

**Communicating Consanguinity:
Mediated Identities in Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*
and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners***

A thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
University of Manitoba
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Joan Leslie Garbutt

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ABSTRACT

This thesis maintains that different forms of media influence the social epistemologies of the two main protagonists of Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief* and Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*. MacLeod's Alexander MacDonald and Laurence's Morag Gunn seek an historical context in which to locate themselves, and their ancestral stories help to form the underpinnings of their individual identities, but also challenge each protagonist to re-mediate these experiences through the lens of the more advanced modes of communication that are available in the late twentieth century. The transition from orality to literacy and beyond also has a profound effect on the protagonists' conceptualization of home and nation. The work of a number of media theorists, including Benedict Anderson, Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Stanley Cavell, Ronald Deibert, and Walter Ong, provide the basis for an analytical framework in which to locate these works. David Williams' criticism of media influences in a number of Canadian works opens a space for the discussion of how these theorists address the ontological complexities of the interweaving of media and narrative.

This reading of the two novels contends that, although *Diviners* (1974) is earlier than *Mischief* (1999) in terms of publication, it is actually Laurence's novel that takes the more postmodern approach in its hybridity of form, as well as its social content. While Alexander, wittingly or not, is implicated in "museumizing" his oral Gaelic culture by committing it to print, Morag moves through oral tales to photography and into a far more fluid "past-present" that is well served by her innovative "Memorybank Movies." Moreover, the multimedia techniques that characterize Morag's narrative anticipate hypertext and create an epistemology of a plural, hybrid nation that leaves a living legacy for Morag's Métis daughter Pique and affirms a plural, overlapping collage of identities that is truly representative of Canada's multicultural nature.

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David Williams has truly inspired me to seek a new level of consciousness and to remember that one has not read a book until one has read it "twice."

And to Steve, for making the dream possible.

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Chapter 1:

Mutable Margins: How Media Define or Demolish Social Boundaries

The social epistemologies of the communities we inhabit are, to a great extent, defined by the media that serve them. Moreover, revolutions in technology and the corresponding changes in the way we communicate have a direct impact on how the community defines itself. By probing the differing epistemologies intrinsic to orality, literacy, cinema, and hypertext, it is possible to create a framework in which to examine works of literature and to look at the ways in which the values or “webs-of-belief” reflected in the novel are influenced by the types of media that are represented within the text. The world-view of the protagonists of each of the novels I will study, *No Great Mischief* by Alistair MacLeod and *The Diviners* by Margaret Laurence, is profoundly shaped by how each main character’s experience of different forms of media and how each protagonist incorporates these media forms into his or her personal narrative.

Media theorist Ronald Deibert asserts that the “web-of-beliefs into which a people are acculturated,” the social epistemology, “for a population in a particular historical context,” evolves partly because of the “conceptually distinct effects that arise from a change in the mode of communication” (94). It is necessary, therefore, to examine each media form individually and look at the way in which each has produced a change within the community, the phenomenon Harold Innis described in his groundbreaking work *The Bias of Communication* (1951), where he asserted that each form of media favoured or served a different social configuration. These changes can often be tracked, as in the novel, by how the individual and the community self-identify. Of course, the type of media available and the degree to which each medium is influential is historically sensitive. Additionally, since each new form of technology makes new

media available there exists a layering effect, as old forms do not disappear, but rather become part of the increasingly complex milieu of communications.

Orality, the first medium of human communication, may still serve to shape and maintain local and family histories. Prior to the advent of writing or print, orality appeared as a local vernacular that was not politically invested. As Deibert explains, "...vernacular language itself was rarely a defining site of symbolic or political contestation as it was to become in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (105). Quoting Henry John Chaytor, Deibert further argues that "no ruler dreamt of attempting to suppress one language in order to impose another upon a conquered race" (105). It would seem that in its earliest form oral language was simply a tool used to communicate. The idea of using a particular language as a tool of power had not yet clearly developed. However, Deibert does point out a notable exception in the Middle Ages in the use of Latin:

Certainly Latin was used and thus established a sense of transnational identity among elites, but the various regional vernaculars and local dialects did not elicit strong emotional bonds among their speakers—at least not enough to form the fundamental basis of political differentiation and legitimation. (105)

In this case it would appear that language is a means to divide the populace vertically in terms of intellectual function in the broad world of Christendom, but the difference in vernaculars does not translate into a truly nationalistic sentiment amongst the user groups. The reasons for this apparent lack of affinity are due, in large part, to the nature of sound itself.

Walter Ong outlines the communal effect of orality in his chapter titled "Some Psychodynamics of Orality," beginning with an examination of the qualities of sound. What distinguishes sound from every other form of media is, as Ong asserts, the fact that "sound exists

only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent...there is no way to stop sound and have sound” (32). This is true of any primary oral culture where no recording devices existed with which to capture sound and retrieve it for another time. The sounds produced existed only for the brief moment they were spoken, and then were lost forever. Without the aid of amplifying devices, the distance that the spoken word may be effectively communicated is also limited to the volume of the speaker’s voice and the ability of his or her audience to hear the sound. In order to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from one person to another and from one location or generation to another, there is often a heavy reliance on social proximity, mnemonic techniques, and formulaic speech. Complex interior thought by the individual is limited, because of what Ong refers to as the unlikelihood of producing the same line of thought in the absence of a fixed text (34). Unlike “writing and print” which “isolate,” Ong asserts, “the spoken word forms human beings into close-knit groups” (73). Knowledge that remains unspoken remains the sole possession of the speaker and it cannot be passed along unless it is spoken to another person. Knowledge that is spoken extends to the bounds of the shared community of speakers. Communal speaking is necessary to the physical and cultural survival of the group.

The spoken word has retained some sacral characteristics, even with the advent of writing and print. Words that are strongly remembered are interiorized by the listener. Although, as Ong points out, “the sacral is attached also to the written word...the spoken word functions integrally in ceremonial and devotional life” (74). In the manner in which faith relies on belief in the unseen, so too does the oral community rely on the repository of past knowledge of the ancestors for their history. David Williams asserts that in the immigrant experience, there is a reliance on the elders for knowledge of the unseen homeland:

Evidently, what is known in an oral culture does not depend upon the evidence of things seen (at least not on the visible form of the written word); rather, it depends on evidence of things heard from the Old World and thence reported to a place distant in both space and time...what these descendants of the first immigrants 'recall' is not a world that they have seen themselves but an echo of voices that they have always heard. (85)

For this reason, those who retain the knowledge of the ancestors have inherited a kind of sacred lore that requires a suspension of disbelief that is similar to religion. There is an inherent wisdom in the spoken word of those who can relate the history of those who share a spoken vernacular. The accuracy of such history is not usually questioned and the mutability of stories over time does not diminish the importance of what is told, since there is no mechanism to identify the changes. In fact, this evolution of history is not even acknowledged because there is no external repository of knowledge to which one can refer.

Within this culture the identity of the individual is subsumed within the oral identity of the group. The importance of belonging to the culture overrides defining of the individual. Groups and cultural distinction survive because the members place the importance of group maintenance ahead of their own egos. David Williams discusses the deep connection between family and language in his work on *No Great Mischief*. Williams points out that some of the clan members are never named (the second and third brothers of, for example, Alexander), and that, in a family photograph, "individual features of their faces became more blurred" as increasing enlargements were attempted. "Here," Williams claims, "is graphic evidence, then, of the claim that the individual has no identity apart from the clan" (87). The individual exists within the complex oral network of relationships that make up the community. The assurance of

belonging to the revered ancestral collective is all the earthly remembrance that these less egocentric people require. There is no individual authorship of the cultural products; instead, the people understand their place in a community of shared oral stories.

Language and territory are also very closely aligned, but not in a way that anticipates the anonymous fraternity of nations in their horizonless extents. The visualization of concrete landforms, with familiar landmarks inside familiar horizons, marks the territory of local speech and regional belonging. The memories of the community compel the members to remain inside the local speech community, or else to return to that language of origin. This phenomenon is illustrated again by Williams in his discussion of the Gaelic Cape Bretoners of *Clann Donald*. Williams notes the transition in the grandparents when they “became ‘dwellers of the town instead of dwellers of the country’” (MacLeod 37), and the fact that “they became ‘quite adept at English’ (MacLeod 40)...and yet a later generation could still revert to Gaelic by the simple expedient of moving back to the farm” (82). The loyalty to the language exists as an act of fidelity toward the family, the land, and the memories constructed in that location. By extension, the loyalty is extended to the language, territory, and communal memory, and is accepted on faith by the youth. It is only when the children are exposed to the overwhelming influences of “urbanization, public education, and the automobile” (Williams 82) that the integrity of the oral culture begins to decay.

The transition from a strictly oral culture to that of a society capable of written expression brings about a tremendous change in the realm of human consciousness. Walter Ong suggests that “the drift in human consciousness toward greater individualism [has] been well served by print” (131). However, it is important to note the distinctions between the ability to write and the introduction of mass printing enabled by the movable printing press, given how each form of

media effects a change within the individual and the community. The ability to write allows an individual to maintain an external form of memory. The advantage of an external memory is the ability to “remember” a greater volume of information and more complex ideas in the fixities of print. Also, the writer is usually not present when the written work is being read. This allows for the separation of the “speaker” from his or her “audience.” However, an ongoing “conversation,” of sorts is possible, and is still evident, in written marginalia of readers alongside the text of the author in manuscripts. Indeed, it was the practice of medieval scribes to reproduce the “communal” text of “Aristotle,” say, as the total sum of textual commentary by an authorizing community.

The printed book, however, as Williams argues, excluded “other voices and authors from its margins (in marked contrast to the parchment manuscript), and so fed a growing sense of the self as being simultaneously closed and stable, contained and centred, continuous and enduring” (47). Written works had, and still do have, the temporal advantage of semi-permanence. To this day, ancient papyrus manuscripts survive, and old vellum and paper are extant in greater numbers yet. This survival provides a tangible and visible link to history that was previously unavailable, and this link affects the social epistemology of communities in an ongoing way. Granted, originally few people were literate and the works that were written favoured oral performance to an audience, thus precluding the notion of authorship and individual copyright. Rather than the previous notion of knowledge as a communally-held trust to which the elders were especially privy, the written word emerged from the perspective that Deibert calls the “spiritual elite” (50). The text written by these clerics was the spiritual property of the community; but only those who were privileged enough to be able to read and mediate between the divine and the populace had direct access to the language.

It is only with the development of the printing press that the transformation from folk culture to nationalist culture takes place. The book, as Ong sees it, favours the rise of the individual; but for Deibert, there is a simultaneous homogenization of the culture in which that individual exists. While somewhat paradoxical, the two concepts are clearly not mutually exclusive. Elaborating on Deibert's notion of the focus on the self brought about by the revolution of the book, Williams asserts that

while Deibert does not say so, the book also tended to underwrite the Cartesian idea of self-sufficient reason and the Lockean notion of the mind as *tabula rasa*...excluding other voices and authors from its margins (in marked contrast to the parchment manuscript) [which] fed a growing sense of the self as being simultaneously closed and stable, contained and centred, continuous and enduring. (47)

As printed materials became more widely available, both in terms of volume and economic affordability, the literacy rate of ordinary people rose. The ability to read and write was no longer the exclusive domain of the very wealthy or extremely pious. Ong attributes the rise of individual thought to the development of mass printing:

Print was also a major factor in the development of the sense of personal privacy that marks modern society. It produced books smaller and more portable than those common in a manuscript culture, setting the stage psychologically for solo reading in a quiet corner, and eventually for completely silent reading. (130)

Thus the need for personal space was born out of the need to have contemplative time with the works that were consumed by the increasingly literate mass population. The corresponding change in the architecture of modern dwellings is "more rigorously demarcated and separated

private from public spheres and functions” (Deibert 100). The physical changes in the individual dwellings and in the social epistemology of the communities they form are concurrently tied to the rise of print culture. In terms of spatial perception, the rise of print favoured not only the demarcation of borders within the home, but also those which separated one home from another, one community from another, and one nation from another.

The invention of the newspaper is pivotal in creating what Benedict Anderson calls the “imagined community” of the nation. Anderson’s work very clearly demonstrates the foundation of nationalist culture in the rise of a capitalist print economy. Furthermore, Anderson argues that the internal mindspaces of the multitudes of individual readers are ideologically linked because of their simultaneous consumption of the news: “...each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (35). This reaffirms the notion that, through an individual activity, a group member can construct an identity that affiliates her or him with an unseen larger community. For the first time, perhaps, the newspaper affords the common person the opportunity to envision her- or himself as being affiliated with a group that has a unifying condition apart from religion or local geography. In fact, as Anderson suggests, it is the imposed uniformity of print dialect that becomes the equalizing factor in the realm of the new print culture. He argues that “mutual incomprehensibility was historically of only slight importance until capitalism and print created monoglot mass reading publics” (43). To create community in anonymity through the reach of a fixed linguistic market was a by-product of the print revolution, but this transition was instrumental in the development of what Anderson refers to as “national consciousness.”

