

realidad es puesta a flote, donde no se alberga la abstracción idealista, donde se apresa en toda su complejidad y su rico contenido de contradicciones, la lucha de lo que va a nacer con lo que muere."³

Otero's method of analyzing the social and political state that prevailed in Cuba before 1959 leads to a moral condemnation of the world destroyed by the Revolution. The necessary point of reference for the evaluation of the past is the present and the order created after the victory of Communism in Cuba. Otero's choice of narrative material and presentation of character development results in an indictment of a past reality from a Marxist perspective. Evidently based on his faith in the new social order in which he lives, Otero builds a novelistic world in which he demonstrates the impossibility of attaining any type of justice within the political structure of the time examined. With its critical objectivity, *La Situación* becomes a model of Marxist analysis that brings forth a totally negative view of the past in order to strengthen the conviction of its readers in the historical need for the emergence of the new revolutionary order.

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NOTES

¹*The New Communist Manifesto and other related documents*, ed. Dan Jacobs (Evanston, Ill. and Elmsford, N.Y., 1961), p. 56.

²Lisandro Otero, *La Situación* (La Habana, 1963), p. 269.

³Mirta Aguirre, "Apuntes sobre la literatura y el arte," in *Literatura y arte nuevo en Cuba* (Barcelona: Editorial Estela, 1971), p. 182.

Margaret Laurence's Progress

Margaret Laurence has been publishing fiction since 1954 when her translation of Somali folktales, *Tree for Poverty*, appeared. Her own early creative work, including the novel *This Side Jordan* (1960) and a collection of short stories, *The Tomorrow-Tamer* (1963), was set in Africa and dealt with various facets of the transition from tribal cultures and colonial domination to emergent nationhood. Her subsequent novels, all set in Canada, have earned her continuing critical and popular acclaim and an international reputation which the publication of her latest work, *The Diviners* (Toronto, 1974) is certain to enhance.

The Stone Angel (1964), with its ninety year old renegade heroine Hagar Shipley, established Mrs. Laurence's reputation as a writer in firm control of her material and one whose attitude to her central character was not only compassionate but tough-minded at the same time. *A Jest of God* (1966), the story of a neurotic thirty-four year old spinster Rachel Cameron and her attempts to cope with the demands of a clinging mother and the smothering social code of a small prairie town, won the Governor General's award for fiction and was later

retitled *Rachel, Rachel* and made into a successful commercial film. Three years later *The Fire-Dwellers* probed the tortured psyche of Rachel's older sister Stacey, a middle-aged mother of two who feels trapped by her marriage and indeed by life. Stacey's struggles to find direction and meaning are chronicled with the precision and detached sympathy that have become hallmarks of Margaret Laurence's writing. *A Bird in the House* (1970), perhaps the most autobiographical of her works, studies the growing self-awareness of young Vanessa MacLeod in a household dominated by an authoritarian grandfather. In 1972, in recognition of the brilliant achievement of these works, Mrs. Laurence was made a Companion of the Order of Canada, the highest civilian honor granted by the federal government.

The spiritual center of Margaret Laurence's fictional world is the imaginary prairie town of Manawaka (in reality Neepawa, Manitoba). It is here that her earlier heroines live (or analyze in reminiscence) the involvements and events that determine their personal identities. It is here that each of them explores the contours and boundaries of her own individuality, more often than not attempting to reconcile the opposing demands of personal freedom and moral responsibility. And it is here that Morag Gunn, protagonist of *The Diviners* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1974) spends the formative years of her childhood and adolescence.

When the book opens, though, Morag is forty-seven years old, living alone in rural southern Ontario where she struggles to complete her latest novel and to define her identity by redefining her past. Through the perusal of old snapshots and the mental screening of "memorybank movies" she reconstructs the childhood and teenage years in Manawaka, the escape to university in the city (in this case Winnipeg) and marriage to her first year English professor. Her increasing tension and frustration with this relationship, which her husband carefully programs to fit the social conventions of Toronto's academia, causes her flight into an affair with a Métis folksinger from home who later fathers her illegitimate daughter Pique. Memories of separation, and a long sequence containing fragmented patterns of her existence over the next eighteen years, bring Morag (and the reader) gradually back into the present. The need to look back in anguish (and at times with wry wit) is compelling for Morag. Even though at times it may seem pointless, she is driven to continue: "What happened to me wasn't what anyone else thought was happening, and maybe not even what I thought was happening at the time. 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" (p. 49). Yet certain recollections do yield answers, and through them Morag moves gradually towards a sense of control, a positive awareness of the possibilities and limitations in her life, that previous Laurence heroines were never able to achieve.

One of her earliest "memorybank movies," called "The Law Means School," is a replay of Morag's first day at school. Cruelly teased by her classmates for her ankle-length faded-print dress, and faced with the example of a similarly dressed playmate who is made so nervous she messes herself, Morag learns her first hard lesson in survival (p. 28).

Morag's guardian is Christie Logan, the town's garbage collector, known locally as "the scavenger." Christie is both shrewd and romantic, on the one hand able to show her how to "tell" garbage, or interpret people's habits and attitudes from what they throw away, on the other hand ready to kindle her sense of self-esteem with the tales he creates about her "ancestor" Piper Gunn, an

imaginary Scots folk hero who led his people to a new life on the Canadian prairies many decades ago. Christie cleverly associates Morag with the legend: "Now Piper Gunn had a woman, and a strapping 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" (p. 41). Through Christie's numerous tales of Piper Gunn's exploits Morag comes to feel a sense of kinship with the past as well as a growing awareness of her own present identity.

