>6</sup> He too, while alluding to the theme(s) of (a) the impact of the past upon the present and (b) the struggle between idealism and practical necessity and (c) the difficulty of meaningful communication between individuals, concludes finally that the deeper thematic meaning of the novel is a "quest for understanding at the individual level."

Clara Thomas, in what is (despite all of its weaknesses) to date the most comprehensive study made of Laurence's work as a whole, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, also grants this first novel, as does Killam, a secure and significant place in the corpus of Laurence's published

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<sup>5</sup>Joan Hind-Smith, Three Voices: The Lives of Margaret Laurence, Gabrielle Roy, Frederick Philip Grove. (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1975).

<sup>6</sup>G.D. Killam, "Introduction", This Side Jordan by Margaret Laurence. (New Canadian Library, No. 126). Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976 (date of introduction).

fiction. Thomas associates This Side Jordan with Laurence's other African tales in its exploration of the motifs of "exile" and the search for one's true "home," of "tribalism and community," but insists that its strongest inner "drum beat" responds to the theme of the "indomitable vitality and endurance of the spirit of man."<sup>7</sup> And what was only faintly hinted at by William H. New, namely, that Laurence's first published novel already anticipates, in the contours of its characters' most significant experiences, a major and reiterated theme of all her fiction becomes a slightly stronger note in Thomas' latest critical work.

The Stone Angel - to turn now to Laurence's second published novel - has evoked more critical interest and attention, in every way, than This Side Jordan or, for that matter, any other of her novels. Although it may be too early to assess its precise rank among her novels, such critical consensus as has already emerged would assign to it first place in terms of the richness, subtlety, and credibility of its portrayal of characters at any rate.<sup>8</sup> There is widespread agreement among the critics of Margaret Laurence - Paul Pickrel, Stanley Read, Honor Tracy, Barry Calaghan, Robertson Davies, Denyse Forman, Uma Parameswaran, Joan Hind-Smith, John Moss, J.M. Kertzer, William New, and Clara Thomas are all among them - that the dominant theme of The Stone Angel has something

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<sup>7</sup>Clara Thomas, op.cit., pp. 49 - 59.

<sup>8</sup>This assertion may be rather too strong in view of increasing appreciation among some critics for the artistic complexity of Laurence's latest work, The Diviners. Still, critical opinion seems more agreed, taken as a whole, about the artistic unity and success of The Stone Angel than it is, to date, about the over-all artistic success of The Diviners.

to do with the inner struggles of a proud and self-willed individual who, in reflecting upon the failures and joylessness of her past life (personal and family life), seeks to comprehend the reasons for her joylessness and the true meaning of her life. Some, as do Davies, Pickrel, and Read, emphasize the anatomy of pride itself which this novel provides for us in such careful and convincing detail; others focus more sharply upon specific aspects of Hagar Shipley's inner experience which, while they derive directly from her proud stance, are yet clearly distinguishable from it. Thus, New suggests that an important question posed by the troubled experiences of Hagar is: how can a proud and isolated person come to know herself, and others, at deeper levels? New also introduces, into his discussion of The Stone Angel, the notion of the conflict between desire and reality, inner expectation and actual event, as another aspect of the internal experience of this proud individual, Hagar Shipley. Clara Thomas, and Denyse Forman and Uma Parameswaran, are more disposed to accentuate, in Hagar's experience, the agonized search of a proud and domineering woman for the sources of true freedom and joy.

In the case of Laurence's next novel, A Jest of God, pride as a major obstacle in the individual's struggle to see and accept her real self - here the individual (the main protagonist) is a younger and single woman, Rachel Cameron - is also involved in the thematic thrust of the novel, according to some reviewers at any rate. George Bowering is one who takes this view and elaborates it with both critical breadth and reasoned care. In his analysis the pride of Rachel Cameron is seen to be subtly related to both her inner and outer life - to her own troubled

dreams, inhibitions, and fears, as well as to her characteristic responses to her mother, to Calla, to Nick Kazlik, to her (dead) father, and to the townsfolk as such. D. Forman and U. Parameswaran, H. J. Rosengarten, S. Djwa, and C. Thomas are clearly not oblivious to the importance of this element of pride, in Rachel Cameron's personal dilemma, but attach more importance in their considerations of A Jest of God to the factor of Rachel's personal fears and to their various manifestations, and to their implications for her, in life. Bowering's analysis is, however, more incisive and penetrating than that of any of the others referred to here, in terms of its own defined parameters. However, only S. Djwa and C. Thomas - Djwa less knowingly so than Thomas, perhaps - go on to suggest that these experiences of Rachel Cameron (her struggles with pride and fear in the attempt to win through to a sense of personal freedom and confidence) provide another variation on the more general theme of the "growth of the human spirit into self-knowledge and freedom."