Print shapes the terms of a new political power. Written contracts and agreements, laws and maps provide the stability of a visual reinforcement in ways that differ epistemologically from the oral “oath” that would have defined authority in a less-modern culture. Through print, the authority in power now had a clear visual representation of the previously abstract idea of property ownership, thus creating an image of shared national “property,” and of the newly-defined space of the nation (Diebert 80-86). The profound link between the map and the ideological nation is nowhere better demonstrated than in Williams’ study of both the film and print versions of *The English Patient*. When the film-Almásy decides to make a deal with the Germans, he effectively sells out the nation of his lover, Katharine. The print nation that Almásy hands to the enemy is an expeditionary map that gives valuable information to the German forces. Williams observes that it “was really his denial of her national identity that doomed her...a British officer had requested his ‘wife’s’ name...but when Almásy refuses to answer, she loses her nation, and then her life” (213). But the novel-Almásy clearly rejects the borders of the print-nation, having realized that “we are deformed by nations...Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert” (138-9). In the novel, the man who has tried to map the desert is left to atone for his error in trying to give the woman (and the territory) his “name.”

What defies the surveyor’s tools, however, cannot escape the lens of the photographer or the cinematographer and within the culture of the visual image there are new challenges to film. In his ground-breaking essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin foresaw how technologies of visual reproduction stripped the artwork of its normal boundaries: “The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing

room” (221). In other words, the art is transported through time and space in a reproduced form so that it can be experienced outside of its singular location. Now, film “transports” distant times and places into our immediate present. Like oral storytelling, it “imports” what has originated elsewhere, but with this difference: what remained unseen in oral culture, what had to be taken on faith, is now made directly present to film audiences. The present-ness of the film image overrides the past-ness of the past; what is altered in cinematic epistemology is the very structure of time, as well as the fixity of place.

Although Benjamin concedes the power such copies exert over spatial and temporal restrictions, he is quick to recognize the “dangers” inherent in film. What troubles Benjamin is the “plurality of copies” which substitutes for a “unique existence” (221). Obviously, “in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation,” the object is reactivated. However, the “aura” and the “authority” of the original, Benjamin suggests, is undermined and “its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage” (221). The historical authenticity of the object is compromised by having its reproduction readily available, thereby also diminishing the “aura” of the original object. The reproduction of art is a technological byproduct of the capitalist project, and apparently serves the mass movement of goods.

Benjamin’s focus on loss of tradition and the removal of the boundaries installed by print capital have progressive implications for society, with particular relevance to the project of Nazi Germany. For Benjamin, film holds the possibility of removing art from the domain of “tradition,” and the opportunity to “rescue” culture from the clutches of a proprietary “folk” that uses “tradition” as a means to exclude, even dispossess, others. The “cult” value of tradition,

therefore, is greatly diminished and possession of culture by any one group becomes difficult. However, the danger that accompanies the mass screenings of film is the potential to create mass audience. This possibility troubles Benjamin in that war can be aestheticized and presented to an audience as an art form. The horror is be diminished and the propagandist war machine can easily recruit an ideologically aligned army composed of the film audience.

For Stanley Cavell, the ontology of film includes the *auteur* and the deliberate human influence in the creation of the work. In *The World Viewed*, Cavell looks back on his personal history of film viewing and recalls the “clarifying shock” in his realization that “films were directed, that some human being had undertaken to mean, or was at any rate responsible for, all the angles of a movie” (7). This is not to say that *all* of the ontological ability of film rests in the hands of the photographer. Indeed, like Benjamin, Cavell asserts that the mechanization of photography is both freeing, in that human agency is not required in making vast copies, and is yet a conundrum. For Cavell, the difference between a photograph and a sound recording help to explain the ontological problem with the photograph. He poses the question: “Is the difference between auditory and visual transcription a function of the fact that we are fully accustomed to hearing things that are invisible, not present to us, not present with us?” (18). The sound of a musical instrument is no different from the recorded sound of a musical instrument; at least the two are indistinguishable to most people if the recording equipment is of good quality. But a photograph is easily distinguishable from the object that was photographed. However, we do not know what to say of this likeness. The problem, Cavell suggests is that “the image is not a likeness; it is not exactly a replica, or a relic, or a shadow, or an apparition either...when we look at a photograph...we see things that are not present” (18). The consequence of the realization that human figures from the past are present to us while we are not present to them is that “our

subjectivity became what is present to us, individuality became isolation” (22). And while the viewing of photographs is essentially a solitary experience, the exhibition of film brings a different ontology to the photographic arts: that of mass viewing and mass experience. What had previously challenged print epistemology, the ability to transport “people” and “places” distant in time and space, is now possible for film. Unlike the fixed boundaries imposed by the medium of print, film is capable of “flow” that defies the old boundaries of space, time, and even language. Now, the past is no longer “past;” it moves again before our eyes.

Photographs, like books, encourage solitude and introspection. Films, like oral communications, more readily lend themselves to mass audiences and a group event. Much like the consumers of newspapers, the audience members are aware that the same message is being received by countless others at more or less the same time, creating a community of watchers the vast majority of whom never meet. Yet, they are certain of the existence of one another, in places that reach far beyond the old borders of print-markets. While Cavell points out that “the audience of music and theater is essentially larger than your immediate acquaintance—a gathering of the city” (10), the mass-produced movie may have a potential viewing audience of a global, given the linguistic dubbing available in DVD format and the availability of foreign films with subtitles.

To a major extent the solitariness experienced in reading or in viewing photographs is replaced with both the potential to individually recall the movie, or to share in a collective memory of the experience with anyone else who has seen it. Cavell likens the procedure of remembering movies to that of remembering dreams, both in their similarities and differences: “As with dreams, you do sometimes find yourself remembering moments in a film...but, unlike dreams, other people can help you remember, indeed are often indispensable to the enterprise of

remembering” (16). Of course, Cavell writes before the advent of VHS and DVD technology that enables the viewer to stop or “freeze” a scene, or even to “turn the pages” shot-by-shot, much as one would view a book. This ability notwithstanding, the more common communal viewing of film encourages group post-event discussion and recall of moments, plot-lines and emotional reactions. However, rather than discussing the film as a piece of art, Cavell maintains that film occupies a different cultural space: that of “reality or nature” (16). However, the realism that film captures commands that we see a world we “know” but “to which” we are “nevertheless not present.” It is “a world past” (Cavell 22). As in film, our past can be present to us when we are no longer present to it. Through the “dynamization of space and the spatialization of time” (Cavell 30) that occurs in film, humanity can experience times and places juxtaposed in ways never before possible. Scenes that are diverse in both space and time can appear within the briefest of moments through the editing process that allows for quick cuts. These shifts in space/time are intended to elicit the viewer(s) emotional response. Life is portrayed on the screen, yet it is unlike “real” life because the editing process makes the impossible shifts of time and space possible. The ontological “shock of film” (Williams) awakens a new metonymical reality that re-presents the possibilities of a new world order and revised world views.

The new world order envisioned by the possibility of sharing images worldwide is one which, at its most optimistic, is marked by a new equality. Williams asserts that “a door to social levelling swings open in the mass reproduction and distribution of images” (171). Within the culture of film there is a return to the public audience of oral experience, “an experience forgotten since the era of mass worship in great cathedrals or, before that, of public performances by epic poets” (Williams 171). The images “belong to everyone” and are readily accessible by

even the relatively poor and illiterate populace. This social leveling is also mirrored in the technique of film, where rich, poor, educated, ignorant, talented, and unskilled may all appear within a single motion picture. The metonymic dance enabled by editing and cutting contributes as well to the equality of film. The viewer can be transported instantaneously from one locale to another, from one time to another, without the film making a hierarchical statement. The political ramifications of metonymy are under the influence of the director and are a product of the camera's ability to juxtapose differing aspects of any given scene. For example, Williams refers to "one astute reviewer of (D.W.) Griffith's *Through Darkened Vales*" commenting on a scene where "the lonely, helpless condition of the blind peddler is emphasized by showing him at a distance, as he wanders alone, picking his way through deserted streets" (citing Pratt, 92). By assigning a particular point of view to the audience, the camera can still champion individuals. But the epistemological effects of the new medium tend in a different direction—toward the erasure of boundaries between people of differing classes and nations and even differing histories. Williams goes as far as to assert that, "in retrospect, film thus appears to have been a harbinger of globalization" (174).

Yet, for all the idealism that social levelling seems to offer, film grants the audience freedom from direct involvement in social problems. The viewing of the pathetic peddler may induce a sense of his helplessness, but the viewer is not present to him and cannot offer him any assistance. The voyeuristic gaze of that audience ensures the anonymous viewers are protected from the potential guilt of feeling responsible for the peddler. The screen guarantees spectatorship; no action is required on the part of the viewer. So, while a potentially massive audience can share in a viewing experience, the truth of human connection is possibly no better served. The idea of social responsibility becomes distorted by the perception that someone "out

there” is doing “something,” when in fact, possibly no one is doing anything to improve the lives of those living in disadvantaged circumstances. Being a member of a mass audience actually helps to assuage guilt and remove responsibility.

However, as technology moves forward at an unprecedented rate, humanity finds itself increasingly familiar with participating in a mass audience that is global in nature. The connections made between people are taking place more often than not through what Deibert refers to as “hypermedia,” a term that

not only captures the convergence of discrete technologies, it also suggests the massive penetration and ubiquity of electronic media characteristic of the new communications environment. Furthermore, the prefix “hyper” (meaning “over” or “above”) emphasizes two central characteristics of this environment: the speed by which communications currently take place, and the intertextuality or interoperability of once-discrete media. (114-15)

As the residues of previously-created forms of media remain intact, and as new forms of technology enable new media forms to come into being, there is a layering effect that allows different media forms to be active concurrently. It is now possible to inhabit a number of diverse media environments at the same time. Moreover, the individual has never been more in control of the mode by which she may choose to access that media. In terms of cinema alone, it is possible to view the same film in a movie theatre, at home on a DVD, via satellite through a dish receiver, or online through an Internet site (whether legally or “pirated”). The potential for any form of media to be experienced on a global level has never been more realistic. There is no single element that *is* hypermedia. Deibert asserts that “no single technological innovation or instrument of technology signals this transformation. Rather, the emergence of the hypermedia

environment reflects a complex melding and converging of distinct technologies into a single integrated *web* of digital-electronic-telecommunications” (114).

The social implications of this new technology are staggering. In an age of transplanetary mass communications we have become accustomed to a networking ability that truly spans the globe. Largely, it is our ability to digitize information that has led to this remarkably seamless environment. As Deibert suggests, “Video, audio, text, and graphics are all similarly reduced to binary digits, and thus can travel through the same channels, and be processed in the same way, to be displayed on the same screen” (135). The Internet has allowed the world to become an increasingly more global community through the elimination of distance and the minimization of differences in language through technologization. Members of Internet “communities” can be as diverse as the world itself. All one needs is some way to connect to the vast network of fiberoptic cable and the nearly limitless reaches of cyberspace become available at the click of a mouse. A more global form of citizenship now seems much more feasible. The “invisibility” of the infrastructure that supports the mass global communications leads to questions about the continued relevance of national boundaries.

Deibert examines what he calls *transnational social movements*. Quoting Ronnie Lipschutz, Deibert refers to these new movements as “‘global civil society’: that is, transnationally organized political networks and interest groups largely autonomous from any one state’s control” (157). However, Deibert is quick to point out that, while “hypermedia do not *generate* these new social movements, they do create a communications environment in which such activities flourish dramatically” (157-58). The existence of special interest groups is served by the network that allows like-minded individuals to communicate seamlessly across national borders, prompting Deibert to assert that these associations are “organized largely

without respect to sovereign-territorial boundaries” (162). The potential exploitation of the Internet for both resoundingly improved human justice and for devastatingly wholesale destruction is possibly the biggest question that faces us today. Clearly our technological ability outstrips our ability to anticipate the ramifications of worldwide political movements.

The epistemological changes in the construction of individual identity are also affected by the advent of multimedia and hypermedia experiences. The collage of media to which individuals are exposed result in a more complex social experience that contributes to what Deibert calls “a ‘decentered’ self...a *multiple self* that changes in response to different social situations” (181). Indeed, this postmodern perception of self deals in the constructedness of the individual and in the process by which the self is formed. Quoting Stuart Hall, Deibert alludes to the self as ““something with a history, ‘produced,’ in process”” (181). The outcome of this type of construction can be viewed pessimistically, where “the autonomous individual can no longer provide the philosophical foundations from which to design or achieve human freedom” (Deibert, 181), or, more optimistically in a McLuhanian way, where the individual has every opportunity to seek new creative forms and escape the restrictions imposed by authorities. I would suggest that the truth of the individual identity is somewhere between these extremes and that the individual’s success in creating a reasonably stable sense of self is determined by his or her ability to integrate new forms of technology and media into an established value system. It is precisely this individual response to postmodernity that forms the basis of many protagonist struggles in contemporary fiction.