As a teenager she also learns the hard realities of social prejudice. Attracted to a Métis classmate, Jules Tonnerre, she is baffled by and rebels against the town's ostracism of his family. "The Tonnerres (there are an awful lot of them) are called *those breeds*, meaning halfbreeds. They are part Indian, part French, from away back. They are mysterious. People in Manawaka talk about them but don't talk *to* them. Lazarus [Jules' father] makes homebrew down there in the shack in the Wachakwa valley, and is often arrested on Saturday nights. Morag knows. She has heard. They are dirty and unmentionable" (p. 56). Yet the pride and need to define her strengths that drive Morag also motivate Jules Tonnerre and this draws them together. Morag's first sexual encounter is with Jules, and years later when her marriage is breaking up, she has his child.

In the meantime, she has begun to discover herself through writing, first as a reporter on the *Manawaka Banner*, later by beginning her first novel as an antidote for the sterility of the relationship with her academic husband, Brooke Skelton. The blandness of their life in Toronto both obsesses and stifles her. "Who the hell could let their hair down here? . . . [Since she had last seen] Christie, Morag has experienced increasingly the mad and potentially releasing desire to speak sometimes as Christie used to speak, the loony oratory, salt-beefed with oaths, the stringy lean oaths with some protein in them, the Protean oaths upon which she was reared. But of course does no such thing" (p. 209). Though she begins to find release and self-assurance in her writing, she continues to resent Brooke treating her like a child. In a "memorybank movie" entitled "The Tower," she recalls how his insistence on calling her "little one" triggered an outburst of the profanity she has longed to use, marking her first real taste of freedom. Though Brooke's reaction is to call her hysterical, she has in fact broken down barriers and come a giant step closer to the freedom and selfhood she seeks.

Having proclaimed her right to be taken seriously, Morag becomes aware of a new confidence in her abilities as a writer. She defends her rejection of Brooke's help as proofreader for her novel, and in correspondence with an interested publisher she finds "it is a relief to be able to discuss . . . [the novel], no holds barred, with no personal emotional connotations in the argument. Only when the process is completed does she see that it has been like exercising muscles never before used, stiff and painful at first, and then later, filled with the knowledge that this part of herself really is there" (p. 212).

What sets Morag apart from previous Laurence protagonists—Hagar, Rachel, Stacey, and Vanessa—is her early clear-sighted recognition of her predicament and her ability to begin taking corrective measures, however difficult and painful, to improve her situation while there is still time. Nearly twenty years after leaving Brooke, having watched her daughter move into a perilous independence of her own, Morag is alone again. As Pique leaves, Morag candidly assesses her position: "I've got my work to take my mind off my life. At forty-seven that's not such a terrible state of affairs. If I hadn't been a writer, I might've been a first-rate mess at this point. Don't knock the trade" (p. 4).

Unable to judge the significance or even the effect of her work, she does recognize that "in a sense, it did not matter. The necessary doing of the thing—that mattered" (p. 369).

For those who know Margaret Laurence's work, *The Diviners* will seem a summing up, a return to familiar territory in the crowded, vital world of Manawaka, and a fresh appraisal of that world in which various characters from the earlier novels are seen in new perspective. It is also a more consciously Canadian novel than the others, with the legends of Piper Gunn and Jules' tales of Rider Tonnerre and the days of Métis glory providing the curious amalgam of fiction and history that make cultural myth. The spirit of place is caught and crystallized too, perhaps best when Morag recognizes the coming of winter in the time-honored Canadian way: "Sitting on the dock, Morag became aware of an unmistakable sound overhead. Very far up, they flew in their V-formation, the few leaders out front, the flock sounding the deep long-drawn-out resonant raucous cry that no words could ever catch but which no one who ever heard it could ever forget. A sound and a sight with such a splendour in it that the only true response was silence. When these birds left, the winter was about to happen. When they returned, you would know it was spring. The Canada geese were flying south" (p. 336).

As the novel draws to a close, Morag ponders the fate of her friend Royland, a water diviner who loses his gift, and wonders about the future course of her own talent. It is tempting to speculate on whether she is echoing Margaret Laurence's own present uncertainty: Mrs. Laurence has said recently that she may never write another novel. However that may be, one must certainly see *The Diviners* marking the end of the Manawaka cycle in her work; at the same time it assures her reputation as one of Canada's most competent novelists.

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"Martin": A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Hydrocephalic

In "Martin," from the collection *La Fièvre*¹ by J. M. G. Le Clézio, a constant irony bears witness to the author's fascination with adventures of the mind, while mercilessly condemning the gifts which make those intellectual explorations possible. The ironic mode permits him to assert and at the same time refuse all acquiescence in the assertion. "Martin" derides, and thereby negates, but also renews and develops ideas which infuse Le Clézio's entire canon.

Central characters in Le Clézio's other writings can often be linked onomastically with an allegorical Everyman. Martin's family name, on the contrary, is Torjmann, which, through its Germanic roots, marks him as the Fool-man, the exception. The juxtaposition of his two dominant traits transcribes his uniqueness: he is a genius; he is hydrocephalic. Thus, even Martin's basic nature pushes to absurdity Le Clézio's underlying antiaristotelian philosophy that unity derives from reconciled opposites, and from the beginning the reader is made aware of the author's autoparodistic intentions.