C. M. McLay diverges from the views of most other critics in fixing upon the sense of aloneness and isolation and the need (for Rachel Cameron) to accept this essential aloneness and mortality of the individual as necessary facts of life, as the central theme of A Jest of God. McLay's argument can in fact be almost wholly summed up in two or three key sentences from her essay, "Every Man is an Island":

Yet Rachel's acceptance of life is attributable to her acceptance of her central predicament, her essential aloneness. She cannot escape through dream, fantasy or nightmare . . . And with this comes the simultaneous realization that every one else is alone too, that even the closest human relationship cannot cross the barrier of self. (p. 177)

A Bird in the House, here viewed as a novel rather than as the

closely-knit collection of short stories which it in fact is, has not received much serious critical study. The few who have ventured to comment upon its overall structure and thrust suggest that what links these stories together thematically is, above all, the psychological growth of its young but acutely perceptive narrator, Vanessa MacLeod, who in the very process of daily observing those so very near to her (family members and near relatives), comes to understand both them and herself more deeply. Kent Thompson and Henry Kreisel, it is true, only hint at this conclusion, in their all too brief references to A Bird in the House, and George Woodcock declines to elaborate further upon a concluding, and intriguing, assertion: "until in the end the child moves into the age when those emotions become identical with hers, and the perceiver becomes the perceived" (p. 148). Clara Thomas, however, in The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, develops this indicated theme with some fulness, even suggesting that the maturing experiences of Vanessa MacLeod directly reflect remembered stages of growth, as person and writer, in Margaret Laurence herself.<sup>9</sup> Thomas' discussion also takes account of Laurence's skilful management of two narrative voices, her technique of "double exposures" (to use Thomas' phrase), in bringing together the earlier experiences of the younger Vanessa and the present understandings of the older Vanessa.

Margaret Lawrence, in an essay "Time and the Narrative Voice,"

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<sup>9</sup>This suggestion would seem to be confirmed by comments made by Margaret Laurence herself in the course of an interview transcribed by Clara Thomas. See "A Conversation about Literature: an Interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton," Journal of Canadian Fiction, 1 (Winter, 1972) 65 - 9.

includes the above theme as one, at least, of several which - as she comprehends her own work - are conveyed within the stories of A Bird in the House. She remarks with specific reference to one of the stories ("To Set Our House in Order"):

It is actually a story about the generations, about the pain and bewilderment of one's knowledge of other people, about the reality of other people which is one way of realizing one's own reality, about the fluctuating and accidental quality of life, and perhaps more than anything, about the strangeness and mystery of the very concepts of past, present and future. (p. 159)

In the case of The Fire-Dwellers, some critics discover a more extended treatment of a theme already touched upon in The Stone Angel and A Jest of God: the difficulties involved in the struggling efforts of individuals to establish honest and meaningful communication between themselves and others who are necessarily involved in their lives. Diana Loercher would appear to be among these since her review concentrates largely upon Stacey MacAindre's deep need to relate more intimately to the members of her family and upon those "redemptive moments" in the family's experience when such intimacy is again rediscovered or even deepened. Loercher feels, however, that this novel is weakened, in its central thematic thrust, by the author's intrusion of extraneous topics such as "God, death, war, social injustice, etc." (p. 204). Joan Hind-Smith does not hesitate at all in asserting that "one of the universal themes in The Fire-Dwellers is the starvation of human relationships when there is no communication" (p. 46), but speaks of Stacey's continuing struggle to properly define and accept her role in life (as wife and mother) as a second and related theme. Douglas Spettigue also speaks of the "solitary self" in each of us which the experiences of Stacey

illustrate for us in an archetypal sort of way.<sup>10</sup> Barbara Hehner is another who regards "the difficulty of achieving genuine communication between individuals" as one, but only one, of several themes which link all of Laurence's earlier Manawaka novels.<sup>11</sup>

Allan Bevan also comments upon the "condition of aloneness" (p.207) which marks all of the characters in The Fire-Dwellers, but regards the individual's sense of aloneness and his (her) inability to relate to others easily as, once again, only one of several closely related themes. The novel, Bevan feels, is also about the frustrating discrepancy between external appearances and inward realities, and about the grim struggle, generally, of middle-class urbanites in our contemporary world.

D. Forman and U. Parameswaran return to the earlier suggestion of J. Hind-Smith that a major thematic motif in The Fire-Dwellers is the matter of discovering and coming to terms with one's essential role in life. "She (Stacey MacAindra)," they remark, "has been offered a chance to escape, to break the chains that bind her to a life of unending routine but only when Stacey realizes that she has this choice does she know that she will never give up her present life, no matter how unsatisfactory, for any other" (p. 100).

Clara Thomas sets these suggested thematic elements, in The Fire-

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<sup>10</sup>Douglas O. Spettigue, Review of The Fire-Dwellers, Queen's Quarterly, 76 (Winter, 1969), 722 - 4.