In examining the novels that, for me, illustrate such questions, I will demonstrate that the individuals, communities, and nations in *No Great Mischief* and in *The Diviners* how media help to create the social epistemology within each novel. By utilizing the theoretical framework

outlined in this chapter, it is also possible to determine to what degree each author can be located in modernist or postmodernist ontology. Canadian literature lends itself especially well to the examination of media influences within its art. As a nation largely made up of immigrants and at the forefront of the technological developments in communicating over a vast territory, Canadians are constantly examining and attempting to define a culture that has been produced by an official policy of multiculturalism and that ostensibly embraces the plurality of its “mosaic”. Through thoughtful analysis it is hoped that we can better understand the implications of the rapid changes in technology and how we might grapple with the large social questions of our times.

Chapter 2:

Census-taking and Map-making: Print as an Agent of Change in *No Great Mischief*

Multiculturalism is an undeniable fact of existence in Canada that finds expression both in official policy and through the arts. Each cultural group communicates its narrative through various forms of media, creating a foundation for identity. Literature is one facet of this culture that draws attention to the multitude of cultures that inhabit the nation and, as a media form, has a profound influence on the nation-building process. The Scots heritage in Canadian culture is nowhere better represented than in Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*, though it differs substantially from the Scots heritage as it appears in another late twentieth-century Canadian novel, Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*. While MacLeod's Alexander MacDonald seems to be a self-appointed conservator of his oral-Gaelic community's history, Laurence's Morag Gunn engages in the process of identity-building through miscegenation and inclusivity. Both writers are influenced by the orally-generated histories that have helped to sustain the sense of cohesiveness within people of shared backgrounds. Likewise, both authors make use of protagonists who are engaged in writing about their heritage. In this shift from an oral to a print medium, both novels help to produce an epistemological shift in our understanding of imagined community. Since MacLeod confines his exploration of Scots culture to this single transition, the "community" that he envisions is a direct product of the stasis of print. Laurence, on the other hand, pushes the "community" much further, imagining the epistemological influences of cinema and even a rudimentary hypertext, anticipating the impact of the Internet on society's perceptions. Because the media influences differ in these novels, so do the ways in which each author constructs "communities" within the nation.

The last strains of a Highland lament fade into the mists above Cape Breton, sealing the irrevocable movement of oral culture into the past tense in MacLeod's Gaelic-rich elegy. *No Great Mischief* (1999) is marked by a number of journeys that serve to chronicle the passing of the MacDonald clan into the fixities of print. Journeys both temporal and geographic enable MacLeod's protagonist Alexander to record the history of his family. At the risk of slipping into a mournful cry for Celtic revivalism, what MacLeod pens, whether wittingly or not, is an archival piece, complete with the requisite census and map-making that immortalize Canadian oral-Gaelic culture in print. Alexander's attempt to preserve the culture of his birth effectively sentences the culture to the realm of history. The thematic tension between oral and print culture in the novel serves to dramatize the magnitude of what has been lost in the technological rush of advances in communications. Alexander's generation marks the end of an era, yet through his actions Alexander justifies the print nation that is the by product of his narrative. Just as he ferries the dead body of his brother Calum home to Cape Breton, knowing he has done right by the man who carried him on his shoulders, so Alexander lays his lost Gaelic culture to rest.

As Alexander becomes increasingly distanced from his community, he paradoxically becomes both conservator and destroyer of his cultural heritage. While it is true that the act of writing the family history helps to preserve it, he nonetheless effectively commits events to the stasis of print. Even the frame narrative of the middle-aged Alexander is distanced from the history-writing Alexander in that he is already thinking of the historical clan as a compartmentalized entity. The history he writes is a chapter in the larger volume that makes up the print story of the nation. It is bordered and bound, and thus limited by its own construction.

Apart from its First Nations, Canada's national history is largely composed of the stories of its immigrants. As part of the "new world" Canada has been settled by those who have come

from “away”. The MacDonald clan of MacLeod’s novel belong to a community of Gaelic-speaking settlers who arrived in Canada after a perilous journey from their homeland in the Scottish highlands. The legendary patriarch, *Chalum Ruaidh*, has established the *clann* in “the land of trees” and provides the anchor story upon which the entire family history is based. The novel’s protagonist, *gille beag ruadh*, whose legal name is Alexander MacDonald, is a transitional character whose identity is formed within the often-competing influences of the traditional oral-Gaelic culture and the ever-encroaching print culture of the wider Canadian milieu. The challenge facing Alexander and other members of his clan is to create for themselves an identity that maintains a connection to the rich heritage of *Chalum Ruaidh* while allowing them to emerge as socially relevant within the nation of Canada. For Alexander, especially, the transition produces anxiety that is borne out of the guilt he feels over a perceived division of his loyalty between his Gaelic roots and his need to take his place as a Canadian citizen. MacLeod allows the tension between these cultural poles to remain unresolved, making it difficult to judge Alexander’s relative success or failure to claim a fully remediated identity. Through Alexander and a number of secondary characters, especially Alexander’s eldest brother Calum, MacLeod suggests that there is no ideal formula for re-mediation of culture from the “oral clan to the print nation” (Williams). What Alexander “writes” is an elegy for a clan on the verge of being subsumed within a nation, and what Alexander cannot escape is the apologetic guilt he feels for having been complicit in its seemingly inevitable demise.

In his reading of *No Great Mischief*, David Williams asserts that MacLeod has penned an elegy to the lost oral-Gaelic culture of Cape Breton. He concludes that Alexander “has managed...in writing his oral story...to reconcile opposed ways of knowing in a style that is true to each” (102), meaning that he has effectively integrated the oral and print worlds. Alexander

places the burden of remembering on paper in order to conserve what he can. But Alexander's mission, I would argue, has an additional outcome that overshadows this project. By writing about oral culture, Alexander virtually guarantees that it will be obliterated. Although his life is informed by the tension that exists between the oral and print worlds, his solution of fixing the oral world in print alters the relation of that oral culture to the past.

MacLeod wastes no time in setting up the tension between the oral and print worlds that form cultural poles in the novel. Alexander writes, "As I begin to tell this, it is the golden month of September in southwestern Ontario" (1). But his diction and syntax are oral, the verb "telling" paying homage to the tradition of storytelling, even as "telling" is translated into "writing" in the printed text. This diction may, at first blush, seem a quirk on the part of the author, but the choice is clearly indicative of the profound difficulty at the core of the novel. This is the key question posed by the novel: how does one remain true to his past, and possibly even conserve history, yet still progress and take one's place alongside citizens from different backgrounds? Indeed, does the very act of conserving the past somehow change it? Alexander is charged with the task of taking an identity historically formed within an oral clan and re-mediating this identity through the vastly changed epistemology of a mass culture of print. One method that Alexander chooses as a means to conserve his history in print form is to adopt the oral syntax of "telling" the narrative to the reader, whom he chooses to perceive as "hearing" (3).

Alexander's own introduction to the world of print culture is an event that inaugurates the sense of tension that informs his life. His teacher calls out "Alexander MacDonald" from the class roll and *gille beag ruadh* does not even recognize the name as his own, requiring prodding from an alert cousin who affirms his dual identity (18). The difficulty of naming within the clan is further complicated by the multiple occurrences of such names as "Alexander" and "Calum".

David Williams suggests that the epistemological effect of the tradition of name “sharing” among successive generations of family is that “individuality [is thereby] subsumed by the clan,” since “the narrator can only be identified by his distinguishing marks. So the narrator is ‘*Still the gille beag ruadh*’ many years later” (Williams 87). The practice of putting the identity of the clan ahead of that of individuals is a theme that is repeated throughout the novel, but it depends on a social structure that is increasingly threatened by the encroachment of the print nation.

The simultaneous existence of four individuals named “Alexander MacDonald” is used by MacLeod as a way to suggest that, within the clan structure, individuals are virtually replications of each other and that individuals are thus replaceable in the interests of this social structure. Alexander MacDonald, namesake of Grandpa Alexander MacDonald, may be the narrator, but his life is shadowed by two cousins of his generation with the same name. The ability to substitute clan members within the group structure is played out in a northern Ontario mining sequence of the narrative. A first cousin of “local” origin named Alexander loses his life in a mine shaft and is laid to rest by his Cape Breton brethren. His mother bestows the MacDonald plaid shirt she had purchased for her son on the *gille beag ruadh*, symbolizing the interchangeability between the two. The narrator Alexander MacDonald must fulfill his cousin’s duty by taking his place in the mine for the larger benefit of the other mining clan members. The narrator Alexander’s own dental career is thus laid aside for the time being in order to serve the clan (129-32). Some time later, seeking employment, an Alexander MacDonald cousin from San Francisco arrives at the mine and effectively assumes the identity of his dead cousin. His arrival and acceptance into the clan and the workplace are assumed because of Grandma’s insistence, “Always look after your own blood” (204). The Californian Alexander MacDonald is given the “pinkish-brown employment card that had belonged to the red-haired Alexander MacDonald”

and the narrator suggests that the mining management is indifferent to the replacement of the dead worker (224-25). "It was somehow as if the red-haired Alexander MacDonald had merely gone on a short vacation and had now returned to resume his appointed tasks," the narrator observes (225). As the dead Alexander "lay silently beneath the gentle earth," his identity is assumed by a foreign stranger with nothing more in common with the deceased worker than a name and a shared ancestry.

The process of naming individuals takes on further significance for Alexander, the narrator, with respect to the rest of his family. While he singles out his eldest brother, Calum, by name, the remainder of his brothers, apart from the deceased Colin, remain nameless. Often, as Williams points out, Calum is, "likewise reduced through long stretches of the narrative to 'my eldest brother,' identified by his relationship with the speaker rather than by his 'own' name" (87). As they do not distinguish themselves in the ways that Colin has done by dying, and Calum has done by leading the group, it seems sufficient to Alexander to refer to them in a collective sense. Even Alexander's twin sister, Catriona, is not often referred to by her given name. The multiple MacDonalds are thus a source of humour in what are otherwise tragic circumstances when the Mounties come looking for "MacDonald" at the wake for the red-haired Alexander MacDonald. Speaking to the group, the officer who says, "We've come for MacDonald," unwittingly summons them all (125). The representative of the law is, as Williams asserts, "stymied by a social system that promotes the rights and responsibilities of the clan before the abstract right of law" (87). What MacLeod asserts through his repeated decision to engage in identification through relationship, rather than by given name, is that the network of the clan is more important than the individual within the clan. Position within the structure of the clan is the social priority.

Alexander's twin sister Catriona, anglicized to Catherine, is also irrevocably tied to the past through multigenerational naming practices. Grandma, who becomes the primary female caregiver to the twins upon their mother's death, is also named Catherine. Likewise, Catherine is the name of the wife who accompanies Calum Ruadh on the journey to the new world. Her demise at sea is chronicled within the oral family history as "Catherine of the Sea," and the repeated story of her body being committed to the sea, sewn into a canvas bag, is a reminder to the *clann* members of the sacrifices that were made by those who braved the journey to Cape Breton. In a family with relatively few women of mention, it is notable that "Catherine of the Sea" and Grandma Catherine are characterized as women of strength who place family at the forefront of their existence. This is certainly true of Grandma Catherine who swiftly puts the Mounties in their place at the wake of the red-haired Alexander MacDonald:

"This is ridiculous," she said, moving through the crowd that parted before her like the water in front of a boat's prow...The officer took off his hat as she spoke to him and then withdrew a few steps and beckoned his men around him. After a brief conversation he nodded to Grandma and then all of them got into their cars and drove away, turning off their revolving lights as they departed. (125-26)

Grandma maintains a lifelong dignity that arises from her constant concern for others and her belief in the repeated maxims that she wisely dispenses. But the sister Catriona's life is fundamentally altered by her decision to attend university in western Canada. She has a career that takes her outside of the home and she marries outside her own heritage. This is clearly a more individual existence than that of her Grandma's matriarchal life. For the modern Catriona, the past becomes the stuff of memory and souvenir, like the photos of her long lost parents, tucked away and taken out only once in a while.

Catriona nonetheless experiences the feeling of clanship when she accompanies her husband on a trip to Scotland and spends time in the vicinity of Moidart, the ancestral home of *clann Chalum Ruadh*. A Gaelic-speaking stranger approaches Catriona and, rather than asking her place of origin, makes the frank assumption from her appearance that, “You are from here” (160). Catriona has spent a lifetime “remembering” the story of Calum Ruadh, the loyal dogs, and her legendary clan of red and black-haired MacDonalds, only to find that she is equally “remembered” by those who have never seen her before. They repeat to her the legendary story of Calum Ruadh’s journey from the point of his departure from the highlands, and Catriona picks up the story at that point and completes its telling for her Scottish kinswomen. The legend, like Catriona’s “return” to Scotland, has come full circle. The woman in Moidart smiles and offers Catriona a drink, saying, “You are home now,” providing Catriona with an extended ontology of the meaning of “home”. This is the home of oral community that is based on shared language, history, and ancestry, not through geographical borders or through shared government.

Kinship, while it is based on blood ties, is orally reinforced through the “remembering” of things unseen. Oft-repeated stories are prefaced by the oral-formulaic “Do you remember...?” “This catechetical phrase is like a formula of memory in oral societies, with their bounden duty to preserve the past in repetitive speech, since, without written texts, their history would soon vanish” (Williams 92). A number of other phrases are frequently repeated in the novel: “It was in those dogs to care too much and try too hard,” Grandpa says over and over of the fiercely loyal dogs who have served generations of MacDonald masters, but the same phrase is spoken by the Highland Scots who “remember” the canine ancestor who swam after the departing boat of the first Calum MacDonald. “My hope is constant in thee, Clan Donald” is also a phrase that has survived highland and new-world conflicts and continues to inspire Alexander and his siblings.

Grandma's maxim "Always look after your own blood," serves as the rationale for taking in the Californian Alexander MacDonald and for the narrator Alexander's vigilance in caring for his aging, alcoholic brother Calum. The phrases take on an existence that stretches beyond the immediate locale of Cape Breton and are repeated globally in places like San Francisco, Scotland, and Calgary. The community remains tied through these specific oral formulae, irrespective of location; kinship is accorded to those who use the common phrases, whether they "know" each other or not.

This oral community thus extends beyond the boundaries of Scotland, with Calum Ruadh's arrival in Cape Breton, and beyond Cape Breton with the gradual diaspora of MacDonalds to other parts of Canada and North America. The decision to leave the immediate community, in Alexander's case, is largely economic. His ability to leave and to thrive outside of the local community is facilitated by a university education. As a dentist, and especially as an orthodontist, Alexander must relocate to a place where people will pay for the aesthetic improvements that his specialty offers. This reality takes Alexander far away from the home dentistry performed by his eldest brother Calum, who crudely pulls an abscessed tooth with the aid of his horse, Christy. In his modern office, Alexander dispenses carefully written instructions to his patients alerting them to the need to follow instructions and to take medication for the pain. Calum, within the less-literate and less-fortunate local community, has no such benefit of pain reduction or sterile technique. The distance between the two "dentistries" is great in both geography and ideology. Alexander embraces the aesthetic improvement of teeth while the brothers see teeth as merely functional body parts that can be removed if they become troublesome. Essentially, Alexander becomes overqualified for his community, his services out

of reach in several senses for most inhabitants. His profession is acquired in the halls of the university in Halifax, rather than within the traditions of his family.

Although Alexander's brothers also leave the local community for the more lucrative work of mining, it is clear that they carry with them the sensibilities of the local traditions. They continue to lodge together and work together, just as they had in Cape Breton. Alexander notes to himself that the other miners "would quietly attempt to identify [them]. 'Those are the Highlanders,' they would say, 'from Cape Breton. They stay mostly to themselves'" (137). They also maintain their Gaelic language and uphold the virtues of family honour by taking in the Californian Alexander MacDonald. Calum still leads the group, which functions in much the same way as it had at home. There is evidence, however, that moving away from Cape Breton is a progressive act for the MacDonalds. They have taken the tradition of Cape Breton coal mining and adapted it to hard-rock mining, proving that they can be innovative. The cohesiveness of the social group, however, is maintained.

The physical nature of mining makes it difficult to compare it to the relatively clean and less physical demands of orthodontics. However, Alexander's departure from the traditional blue-collar roots of the family leads Grandpa to pronounce at the university convocation, "Good for you...this means you will never have to work again" (107). Circumstances, however, dictate otherwise; duty to his brothers leads Alexander to give up an opportunity to do dental research and to enter the "family" business of mining, at least for a season. It is clear that the clan is highly skilled and they are sought-after as specialists in the field of drilling and blasting through rock. This strangely parallel "geo-dentistry" takes a skill that cannot be acquired through coursework or through reading, but instead must be learned by hand from older "hands."

Alexander learns his mining skills in the traditional way of apprenticeship. However, it is always known to everyone that he will still return to his dental work, breaking with tradition.

Catriona's life takes a similar, individual direction. Her gender and upbringing in the "town" home of Grandma and Grandpa have already served to widen the gap between the lone female sibling and her brothers. The brothers, who farm and fish on their own following the deaths of their parents and brother, are aware that their rustic lifestyle differs vastly from the comparatively civilized environment in which their younger twin siblings are being brought up, and they are accordingly ashamed and embarrassed by the "silver-grey rooster energetically servicing the members of his harem" and the "cups without handles...and the fact that they sometimes ate standing up, spearing the half-boiled potatoes out of the bubbling pot upon the stove and sometimes peeling them with the same knives they used to bleed the deer's throat" (75). Catriona leaves the highland fastness of Cape Breton earlier than her twin brother and graduates from university in Calgary. Her career requires that she distance herself, at least linguistically, from her heritage. As an actor her accent is seen as a limiting condition that must be eradicated if she is ever to be cast as anything other than an "Irish maid" (193). She marries a petroleum engineer of Slavic heritage and lives in an affluent part of Calgary. Her children are not involved in the oral history of her family, as appears when one of her children is "recognized" as a MacDonald by passers-by in a car headed to British Columbia. Upon questioning the youngster and obtaining the necessary information to confirm his "identity," the strangers give the astonished child fifty dollars. Upon arriving home, the young MacDonald descendant questions his mother, "What's kwown calum rooah?" (31). The name has become a series of nonsense syllables that hold no meaning for the child, yet the name has been legendary within the family up to now. While the family legacy is, in effect, written on the child's body, it

has disappeared from the child's language. Within one generation the connection to the past that has underpinned the family identity may well disappear.

The social changes that have occurred within the community, however, are not brought to bear on Alexander's generation alone. MacLeod's representation of Grandpa MacDonald and Alexander's maternal Grandfather clearly demonstrates the effect that literacy has had on the community itself. Grandfather has immersed himself in the written history of Scotland and the settlement of Scots in Canada. Occasionally, his comprehensive knowledge puts him at odds with Grandpa who prefers the orally-related history of his ancestors. Grandfather visits the library at Alexander's graduation in Halifax in order to confirm a disputed fact, placing his trust in the "word" of the book, even if it calls past "tellings" into question. Grandfather has accepted the print-bureaucracy of the country of Canada in ways that Grandpa cannot understand. Grandpa relies on Grandfather to do the income tax return, who would be willing to explain the process to Grandpa, but Grandpa's interest extends only to the question of: "Do I get anything back?" He regards the entire process as "a mystery not worth solving" (88). The great care Grandpa takes in affixing his signature to the "mysterious" form is indicative of his unfamiliarity with written language and government procedures. To Grandpa the nation's government is a far-off, ill-understood entity whose workings are inaccessible. He understands only that he can personally benefit from participating in the process, but this process remains impersonal, even faceless, to the oral man, and so he requires help in order to accomplish the necessary paperwork.

Grandfather, on the other hand is, like Alexander, a figure between two worlds. He is of the clan but his fatherless childhood places him on the fringes of social acceptance. In order to compensate for his mother's "shame," he leads a life of cleanliness, austerity, and propriety that

eventually confer on him the respect of his peers. Grandma and Grandpa are forever grateful to Grandfather for giving them “the chance,” an opportunity for Grandpa to obtain a permanent position as the local hospital’s caretaker and for the couple to become town-dwellers (35). This elevation in social status allows the grandparents to raise the orphaned twins in relative splendour compared to their older brothers who take over the old home in the country. However, Grandfather is not without loyalty to his Gaelic ancestry. It is to him that everyone turns to remember the numerous verses of traditional songs. His sense of oral history is that, if it is to be remembered, one must make an effort to do it correctly: “‘You never make a mistake,’ said Grandma to him after the song was done” (116). The need to remember the songs accurately is symbolic of Grandfather’s fastidiousness and his acculturation into the print world where the “word” does not change once it is set down.

Conversely, Grandpa MacDonald’s sense of history is based much more in the immediate landscape. This difference is evident in the ride “home” from Alexander’s graduation in Halifax. Alexander describes the “signs” that “began to announce our closeness to Cape Breton,” but it is clearly the landscape that inspires recognition as they begin “shouting out the names of the places as far as we could see them strung out along the coast” (115). Where Grandfather orients himself in terms of the linearity of print, Grandpa orients himself in terms of bounded, contiguous space: “When the front wheels of the car touched Cape Breton, Grandpa said, ‘Thank Christ to be home again. Nothing bad can happen to us now’” (116). And, while Grandpa exuberantly celebrates his return to “God’s Country” by waving his whisky bottle outside the car window, he is admonished by his literate counterpart: “‘Don’t be such a fool,’ said my grandfather, who looked as if he wished he were somewhere else, ‘or the police will

arrest us all” (117). Grandfather’s concern over the letter of the law places him at odds with Grandpa’s celebrations, which take place without concern for the laws of the land.

The degree to which each man participates in the literate nation plays out in the extent to which each man is assimilated into the community. Grandfather is frequently portrayed as a loner; he lost his wife after the first year of his marriage and he never remarries. He raises one child, a daughter, with whom he is very close. However, once she leaves and marries and, following her tragic early death, he is left to spend the remainder of his life as the lone inhabitant of his spotless home. Whenever the community gathers for evenings of song and celebration Grandfather is welcome but distant. “Neither did he like ribald songs nor off-colour stories in either English or Gaelic, and his face would redden at almost any sexual reference,” Alexander explains (34), attributing Grandfather’s sense of propriety to his fatherlessness. Although not a teetotaller, Grandfather admits to being drunk only once in his life. Grandpa, on the other hand, is frequently “celebrating” for one obscure reason or another. Upon arriving in Halifax for Alexander’s graduation Grandpa seeks the communal fellowship of the tavern, while Grandfather immediately seeks the solitude of the library.

Because of his devotion to reading history Grandfather has developed a critical attitude towards the oral histories that have come down through the family. This persistence in researching the usually unquestioned oral “truth” puts him at odds with Grandpa who maintains a stubbornly romanticized version of oral history as the “truth.” Speaking of the highlanders who fought at Killiecrankie and Dunkeld the two men display characteristically conflicting views:

“They were brave as hell,” said Grandpa with enthusiasm.

“Yes,” said Grandfather, “but I think they were also afraid.”

“Never,” said Grandpa, half rising tipsily from his chair, as if he would defend

the honour of all the MacDonalds in the world. "Never was a MacDonald afraid."

(89)

Grandpa is clearly repeating what he has been told his entire life. His firm belief in the bravery of the *clann* is legendary, but then so is the repetition of this phrase which likely helped the men to remain brave in the face of battle.

Grandfather is more realistic and pragmatic when he considers family history. The literature that he has read regarding the battles has acquainted him with the brutal reality of the conflicts in which the highlanders participated, and he uses this knowledge to make a more individual decision regarding the demeanour of the warriors. The "word" of the book is Grandfather's truth:

"It is true," said my grandfather after we had been travelling for about an hour. "I found it in the library in Halifax."

... "But," said Grandpa, "didn't you tell me once that it was a French-speaking MacDonald who got them past the sentries? And that he was first up the cliff with the other Highlanders, that they pulled themselves up by grasping the roots of the twisted trees? Didn't you tell me that?"

"Yes," said my grandfather. "*First up the cliff*. Wolfe was still below in the boat. Think about it."

"They were first because they were the best," said Grandpa stoutly. "I think of them as winning Canada for *us*. They learned that at Culloden."

"At Culloden they were on the *other side*," said Grandfather in near exasperation. "MacDonald fought *against* Wolfe..."

Grandfather is determined to seek the truth as reported in the history books, while Grandpa stubbornly clings to the truth as he has heard it from the previous generation. In thinking that Canada was won for “us” by the Highlanders, Grandpa places himself within the direct line of the clansmen who fought with Wolfe. He still feels a very real connection to the men who fought on the Plains of Abraham, while Grandfather has developed enough distance to allow himself to read and think critically about the incidents as they have been passed down orally. The “truth” is that, in fifteen short years, the *clann* has fought on both sides, with and against the English, but Grandpa preserves the truth that serves him best, as is characteristic of oral culture. “Truth,” to the print-man, however, is neither one-sided nor formulaically predictable.

Predictably, the way each man dies is also characteristic of the way he lived. Williams suggests that “in the persons of these two men, all the crucial tensions in the narrator’s character are finally resolved. For what he has managed to do in writing his oral story is to reconcile opposed ways of knowing in a style that is true to each” (102). If Grandpa dies in the midst of “jumping up in the air and trying to click his heels together twice” while surrounded by his community of friends, “Grandfather died reading a book called *A History of the Scottish Highlands*...His finger marked the page and the book flipped closed around his finger...” (264). Grandfather thus dies alone, much as he had lived. It is Grandma who makes the keen observation that, “Although they were so different they were each other’s closest friends. Throughout their lives, they were each a balance to the other” (264). The two men evidently present different ways of existing in the new nation of print. Grandfather embraces it, while choosing to remain within the community and to preserve a link to the past that nonetheless keeps him on the margin of local society. Grandpa is largely ignorant or indifferent to the workings of the print nation and remains in the one place where he belongs—in the traditional

structure of the *clann*. The tension to which Williams alludes is indeed resolved through the portrayal of both grandfathers. And Alexander never privileges one grandfather's expression of family and tradition over the other.