<sup>11</sup>Barbara Hehner, "River of Now and Then: Margaret Laurence's Narratives," Canadian Literature, Number 74 (Autumn, 1977), 40 - 57.

Dwellers, into a broader and unified perspective by incorporating them into a more fundamental theme: the individual's quest for a clearer recognition and more assured acceptance of his (her) own identity, whatever the particular context of his (her) situation or dilemma in life may be. Her analysis of specific fictional techniques used to convey these internal anxieties and aspirations of Stacey MacAindra serves to strengthen her argument for the centrality of this broader theme in the novel. She does not, however, examine the ways in which this formulation of the theme of The Fire-Dwellers is illustrated also in the experiences of characters other than Stacey.

Phyllis Grosskurth, like so many of the critics here under review, is frustratingly brief and sketchy in her discussion of the themes of The Fire-Dwellers. But one sentence early in her review, made in reference to the main character, suggests that she shares Thomas' view concerning the central theme of the novel: "Lonely, bewildered, frustrated, desperately trying to find the person she once thought she was - in other words, a waif caught up in the universal search for identity" (p. 194).

Margaret Laurence herself, on the other hand, does not perceive this sort of thematic unity in The Fire-Dwellers, if her remarks in a recent essay are to be trusted:

I had - or felt I had - perhaps rather too many interlocking themes to deal with, but these were all inherent in Stacey and her situation, so no one thread could be abandoned without weakening the total structure, and yet I was appalled at the number of threads...to me at the time they seemed multitudinous - the relationship between a man and woman who have been married many years, when the woman does not have any real area of her life which is her own; the frustration of Stacey in trying to communicate with Mac and her ultimate realization of his bravery and his terrible hangups in having to deal with his problems totally alone; the relationship between

generations - Stacey and Mac in relation to their children, as parents, and to their own parents as children; the sense of anguish and fear which Stacey feels in bringing up her kids in a world on fire; and also the question of a middle-aged woman having to accept middle age and learn how to cope with the essential fact of life, which is that the process of life is irreversible.<sup>12</sup>

Margaret Laurence's most recent novel, The Diviners, is evidently still something of a mystery to critics with respect to questions of both theme and form, although it has evoked considerable praise as such in Canada as well as abroad.<sup>13</sup> Marge Piercy does not believe that The Diviners is an altogether successful novel and asserts, in what is itself (regrettably) only a very superficial and shoddy review of the book, that the "orphaned childhood in Manawaka" ("Memorybank movies") portions of the novel are livelier and more convincing than those parts which pertain to the events surrounding the middle-aged Morag of the present. She suggests, but only very vaguely so, that the major thematic thrust of the one sequence of episodes (the childhood of Morag Gunn) is the survival, amidst many obstacles, of a tough-minded and determined girl and that the thrust of the other (present-day) sequence is the gradual growth of a promising writer. The latter theme is conveyed, to use Piercy's own terms, in a rather "perfunctory" and "vaguely romanticized" manner (p. 213). Marian Engel is more charitable in her over-all estimate of the artistic worth of the novel, but her chatty article cannot settle upon any specific themes whatever!

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<sup>12</sup>Quoted from Laurence's article "Gadgetry or Growing" Form and Voice in the Novel" (undated) in Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence, pp. 125 - 6.

<sup>13</sup>Some idea of the very widespread response to The Diviners, when it was first published (1974), may be gained from C. Thomas' bibliography (pp. 209 - 12) in The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence.

In contrast to both of these reviewers, Barbara Hehner and Allan Bevan discover a variety of themes in The Diviners. In an article which is really more concerned with the narrative structure of the novel than with its themes, Hehner nevertheless calls attention to what she describes as "Canadian literary themes" - the themes of communication between individuals and the "limits placed on personal freedom by family and ethnic background."<sup>14</sup> These particular themes, Hehner suggests, "are given a more positive turn in this last novel of Laurence than they received in her earlier novels. Other thematic motifs that surface in The Diviners, according to Hehner, are "the search for a Canadian identity, the discrimination encountered by women, the unjust treatment of native people, and...ecology."<sup>15</sup> The theme however, which Hehner considers a "major" one in the novel is the "process of myth-making" as it pertains to the experiences of exile and dispossession among individuals as well as groups.

Allan Bevan, in his highly favourable review of The Diviners, posits several interlocking themes: the inner nature and external impact and influence of "artist figures" (whether they be singers, writers, dancers, business men, diviners of wells or diviners of human nature), the power and significance of myth-making in human experience, the impact of the past upon the present and, above all, the growth in insight and self-acceptance and personal freedom of the individual who wrestles honestly and relentlessly

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<sup>14</sup> Barbara Hehner, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 41.