Calum, like Grandfather, is also caught between the oral and print communities that he inhabits. With others in his small community he speaks both Gaelic and English, often sprinkling Gaelic phrases into his spoken English. Unlike both his grandfathers, however, Calum seeks employment outside Cape Breton. He leads his family's mining crew, becoming skilled at the dangerous blasting that frees valuable ore from beneath the earth's surface. This precision drilling and blasting takes Calum and the rest of the crew far from Canada to Africa and South America. However, Calum does not make a successful transition in translating his identity from that of a clansman to that of an individual. He becomes a destitute alcoholic living in the flop houses of Toronto's skid row. He is unable to adjust to the rules imposed by literate society. His downfall comes about as the result of what Williams refers to as the "war of clans belonging to the auld alliance," effectively bringing about "a type of restaging of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham" (Williams 89). The restaging of the battle occurs at the northern Ontario Renco mining site where the MacDonalds engage in a series of conflicts with the French crew led by Fern Picard. The suspicion between the two groups takes place on a group level: "We never entered their bunkhouses, as they never entered ours. It would have been like going into the dressing room of the opposing team" (147). The conflict culminates in a fight between the two groups in which Calum kills Picard by crushing his skull with a wrench (257). Calum's criminal record reveals "a trail of various offences from various jurisdictions" (259), indicating that Calum has a history of flouting the law. Calum is sent to prison, isolated now from his clansmen and from the code of the blood feud which would justify his actions.

The corrections system of Canada reveals the power of the law that underwrites the print nation and the failing that plagues those from an oral culture who enter the penitentiary. Calum reveals that, “a disproportionate number of the prisoners were from the native population. In many cases they did not fully understand the language of those to whom they were entrusted or condemned” (274). This assertion of how the First Nations people have historically been treated by Canada links them to traditional communities of immigrants with whom they once mixed. The case in point is embodied by “Cousin agam fhein,” the “cousin of my own” represented by the interracial James MacDonald (152). This James Bay Cree claims a distant Scots background that resulted from the northern trade route plied by fur traders. Both Calum and Alexander recognize the tune that James plays on his fiddle, although James calls it by a different name. James is able to speak a mixture of Gaelic and English, and he recognizes Alexander’s tartan shirt as a sign of the MacDonald clan. The common last name seals the kinship, prompting Calum and Alexander to claim James as a “relative.” Nonetheless, James remains a marginal figure. He is not entirely “family” and his tunes, though familiar in melody, bear different names. As the Métis man, James bridges the two oral cultures, most effectively through language and music. Even though the brothers accept him as one of their own James is viewed with suspicion by the others in the camp. He defies the social boundaries that have been set up in the camp because he cannot be easily classified as Aboriginal or Scots. He returns to a solitary life, but he acknowledges the kindness of the brothers with deer meat, left with a brief note of thanks.

The introduction of James MacDonald allows MacLeod to focus on the similarities between the Aboriginal population and other immigrant oral societies. The First Nations have largely been imprisoned within what was once their own land. However, the print nation that

overtook their existence has a powerful bureaucracy that can remove the rights and freedoms of those who do not operate within the confines of the law. They are sentenced in a language they do not fully understand to a small cell where their culture is reduced to “woven dreamcatchers in the windows of their cells” (274). Calum can empathize to some extent with the native people he encounters in prison. He is also removed from society by the print nation and he is, to a degree, foreign to the system. After serving the law’s requirement of ten years before parole for a twenty-five year life sentence for the murder of Fern Picard, Calum maintains his solitary exile from society in Toronto’s skid row.

While Calum has been guilty of despising the French collectively, Alexander has taken the time to try and befriend at least one of them, Marcel Gingras. Whereas Calum was suspicious of those who used a language that was different from his, Alexander saw an opportunity to learn about the “other” through a game in which he and Marcel exchanged words for common objects:

He would punch the air with enthusiasm when the answers were correct and we would move from the designations of food to whatever objects of work lay before us on the deck-room floor, pointing to *une chaîne, la dynamite, la poudre, la poudre de mine*, being impressed and surprised by how similar many of our words were although our accents were different. It seemed, at times, as if Marcel Gingras and I had been inhabitants of different rooms in the same large house for a long, long time. (199)

Alexander has already accepted the bilingual possibilities of the nation of the book, refusing to limit “citizenship” to a single speech community. Instead of seeing the French as long-standing enemies from the past, he looks upon them more as long-lost relatives.

Alexander realizes that his unilingual cousin from San Francisco takes a completely different view of the French, having been raised in a country which has fully assimilated his Gaelic-speaking parents. Gingras makes the natural assumption that all the MacDonalds “had the same smattering of French” that most Canadian children receive (248). Cousin Alexander rudely replies to Gingras’ greeting of “*Bonjour, comment ça va?*” with, “Why don’t you speak English...this is North America” (224). The rest of the French crew are initially suspicious of this American cousin who visits their bunkhouse occasionally to play poker, but they eventually realize that, “if he were a spy, he was a very naïve one” (249). Gingras also makes attempts to visit the MacDonald bunkhouse, about which Alexander muses, “He was not appreciated historically, but as an individual struggling with a language not his own he was difficult to dislike. No one wished to hit him with a wrench” (249). No one else from the MacDonald crew attempts to get to know any of the Québécois on an individual level, preferring instead to maintain a festering hatred that has carried over from the days of Wolfe and Montcalm. Alexander’s attempt to reach out to a member of a rival group is nonetheless undercut by the feuding between them and by the shadow of suspicion that lingers after the “accidental” death of the red-haired Alexander MacDonald.

The discovery of Fern Picard’s wallet in the footlocker of the American Alexander MacDonald further confirms Alexander’s attitude that the feud between the groups was the result of tragic misunderstandings that could have been prevented if only they had attempted to get along. He laments that “when Fern Picard called us liars and thieves he knew more than we did” (261). The insight that Alexander gains in the mining camp translates into a sense of empathy for people who must make their way in a society where both the oral and written word are not their own. He begins the process of acquiring empathy as a young man because he essentially

“immigrates” to Canada from his “foreign” community in Cape Breton. Cultivating empathy with Marcel Gingras, he nonetheless becomes Calum’s caregiver, empathizing as well with his exiled brother, who “immigrates” but never “integrates,” remaining outside of mainstream society.

The frame narrative that opens and closes the novel thus reveals the extent to which Alexander has come to accept his own identity, both as a MacDonald and as a Canadian. The grown man, an orthodontist, embraces his national culture and defends the ideals of the nation while attending a conference in Dallas. Once again he finds himself defending the complexities of Canada to an American colleague who is so indoctrinated into the culture of the book that he refuses to allow for any interpretation other than that of the American print nation. The American insists that Ukrainians are Russians because he “looked it up on the map” (59). This inference from the fixities of print encourages the American to make the improbable claim that “Communists are taking over the medical system in Canada,” a rumour supported by his insistence that “one is always hearing about” the Ukrainians who, as “Russians,” are undoubtedly Communists. Even though Alexander lives in Canada and has an understanding of its medical system, much less its complicated ethnology, the American arrogantly refuses to listen to the explanation that Alexander comes to see is pointless (59). The American orthodontist is not sensitive to the complexities of oral history, or to the unspoken languages that lurk beneath the fixities of print. He laughingly refers to the anglicized name he wears on his tag, not caring what the ethnic name that preceded “Miller” was once. Instead, he adopts a posture of univocality, making what one sees in print the basis of a single, unifying truth. Alexander’s truth is directly contrary to the univocality of the assimilationist, however, retaining

a place for what his sister Catriona calls “the language of their hearts,” even the “lost language lurking inside the ventricles of the heart” (193).

The American’s attempts to lure Alexander away from Canada to Texas with the enticement of “triple” what he currently makes does not interest Alexander. He has already “sold out” once before, however, when a drunken professor of dentistry in Halifax had persuaded Alexander that he could make “a lot of money in this field, but you will never do it in the Maritimes” (103). The professor convinces Alexander that he must move in order to have the opportunity to maximize his earning potential. However, Alexander cannot envision himself immersed in the American print nation when his residual guilt for leaving Cape Breton is already more than enough for him to bear.

Ironically, Alexander’s sympathy for the migrant workers who flood southern Ontario in the fruit-picking season, speaking Spanish and Low German, as well as French, is communicated by the very vehicle of migration, integration, and individualism that threatens their communal existence. Like Alexander himself, people who must relocate to where there is work are now challenged to maintain elements of their own culture while attempting to navigate the bureaucracy of the nation in which they labour. For the migrants, work is regulated by the nation that welcomes them when they are needed and ushers them out when they are finished. Using their leisure time to drink in the taverns, they “sit by themselves and talk in their own languages...imagining themselves back home” (71). Home for the workers, and to a great extent for Alexander, is a place that can only be imagined or remembered.

Yet Alexander is (re)creating home in a far wider, more nationalistic sense through his map-making and census-taking activities, as described in the frame narrative. Here Alexander has become a modern day explorer in his own country. He is essentially writing about what he

finds in his journeys, his surveys of the new found land that he has come to know as his home. As Williams discusses in his chapter on the film and novel versions of *The English Patient*, mapping is traditionally linked with the power of the colonizer, quoting what Anderson calls “the alignment of map and power” (214). As much as Almásy seeks to map purely for the sake of information and exploration, the politics of the war forces him to acknowledge the undeniable power in “owning” the map. The “imperial atlas makers” (Williams 214) are concerned with the process of colouring all lands belonging to an empire the same. The globe was, at one time, generously painted by the brush strokes of the British Empire. On a much smaller and more intimate scale, Alexander has left his “homeland” and colonized his new country. His travels allow him to survey his dominion and relate his findings. Whether intentionally or not, he places himself in the position of the powerful; he is not one of the observed, he is the one observing.

The widespread acceptance of the automobile as a facilitator of human migration paradoxically allows Alexander to map this unity that is the “new” Canada. He becomes an agent of change through his ability to envision and record the inevitable mixing of culture that has sprung from the economic necessity of finding work. The migrant workers may dream of home, but the bills are paid through their labour in Canadian orchards. Similarly, Alexander has had to relocate in order to reap the benefit of his education. Alexander is not merely witness to the “mapping” of the nation; he actively takes his place in the multilingual workforce that dots the landscape. He empathizes with the migrant workers because he has been one of them. He has come from an oral culture and counted himself in the new census of those for whom Canada is both a map and an imagined kinship. Alexander’s idea of home has been expanded to include the larger print nation, and this shift in ideology has been set in motion by the automobile. The visual evidence of the print nation is just outside the car window.

The informal census-taking that Alexander engages in is similar to the more formalized process of census-taking that Benedict Anderson refers to as one of the three “institutions of power,” the other two being the map and the museum. The census, Anderson argues, became a tool of the colonial mind that sought to “imagine its dominion” and the “nature of the human beings it ruled” (164). Alexander undertakes the process of listing the different ethnicities he encounters to create in his own mind a picture of the reality of the Canada he inhabits and the brethren he sees as co-occupants. However, like the formal census, Alexander engages in compartmentalizing the populations he encounters. They are either transient groups, like the migrant workers from the Caribbean or the “Mennonites from Mexico” (1) or they have come to stay and the “music and songs from various countries” fill the streets with “a mixture of sounds” (4). Alexander accepts the concept of Canada as a multicultural nation, but he still insists on “othering” the various representative ethnic groups that he encounters. Alexander takes stock of the dominion in much the same way the colonizers did. Although he is sympathetic to the plight of the migrant worker and the inner-city dweller of ethnic ghettos, he seems to extract himself from the mosaic he describes. As an affluent suburbia-dwelling Canadian he has broken out of the confines of “otherhood” and become part of the homogenous “non-ethnic” melange that makes up the dominant culture. Calum cannot achieve this status and, therefore, remains part of the “othered” portion of compartmentalized ethnicities that remains confined by language and poverty. Alexander’s census-taking places him within the realm of the powerful. Within a just a few decades Alexander has completed a metamorphosis in identity that has taken him from clan member to member of the ruling hegemony. Neither his children nor his sister’s children exhibit the ethnic awareness that still exists within the inner-city groups or the families of migrant workers. Alexander maintains few ties to his own background; his loyalty to Calum and his

dedication to recording his historical memories seem to be the only remaining ties to the once all-important clan.

The Cape Breton that Alexander clings to in memory is not the Cape Breton he returns to in his final journey with his dying brother Calum. All three grandparents have died and the group of brothers has disbanded; one having moved to British Columbia and another having gone to Scotland. The once-ubiquitous MacDonald presence has been diminished. A policeman stops Alexander and Calum as they approach Canso Causeway:

“What are your names?” he asks.

“We’re MacDonalds,” we say.

“MacDonalds?” he says. “Are you the guys who make the hamburgers?” (280)

The once formidably-numbered clansmen are deflated by a “misrecognition” that connects them with an American fast-food chain. The clan name has been subsumed within the popular culture of a transnational scenery. In Grandma’s words, this has happened whether they “*like it or not*” (17).

There can be little doubt that Alexander still bears the guilt of leaving Cape Breton, and his guilt is itself the impetus for the elegiac tone of the novel. He feels beholden to Calum and remains steadfast in his acceptance of responsibility for his eldest brother, in spite of his clear discomfort in Calum’s destitute environment. This duty extends to ferrying the dying Calum “home” to rest in Cape Breton. Alexander is thus impelled to write the narrative, as best he can, in a manner that pays homage to his oral roots—using oral syntax and a liberal injection of Gaelic. However, what is not entirely clear is to what extent Alexander accepts his complicity in creating the very changes that he laments. By writing the narrative, he is fully participating in the print nation, effectively transferring his loyalties to the new medium. For all his attempts to

“conserve” his family’s history, it is through his agency and the widespread influence of print that his oral culture is further circumscribed. Like Catriona, he appears to have not even educated his own children in the oral ways of his family. He has removed himself from the landscape of Cape Breton, and his ability to map the nation beyond that island forever changes his conceptualization of home. The *clann Chalum Ruadh* recedes into history and Alexander cannot deny his contribution in orchestrating its demise. Even though Alexander laments the change, he clearly cannot reverse the progress of the book, the map, and the census. As Williams points out: “In the end, what we hear...is the inwardness and reflectiveness of a mind structured by writing” (100). In other words, Alexander cannot help that he is capable of imagining the print nation in a way that his ancestors never had.

Above *Calum Ruadh* point there remains a stone with the name of *Chalum Ruadh* cut into it and the names of Alexander’s parents and young brother Colin. If print crept slowly into the oral Gaelic community of Cape Breton, in the end, it overwhelmed that community in a very short span of time. Now the *clann* that has inhabited Cape Breton for so long must take its place alongside the other families who have embraced Canada as “home.” Even Chalum Ruadh finally is remembered as a “Citizen of Cape Breton,” embracing in print on the stone that marked his life the land he had chosen beyond the land of his birth.

Chapter 3:

Movies, Memories, Myth, and Métis: Canada in the Present Tense

The media transition from orality to literacy, as we have seen, marks an epistemological shift of social focus from group or clan to that of the individual. Naturally the influence of oral culture is never entirely destroyed; it adds another dimension to the vast array of communicative choices made by people every day. The layering effect of media thus makes the task of identity formation increasingly complex. If Alexander MacDonald is elegiac and resigned, always gazing into the past from the frame narrative of his contemporary life, Morag Gunn's construction of the nation in *The Diviners* is far more concerned with the present than the past. Laurence's Morag grows up desperately trying to construct an identity for herself within the context of a variety of competing media. While she shares a Scots past with Alexander, she is never entirely willing to limit herself to an oral or print history as the basis of her identity; both media are too static and do not allow for the complexity Morag encounters in trying to accept what she sees as a shameful childhood. Morag's identity-building process must facilitate her acknowledgment of Christie Logan as her father and the place she occupies with her adopted parents in the social structure of Manawaka. Thus the boundaries and mapping that take Alexander out of the clan and into the geography of the nation are much too limiting for Morag. Instead, she attempts to fuse a number of ontological tools, some highly innovative, in order to facilitate her task of identity-making. What results is a forward-thinking argument for the new epistemology of Canada, one that is both inclusive and collage-like in its operation.

Laurence challenges the traditional boundaries of literature by presupposing a multimedia ontology. By adopting a number of media forms—including snapshots, song, and cinema—Laurence draws upon the ontological strength of each form. The idea of contiguous space, so

prevalent in “traditional” literature, is startlingly withdrawn in favour of Morag’s nonlinear narrative, complete with such distinct headings as “Snapshots,” “Memorybank Movies,” and “Christie’s Tales”. Laurence also brings in Morag’s own tales, Christie’s proverbs, and the ghostly dramatic interchanges between Morag and long-departed Catharine Parr Traill. A number of oral stories and songs from the Tonnerre family are also brought into the novel for the purpose of building a family history for Piquette, Morag’s daughter. The unapologetically contrived digressions from the linear text serve the mosaic-like quality of Morag’s identity formation and confirm her agency in its creation. The frame narrative is clearly subservient to the much more captivating series of mediated devices that Morag employs. Each “genre” of headlined text serves its own particular epistemological purpose.

Orphaned at a very young age, Morag’s choice of a multimedia approach to forge an identity *ex nihilo* is, for her, both necessary and practical. Some of her mediated narratives predate Morag’s own memories, creating a simulated “oral” history. In the absence of a direct lineage of parents or grandparents to pass on oral knowledge of the family, Morag relies on the “invented memories” (9) she attaches to the snapshots of her parents, along with the “created” ancestral tales that her adoptive father Christie Logan relates to her. Morag adds to this composite narrative the scenes of her life as she remembers them through the “Memorybank Movies,” drawing on the ontologies of both film and oral narrative to achieve her goal of bringing her past into her present, and anticipating a future for herself and for her daughter.

The addition of the dramatic dialogue between Morag and Catharine Parr Traill in the rural Ontario locale where Morag comes to live also gestures toward a goal of national-identity formation. Morag chooses a woman writer of historical significance to Canada with whom to “engage” in imagined conversation. Weaving together past and present, and inserting Traill into

the narrative using dramatic dialogue, Morag easily disrupts the boundaries of space and time as she transports Catharine Traill into the present by creating a fictitious exchange between herself and the distant historical figure. It is also evident that Morag speaks the conversation aloud, as neighbour Royland observes (110), suggesting that the words in the text have also been delivered orally, though unconventionally, to an imagined conversant. In spite of these irregularities, Traill's historical existence as a Canadian pioneer woman makes her attractive to Morag as a role model. Morag clearly feels a connection to her, both as a woman and as a writer. However, Morag idealises Traill's ability to cope and thrive in the wilderness: "In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one's hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing. (*The Canadian Settlers' Guide*, 1855)" (109). Recognizing the wisdom available to her in the words of this long-departed woman pioneer, Morag assimilates Traill into her own narrative by embracing her spirit in imagination. Further "conversations" with Traill are an attempt by Morag to pull inspiration from the woman. Traill is again idealized as a successful writer, mother of seven, subsistence gardener, and all-around determined and practical woman of early Canadian (186). The lore of the national heroine is thus incorporated into the narrative creation of Morag's identity.

The "Innerfilms" related by Morag are perhaps the culmination of identity-seeking, wherein Morag is finally able to envision her future. Although very brief and written in a disjointed style, these "Innerfilms" suggest that Morag's personal growth has allowed her to visualize (in print) a future in which, with varying degrees of success, she attains the identity she desires, that of a writer. Moreover, her inclusion of the songs and tales of the past and present Tonnerre family point to a future in which the Métis heritage embodied by Piquette is not only accepted but also celebrated within the identity of an ever-evolving Canadian melange.

The most overtly “oral” of the devices used by Laurence in both types of identity-formation are the tales told by Christie, Skinner Tonnerre, and Morag herself. These tales are similar in tone to the stories told by Grandpa MacDonald in *No Great Mischief*. There are elements of heroism and reverence toward the ancestors; the family history is meant to induce a sense of belonging in the descendants and an appreciation for those who had the determination to come to a new land. Her “true” past is not available to Morag, however, because of the death of her parents, but Christie’s tales supply her with elements of bravery and honour as if they had been handed down to him from Morag’s ancestors. The mythological tales of Piper Gunn and his woman, Morag, fill the gap left by the deaths of her parents. Christie relates that “Piper Gunn had a woman, and a strapping strong woman she was, with the courage of a falcon and the beauty of a deer and the warmth of a home and the faith of saints, and you may know her name. Her name, it was Morag” (60). In giving this tale to Morag, Christie not only supplies her with a family heritage, but also a direct lineage through a shared name that links her to a stalwart heroine. This name-sharing tradition within the clan parallels the tradition that was also evident in MacLeod’s novel. The sense of belonging is completely intentional and Christie would have been fully aware of this as he is a Scot and has been raised to respect the heritage as well.

Christie has educated himself in highland history, as he explains to Morag, using the book *The Clans and Tartans of Scotland*. What little self-respect that Christie has is derived from this printed history:

‘...And what is the crest, Morag?’

She knows it off by heart.

‘A passion nail piercing a human heart, proper.’

Christie’s fist comes down on the table.

‘Right! An ancient family, the North Logans, by the Almighty God.’

Then the spirits start to get gloomy in him.

‘Och, what the hell does it matter? It’s here we live, not there, and the glory has passed away, and likely never was in the first place.’ (57)

Christie’s despondency arises from his perception that the book belongs to another time and place, and so does not speak to his present circumstance; it excludes his Canadian identity just as surely as it excludes Morag’s family name from the honour roll of Highland clans. As the town’s “scavenger” he occupies one of the lowest positions on the social ladder of Manawaka. His position, along with Prin’s morbid obesity, is the cause of much of Morag’s shame throughout her life. Christie recognizes that Morag suffers because of his domestic situation, coupled with her own orphan state. The tales of Piper and Morag Gunn are thus enlisted as a way to bring glory to Morag’s unknown past. Even the trusted authority of the book of *The Clans and Tartans of Scotland* leaves Morag little by way of information about her past: “The chieftainship of Clan Gunn is undetermined at the present time, and no arms have been matriculated” (Laurence 58). The sad truth of this gap leaves Christie free to completely fabricate the history that Morag so desperately seeks. It also gives Morag the space to complete her history as she sees fit.

Morag finally sees the possibility of filling the void of history when she exchanges the knife that Christie had acquired through a trade with a man named John Shipley, who had once traded a plaid brooch with Lazarus Tonnerre. Jules has treasured the plaid pin, although it was not a true family relic, and Morag has similarly valued Christie’s knife that was marked with a “T,” all the while not knowing that the knife had once belonged to Lazarus. At the end of her Métis lover’s life she and Jules make the connection and Morag trades the knife back to him for

the pin. In researching the history of the plaid on the pin, Morag recalls that the Gunn name lacks the formal documentation of other clans in Christie's old book. However, Morag feels moved to look up the family represented by the plaid on the pin she has acquired from Jules:

'It's the Clanranald Macdonalds. Where could he have got it from, John Shipley? We'll never know of course... Their motto was *My Hope Is Constant In Thee* – those are the words on the pin. Their war cry was *Gainsay Who Dare*.'

Clan Gunn, according to this book, as she recalls from years back, did not have a crest or a coat-of-arms. But adoption, as who should know better than Morag, is possible. (458)

It is this decision, that an adopted identity is not a barrier to self-acceptance, which brings Morag a sense of peace with both her family history and the imagined past that Christie has given to her as the only gift he was able to give. His voice, along with the voices of the Tonnerres, fills the historical gap for Morag and gives her wholeness from which to provide Piquette with a past as well:

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*. (458)

Through this act of acceptance, Morag pays tribute to the unknown ancestors that have gone before her, and to Christie, who gave her an oral inheritance that she translates into print.

Similarly, the tales of Lazarus, Rider, and Old Jules Tonnerre, as related by Skinner, are filled with the exploits of these men and how they have contributed to their ancestral history. Skinner's tales, though ostensibly based on fact, are rife with his recognition that oral stories

suffer the inaccuracies of time and telling and he is very forthright in revealing their limitations: "...Lazarus Tonnerre sure isn't the man to tell the same story twice, or maybe he just couldn't remember, because each time he told it, it would be kind of different" (159). But the inaccuracies do not appear to detract from the importance of telling the tale. What is important is the process of passing the tales along, as suggested by the title of the story "Skinner's Tale of Lazarus' Tale of Rider Tonnerre" (159). The lineage of the transmission becomes part of the tale itself.

Her daughter's childhood illness, which functions as a trope for her estrangement from the past, allows Morag to continue the tradition of oral storytelling that was handed on through Christie and Lazarus. "Morag's Tale of Christie Logan" (390) and "Morag's Tale of Lazarus Tonnerre" (392) are Pique's introduction to her own heritage and involve Morag in the oral maintenance of family history. The oral stories are as necessary to Pique as they had been to Morag at a similar age. Morag recognizes this need, just as Christie had recognized it in Morag's childhood. Morag's affirmation of Jules' Métis heritage allows for Pique to derive a full understanding of her identity from both of her parents, despite the fact that she has spent very little time with her father. Morag thus channels the voices of the past indiscriminately, as was done for her.

The preservation of oral tradition in *The Diviners* differs, however, from its formulaic method in *No Great Mischief*. Instead of preserving a "dying" tradition in the fixities of print, Laurence renovates the oral tradition by inventing fictional analogues of the past in each generation. If Alexander commits to print the oral traditions that he and his sister do not pass on to their children in MacLeod's novel, Laurence's character inserts herself into the broken chain between her parents and her children, telling the stories that save Pique from suffering the fate of

this rupture from the past. Morag therefore becomes a conduit of a living oral history, rather than the custodian of a “museumized” history.

One of the reasons for her success at preserving the oral tradition, however, is her use of newer media to help her reinvent the past. Photography is one of her windows that opens onto a vanished world, as we see in the series of “Snapshots” which structure the opening chapter, “River of Now and Then.” These snapshot images are the only tangible link Morag has to her dead parents. Because she was so young when they died, her memories of them are extremely vague. In order to strengthen the bond to her parents Morag relates invented narrative along with the photographs that she admits to keeping “*not for what they show but for what is hidden in them*” (14). In “normal” circumstances, family albums promote the sharing of stories among family and visitors to the home. However, Morag’s jumble of precious family memorabilia resides in an “ancient tattered manilla [sic] envelope” that “Christie must have found at the dump” (13).

The disorder and carelessness with which Morag treats the photographs allows her to disregard the usual borders that would have been imposed by a formal album. For example, she is aware, in one snapshot of her parents before her birth, that her father “is grinning with obvious embarrassment at the image-recorder who stands unseen and unrecorded on the near side of the gate” (14-15). She is necessarily aware, that is to say, of what the subject of the photograph is able to see that she can only imagine—a surrounding context of lived experience from which the child is excluded by the loss of her parents. Nonetheless, she can arrange the snapshots in whatever order she chooses and the stories can reside in her head; there is no call for sharing them with other family members or visitors, since she has no need to follow the traditional

family ritual of sharing the stories. The epistemological significance of the photographs is determined by Morag alone.

In theorizing the social and familial significance of early photograph albums Elizabeth Siegel shows how early family albums added a new dimension to family history, surpassing the family Bible as the standard method of documenting such historical milestones as births, deaths, marriages, and important national events. Motivated by concern for the welfare of Civil War widows and their rights to their husbands' lands and pensions, one Dr. A. H. Platt published a comprehensive album that recorded

in a plain, brief, and intelligent manner, The Name, Birth-place, Date of Nativity, Descent, Names of Parents, Number of Brothers and Sisters, Education, Occupation, Politics, Religion, Marriage, Stature, Weight, Habit, Complexion, Color of Eyes and Hair, Health, Time and Place of Death, Disease, Age and Place of Interment of Each Member of Any Family, With Album Leaves for the Insertion of Photographs of the Same. (Siegel 244)

This “grid of specification,” in Foucault’s sense, served to create a web of discourse that located family members in related webs of biological and social relation. Siegel asserts that Platt’s meticulously conceived album served as “part family history, part legal document. It had to function as a certificate of authenticity, with the text and the images corroborating one another” (245). Without the benefit (or burden) of this authentication, Morag is then forced (or freed) to construct her own web of family relations.

Roland Barthes, another theorist of photography, argues in *Camera Lucida* that the “pathos” of photography is its exclusion of the viewer from the time of the image: “I must therefore submit to this law: I cannot penetrate, cannot reach into the Photograph. I can only

sweep it with my glance, like a smooth surface” (106). In his discovery of “The Winter Garden Photograph” (71) of his mother as a child, he begins to think of history in similar terms when he looks at this photograph: “Is History not simply that time when we were not born?...History is hysterical: it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it” (64-5). Nonetheless, he studies the photograph for that “element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (26). What he calls “a photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27). What interests Barthes is that often the *punctum* is “unlocatable” (57) or it is something so banal that it can “accommodate a certain latency” (53). Barthes asserts that the *punctum* may not always be “triggered,” but when it is, “it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and *what is nonetheless already there*” (emphasis Barthes, 55).

The viewer has the capacity to be moved by the photograph, but this response is highly individualized and is dependent upon the cultural and social background of the viewer. The quality of photography that allows for the viewer to reflect on the response it elicits is its stasis. Barthes asks, “Do I add to the images in movies? I don’t think so; I don’t have time: in front of the screen, I am not free to shut my eyes; otherwise, opening them again, I would not discover the same image; I am constrained to a continuous voracity; a host of other qualities, but not *pensiveness*; whence the interest, for me, of the photogram” (55). The ability to arrest movement affords the viewer the luxury of the examination of minutiae that would otherwise be caught up in the movement of the image and resist being held. Barthes’ argument is borne out by his example of the censorship of photographs in Nazi Germany. Portraitist Sander was censored because his images did not “correspond to the aesthetic of the Nazi race” (37), suggesting that

those viewing the photographs would form an evaluation of the portraits that was facilitated by the pensiveness that the image allowed.

Barthes takes the idea of pensiveness a step further when he delves into the epistemological impact of photography and the existential questions that are provoked by the photograph's insistence on "*what has been*" (85). Every photograph, Barthes suggests, prompts a metaphysical response: "I am the reference of every photograph, and this is what generates my astonishment in addressing myself to the fundamental question: why is it that I am alive *here and now?*" (84). The photograph captures a fixed moment of history from which one can calculate one's own existence. An era cannot do this as precisely as any photograph. The paradox of the photograph in the existentialist realm, however, is that, although it is a "certificate of presence" (Barthes 87), it is nonetheless not an *aide-mémoire*. "Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory...but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory" (91). The photograph assumes primacy in the memory, discrediting the memoirist's narrative and the nuances offered by the other sensory inputs. Barthes' assertion is that the photograph is thus violent because it "*fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed" (91). The memoirist is made the servant of the photo, not the other way around.

In her critique of Barthes' treatment of photography in *Camera Lucida*, Jolanta Wawrzycka argues that the "quasi-phenomenological investigations cancel out the operation of the *studium* and the *punctum* that works fairly well when he investigates photographs other than those of himself and his mother" (95). At issue, for Wawrzycka, is Barthes' tendency in these intimate photographs to become "invested in fictionalizing, mythologizing, and spinning the novelistic thread of 'love and death' (that parallels the paradigm of life and death he mentions later [CL, 92])..." (95). Wawrzycka compares Barthes' activities to her own when she examines

family photographs and indulges in the “storytelling prewritten in and by my photographs” (95). What matters to Wawrzycka is clearly the narrative that accompanies the “flat death,” not the resurrection that the photograph seems to hold for Barthes.

In this revision of Barthes, one recalls how Morag’s photographs do not resurrect her parents, but they do provide a starting point for mythologizing her history. Morag seeks, through the photographs of her parents, validation of their existence, of the certainty of “*what has been*” (Barthes 85). At the same time they are a beginning point for her own mythologizing. In snapshots containing the images of young Morag and her parents, the adult Morag supplies a narrative, admittedly imagined in the main, that idealises the mother and father she cannot adequately remember:

Morag’s mother is not the sort of mother who yells at kids. She does not whine either. She is not like Prin.

All this is crazy, of course, and quite untrue. Or maybe true and maybe not. I am remembering myself composing this interpretation, in Christie and Prin’s house. (16)

The italicised portion represents a level of Morag’s consciousness that recognizes the constructedness of the narrative. The narrative that accompanies the photograph is also written in the third person, suggesting that Morag has, to some extent, distanced herself from the images of her parents, even as the medium has distanced them in time, inasmuch as the photograph “is without future (this is its pathos, its melancholy; in it, no protensity, whereas the cinema is protensive, hence in no way melancholic” (Barthes 90). Yet she persists in creating the stories that fill the snapshots with life and movement, resisting the stasis that they would have otherwise offered.

Morag accepts the dubious accuracy of her third-person narrations, even qualifying the content with italicized first-person interjections, but the photographs, like the stories, have “never agreed to get lost” (13). She muses that “*perhaps they’re my totems, or contain a portion of my spirit*” (14). As photographs they do represent the “what has been,” to which Barthes refers (85), but without the narrative, they are inadequate “copies” of the real. Her only recourse is to separate herself from the context of the photographic images, setting them back into the past as she moves on with her remembered childhood, trying to transform “still life” into a small “movie.”

It is in her “Memorybank Movies” (over forty in total) that the past begins to move again, and her remembered history comes to life. Although presented as printed text in the novel, these “Memorybank Movies” share a number of features common to the “writing in light” (Williams 163) of the cinematic version. Two features of cinematic epistemology are especially useful to Morag’s quest for identity. George Pratt (1907) suggests that in film “the performance is preserved in living, dynamic embalment (if the phrase may be permitted) for decades to come” (qtd. in Williams, 164). This allows Morag the utility of what Williams calls the “paradox of ‘dynamic embalment’” where the “past lives in the present” (164). Thus, Williams argues that “shades from the past are ... present to audiences on film in a way that audiences will never be present to them. For film issues a one-way ticket *out of the past*” (emphasis Williams, 164).

“It is an incontestable fact,” as Stanley Cavell writes, “that in a motion picture no live human being is up there. But a human *something* is, and something unlike anything else we know. We can stick to our plain description of that human something as ‘in our presence while we are not in his’ (present *at* him, because looking at him, but not present *to* him) and still account for the difference between his live presence and his photographed presence to us” (26-

7). While there is literally no spectral, filmic presence in Morag's "Memorybank Movies," what is nonetheless at stake for her epistemologically is that certainty of a past that can be brought into the present. Morag can thus construct an identity and a life for herself and her daughter that, moving in time, moves forward, yet does not deny history.

Morag's snapshots are inadequate as the sole foundation upon which to build a working identity because, as Barthes points out, these images exist in what he terms the "aorist" tense: "Not only is the Photograph never, in essence, a memory (whose grammatical expression would be the perfect tense, whereas the tense of the Photograph is the aorist), but it actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory" (91). The aorist tense expresses the incompleteness of the photograph in terms of its ability to preserve the moment. Morag has already experienced this incompleteness with the snapshots of her parents. Without the accompanying "imagined" narrative, the photographs are little more than the certificate of "what has been" to which Barthes alludes. They certainly cannot be brought into the present in the same way that movies can. Movies are distinguished from their static ancestor, photography, by their tense. Movies provide the completeness that photographs cannot, and that completeness allows them to inhabit the "past-present" tense. The "Memorybank Movies" simulate the effect of film, but exist in print, as an analogue of multimedia that Laurence embraces as an epistemologically relevant process of identity construction for the late twentieth century.

Morag's "movies," however, are not exact ontological copies of cinema. Because Laurence chooses print rather than film as her medium of expression, the result is a hybrid cinematic novel. There is an inherent epistemological complexity that is the result of the slipperiness of transgressing the boundaries of both film and print. Unlike film, the reader does not receive the visual confirmation of a "projected...stream of light" (Williams 164); there is no

screen upon which the photons are projected. As readers we invest ourselves in Morag's vision and allow the "illusion" of cinema to be perpetuated. We also accept the version that Morag presents, while fully understanding that her titled, self-contained films are the product of both memory and myth. Yet some features of film proper are maintained; Morag titles each "movie," and the "cuts" are juxtaposed in startling ways within the novel. What film theorist Stanley Cavell calls "the dynamization of space" and the "spatialization of time" (30) are evident in the ways that the "Memorybank Movies" abruptly transport the reader from the frame narrative of Morag's "present" to the representations of Morag's past. This literary disruption mimics the ability of film to move "instantaneously from anywhere to anywhere" (Cavell 30).

The "Memorybank Movies" continuously carry out the ontological "mission" of their more familiar theatrical analogue. Transporting the reader from the present of Morag's riverside life in Ontario back to a "movie" of twelve-year-old Morag happens as instantaneously and as conspicuously as a film "cut" from one scene in one time and place, to another in a completely different era and location. The present-day Morag muses as she writes in her notebook: "*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. But one I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer*" (70). Morag directly acknowledges her revisionist tendencies and speculates that everyone is caught in the same cycle of identity-building through remembrance and myth-building. This speculation is followed immediately by a third-person narration of Morag's school days in Manawaka. The effect of this startling juxtapositioning of very disparate times and places, not to mention narrative point of view, is that the innermost workings of Morag's consciousness are revealed. Her past, or at least an amended

version of it, is brought into the present and has an influence on how Morag defines herself and her relationships with those close to her.

Morag alludes to the past's influence on the present in a conversation with her neighbour Royland, comparing the past to another planet and a snake that sheds its skin. The planets of our own identities, Morag suggests, exist parallel to each other: "We think there is *one* planet called Earth, but there are thousands, even *millions*..." (188). The enduring nature of planets bears out Morag's insistence on constantly revisiting the past. Similarly, the metaphor of the shed snake skin points to the peculiarity of finding oneself inside the past: "You live inside the creature for quite a while, so it comes as a shock to find you're living now in one of the husked-off skins, and sometimes you can touch the creature as it is now and sometimes you can't" (188). The "shock" of realizing that the past is always present is the shock that resides within the "Memorybank Movies." Laurence immediately follows this revelation with the "movie" (*Farewell and Hallelujah*) in which Morag finally leaves Manawaka for the outside world (189). Morag's metaphor of the shed skin is made manifest in the recollection of "shedding" her association with Manawaka. The irony, however, is that she has never completely "shed" Manawaka. It remains as one of the "old skins...still bunched" at Morag's feet (188).

Morag's relationship with Christie is the subject of many of the "Memorybank Movies" and it is clear that by bringing Christie into the present Morag is able to reconcile her troubled relationship with her adoptive father and truly embrace the abject "scavenger" as her "real" father. Christie's own "revisionist" history becomes evident as Morag discloses his willingness to sacrifice his own truth in order to elevate Morag's perception of her biological father. After gazing at the grainy photographs of the soldiers of *The 60th Canadian Field Artillery Battery Book*, Christie relates an invented tale where he tells Morag that "your dad saved my life that one

time, then” (101). In fact, as Morag later learns from Prin, it was “Christie holding Colin in his arms” (224). On a performative level, however, the version of the story told by Christie is essentially true. It was her “father” who was saved that day, in the person of Christie, who willingly sacrificed his own heroic truth for the benefit of his “daughter.” As Morag will say at Christie’s deathbed, “I used to fight a lot with you, Christie, but you’ve been my father to me” (420). In a very real way, then, it was her “dad [who] saved” another man’s life, and saved Morag as well in his humble act of self-erasure.

Morag’s re-patriation is also facilitated by Christie’s ability to fabricate tales of heroism involving the fictional ancestor Piper Gunn. In “Christie’s Tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels” (143-46), Christie takes the perspective of the Selkirk settlers and blames the 1869-70 rebellion on the “halfbreeds” as well as the apathetic settlers. Morag interjects with what she has learned in school, correcting Christie’s retelling of “Reel” and his men who rebel against the settlement. In Christie’s version, the now-elderly Piper Gunn rallies the settlers: “He began with the pibrochs, which was for mourning. To tell the people they’d fallen low and wasn’t the men their ancestors had been. Then he went on to battle music. And the one he played over and over was ‘The Gunns’ Salute.’ A reproach, it was” (145). In spite of Morag’s insistence that “Riel” is justified in leading the rebellion, she clearly embraces the story as a gift from Christie that is given with the intention of strengthening Morag’s sense of her own history. Christie even offers to revise the story again, according to Morag’s knowledge of the events: “Well, well, hm. Maybe the story didn’t go quite like I said. Let’s see” (146). But Morag absolves Christie of this responsibility: “No. That’s cheating, Christie. Thanks for telling the story, I liked it fine. Really” (146). Morag realizes that the social perspective of the tale is less important to Christie than the recounting of Piper Gunn’s last act of heroism.

From the opposing perspective, “Skinner’s Tale of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet” again recounts events of 1869-70 (161-62). Even here, Morag occasionally interjects with the “truth” as she has learned it in school. However, Skinner defends his story’s authenticity with his insistence that the oral story is validated by its direct passage through the family: “...I don’t say Lazarus told the story the way it happened, but neither did the books and they’re one hell of a sight worse because they made out that the guy was nuts” (162). Riel’s portrayal in print disturbs the Tonnerre family, who regard the “Prophet” as a hero in much the same way that Morag sees Piper as a hero. The printed “truth” has less authority than the oral tales in terms of identity construction for both Morag and Skinner. In Morag’s own process of identity building, the authentication comes on a number of different levels. She folds an oral tale within “Memorybank Movie” and the resulting form of print media. This self-repeating form is what Morag requires to validate her history. She invents the form she needs by “borrowing” from whatever media are available and useful.

Laurence thus suggests that Morag’s identity is cumulative and multiform. There is an ever-present awareness of the past and the mythology it has inspired; there is a present that is punctuated with imagined conversations and letters; and there is a preview of the future, which is embodied by Pique. The mature Morag of the frame narrative types a letter to her former lover Dan McRaith and the letter is incorporated into the text. This is followed by inner reflection in which Morag muses:

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. (312)

This passage is immediately followed by another “Memorybank Movie,” entitled “Bleak House,” in which Morag recounts the time of her pregnancy in Mrs. Tefler’s boardinghouse in Kitsilano. In six pages (311-16) Morag covers her present, future, and past with Pique, situates herself in Ontario—the setting of the frame narrative—and gestures to Scotland, where McRaith resides, as well as to Kitsilano, where she spent her pregnancy. Like a film in which a variety of times and places can be juxtaposed with a cut from one shot to another, Morag “cuts” from one space and time to another. The narrative is split between third- and first-person, creating a sometimes bewildering print-position for the reader. Sometimes Morag is part of the “audience,” sitting beside the reader, watching the screen; at other times the first-person narrative invites the reader directly into Morag’s consciousness.

The interjection of first-person narrative becomes even more jarring when it intrudes upon the “Memorybank Movie” itself. This is a feature of the movie “Chas” in which Morag engages in sexual intercourse with a man she barely knows and with whom the encounter ends in violence. In the high tension of remembering this “movie,” Morag’s first-person additions to the narrative attempt to rationalize her actions and her need for intimacy and the risks she has taken:

...Morag takes a scalding bath and after several hours the trembling stops.

He’s sick. And I half knew it all the time. Why did I do it? Because I needed a man. It seems a fairly simple thing. Why isn’t it? Why the hatred in his eyes? Because he thinks I’m a whore? I don’t feel like a whore. Maybe a whore doesn’t feel like a whore either. (350)

There is a simultaneous outside and inside to such a filmic narrative that allows the reader to “witness successively events happening at the same time” (Cavell 30). The “Memorybank

Movies” are all set in the past, but they are clearly as integral to the present as the frame narrative itself.

Even Morag’s future is imagined in brief interjections, such as that examined above, and also more formally, if fragmentedly, in “Innerfilms.” These “movies” are far fewer in number—only three are indicated by the title “Innerfilm”—and they lack the fullness of detail of the “Memorybank Movies.” As pieces of speculation they therefore cannot convey the sensory detail of the “movies.” No memory informs the narrative; thus it remains somewhat amorphous. The language is incomplete and unpunctuated, suggesting that the future is truly unknown and only time and memory will allow the narrative to become complete:

Innerfilm

Morag living in her own apartment in the city a small apartment but lovely
 deep-pile rug (blue) and a beige chesterfield suite the thick upholstered kind a
 large radio in a walnut cabinet lots of bookshelves a fireplace that really
 works (138)

In this example, Morag imagines a life as different from her present life in Manawaka as she can imagine. Gone are the artefacts of Christie’s scavenger life and the reminders of the rural existence of her girlhood. Morag sees herself as a successful writer surrounded by the beautiful things that she has never had the privilege to enjoy.

The final “Innerfilm” is more fully imagined than the earlier two, although it does break down at the end. At the point of its imagining, Morag is far more settled and has, indeed, become the writer she had envisioned herself being from the beginning. Although Morag has revised the details of the “film” to more accurately reflect the life she now leads, there are still gaps that she cannot fill with language: “...All is well. The bank balance is healthy. The

friendly neighbourhood farmer is a bachelor (widower? yes). Although by no means an intellectual, he is a well-read man. Also handsome. And and” (440). Morag does not indicate any disappointment with her life, even though it is quite different from the “Innerfilms” that she imagined earlier. She has willingly revised her “movie” and the only apparent indication of regret is her lack of a life mate. The fact that the conjured “widower” is “by no means an intellectual” suggests that she has no intention of revisiting her disappointing marriage to Dr. Brooke Skelton, Professor of English. Morag requires little more of the future than a chance at the stable companionship that has eluded her adult life.

What Morag could not have anticipated, but what Laurence effectively presupposes, is a novel that anticipates hypertext. Williams notes what Deibert calls “the fit between ...a communications environment of hypermedia and the epistemology of postmodernism” (223). Moreover, Deibert “claims that the idea of a stable, centred self with a fixed identity and universal attributes has been giving way over recent decades to ‘a notion of a “decentered” self that is more like ‘an assemblage of its environment, a multiple self that changes in response to different social situations” (Williams 223). Laurence, it would appear, is clearly accepting of this complicated epistemology of identity. No attempt is made within the narrative to transition seamlessly from the frame narrative to the “Memorybank Movie,” to the imagined dialogue, to Christie’s tales, to the Tonnerre tales, and so on. The cuts are all abrupt. This *modus operandi* is not unlike the hypertext of today, where linked text takes us instantaneously from one website to another. It is much like the experience of Internet communications: fragmented, unobstructed, and borderless. Space, time, language, and identity can be altered at the click of a mouse or keystroke. Although written before the public adoption of this technology, *The Diviners* defies

the traditional boundaries of narrative and presents a multimedia literary experience that is radically unlike MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*.

The resultant "community" to which Morag belongs is therefore necessarily different from that of Alexander. Alexander is a fully-fledged member of the print nation and his Canada is that of the English-speaking, educated middle class that makes up the ruling hegemony. This is not to say that he does not recognize the multicultural nature of Canada. Indeed, he is sympathetic, even empathetic, to the dwellers of the inner-city ghettos and the migrant workers that temporarily inhabit the orchards. However, he has moved beyond the "lived" culture of his family and, as a result, now sees his oral culture as a kind of artefact, a souvenir of his past. Morag, on the other hand, has brought her past into her present with all of its shame, indignities, and disappointments intact. And it lives on "film" in the "past-present" of an imagined mental cinema.

The oral stories of Morag's youth are nonetheless transmitted directly to her daughter as oral stories. Morag sees the Métis heritage of Pique's father, Jules Tonnerre, as every bit as important to Pique's identity-formation as Morag's own history. Morag relates the oral history of the Tonnerres to Pique. Laurence clearly asserts Pique's interest in the tales of her father's family by interjecting the young girl's questions in Morag's oral narrative:

Anyhow, Lazarus had a lot of troubles, but his family never starved.

Sometimes he used to go trapping away up Galloping Mountain way.

(Galloping Mountain? Is that a real mountain?)

Sure. Away north of Manawaka, where lots of very tall spruce trees grow, and there's a lake there, and a lot of your father's people live thereabouts.

(I'm going there someday.) (392)

The “factuality” of Jules’s oral stories is no more vital, however, to his personal identity than are Christie’s invented tales of Morag’s ancestor, Piper Gunn. As Christie tells Morag, “It’s all true and not true. Isn’t that a bugger, now” (99). So, “Christie’s Tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels” (143), for example, is open to revision and restatement in ways that the “oral history” of the Macdonald clan is not in *No Great Mischief*. Morag introduces elements from “Skinner’s Tale of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet” (161-2) to question and ultimately to relativize, contested histories of Scots and French Métis in Manitoba. The point is not to force a reader to choose either version, but to affirm the “truth” of both versions as a “mixed” version of national identity.

In another way as well, oral community is preserved in the songs that Jules sings of his family and of his cultural liminality. These songs are included in the text, as is the appended “Album” containing lyrics and music ostensibly written by Jules himself (481-90). This commitment of Métis history to the text appears to parallel Alexander’s need to conserve his family’s oral history. The consequences, however, are much different. Rather than strictly archiving the stories, Morag continues to tell them to Piquette, unlike Alexander, whose children seem uninvolved in the preservation of history. As well, Piquette has taken up singing her father’s songs. These songs and lyrics do not represent the past. They have not become relics, but are rather recorded for their potential “usefulness” in the present and future, and will lead to new creations, as in “Pique’s Song,” which begins, “There’s a valley holds my name” (489).

In its acceptance of a mixed heritage, Métis culture, in fact, becomes a model for national identity. Morag not only facilitates Pique’s acceptance of her mixed parentage, however, but actively encourages her daughter to continue to explore the various media that contribute to this inclusive identity. This hybrid identity includes the adopted tales of Christie Logan, the tales and

songs of Jules, who never married her mother, and Morag's own history as well. Nothing is rejected, even though most of the history is outside of convention and certainly outside of the favoured middle-class experience of white North America.

For Laurence, the future of Canada and its national identity is ultimately contingent upon the acceptance and celebration of such hybridity. If Pique is the personal embodiment of this challenge, then *The Diviners* is a formal embodiment of the need to embrace mixed media as the very form of communications in the "imagined community" called Canada. Although *The Diviners* (1974) was written before MacLeod's *No Great Mischief* (1999), *Diviners* is already the more progressive experiment in form. Laurence's willingness to push the boundaries of printed narrative to the next levels of communicative technology challenges the epistemology of print itself. Laurence redefines narrative structure, borrowing technique as necessary to achieve the social goal of hybridity. While Laurence's imagined "Pique" is more a type than a fully realized character, she is nonetheless Morag's true heir who has crafted for her daughter the mosaic identity that is perhaps the truest homage to multiculturalism in Canadian writing.

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