DRAMAS OF DESIRE IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S *A JEST OF GOD*, *THE FIRE-DWELLERS*, AND *THE DIVINERS*

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The grand narratives of modernity have come under attack by post-modern theorists for at least two reasons: they reduce the rich particularity of life, and they are usually phallocentric in organization. Freud's Oedipus complex is one such narrative, organized around the equation of the masculine phallus with presence, and asserted by Freud to be the universal drama of desire. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari call the Oedipus complex into question:

> [w]e must pose the most far-reaching question in this regard: does the recording of desire go by way of the various stages in the formation of the Oedipus complex? Disjunctions are the form that the genealogy of desire assumes; but is this genealogy Oedipal, is it recorded in the Oedipal triangulation? Is it not more likely that Oedipus is a requirement or a consequence of social reproduction, insofar as the latter aims at domesticating a genealogical form and content that are in every way intractable? (13)

Deleuze's and Guattari's attack is two-pronged: desire has many other, different structures and genealogies than those of the Oedipus complex; the Oedipus complex is implicated in the ideologies underlying the historical conditions of its production. Attacking along the same lines as Deleuze and Guattari, Margaret Laurence's fiction works against the dogmatic and exclusive application of the Oedipal drama to the workings of desire. In *A Jest of God*, *The Fire-Dwellers*, and *The Diviners*, Laurence deconstructs, historicizes, and proposes alternatives to the Oedipus complex and its implications. In each novel, Laurence chooses a different location for the rearticulation of desire: Rachel reworks the structure of her desire in the personal sphere; Stacey stands on the thin line between public

and private spheres and breaks out of her Oedipal cage by collapsing the opposition between the two; Morag as a writer deconstructs the Oedipal configuration of the symbolic order.

At the beginning of *A Jest of God*, the structure of Rachel's desire is Oedipal. According to Freud's delineation of the Oedipus complex, a woman's psychological development is predicated on her phallic lack. In his *New Introductory Lectures*, Freud states that a little girl stops desiring her mother once she realizes her phallic lack, and that "the wish with which the girl turns to her father is no doubt originally the wish for the penis which her mother has refused her and which she now expects from the father" (162). Rachel's dream of her father illustrates her own sense of phallic lack:

> He is behind the door I cannot open. And his voice—his voice—so I know he is there lying among them, lying in state, king over them. He can't fool me. He says run away Rachel run away run away. I am running across the thick grass and small purple violets—weeds—dandelions. The spruce trees bend, bend down, hemming in and protecting. My mother is singing in a falsetto voice, the stylish tremolo, the ladies' choir voice. (25)

Rachel's father is the object of her desire, but she both lacks the ability to penetrate his realm and is forbidden by him to do so. She is rejected and confined to the realm of the mother, the realm of the castrated who sing in falsetto voices. Rachel's desire for her father is sexual: the "shadow prince" (25) of her preceding sexual fantasy merges with her father, the king of the dead. Because of her sense of phallic lack, Rachel represses active expression of her sexual desire. Freud writes that the little girl "gives expression to her entire dissatisfaction with her inferior clitoris in her efforts against obtaining satisfaction from it" (161). When Rachel's sexual fantasy begins to move from passive imagining to active masturbation, she denies and represses her desire: "I didn't. I didn't. It was only to be able to sleep" (25).

Initially, Rachel's repression of the active expression of her desire structures the dynamics of her relationships with others and the world. Her tension-laden relationship with her mother is controlled by her sense of phallic inferiority. Freud writes that "girls hold their mother responsible for their lack of a penis and do not forgive her for their being thus put at a disadvantage" (158). The realization of phallic lack prompts a turning away from the mother

which "is accompanied by hostility; the attachment to the mother ends in hate" (155). Like other active desires, this hate exists most often below the level of consciousness. Underneath Rachel's ostensibly pleasant relationship with her mother lies a hostility that Rachel attempts to deny. While thinking about her mother, Rachel's unconscious voice breaks through and utters, "My God. How can I stand—" (231), only to be repressed immediately by, "Stop. Stop it, Rachel" (23). Rachel's hysteric moment is likewise a function of her repression of active desire. In the tabernacle, the congregation acts out and sings the praises of a surrender to desire:

> In full and glad surrender
> I give myself to Thee,
> Thine utterly and only
> And evermore to be. (41)

As Rachel's unconscious desire to participate in that surrender swells, so does her conscious resistance: "How can anyone bear to make a public spectacle of themselves. How could anyone display so openly? I will not look. I will not listen" (41). The tension splits Rachel's consciousness, and her repressed desire forces itself into articulation in the form of "chattering, crying, ululating, the forbidden transformed cryptically to nonsense, dragged from the crypt" (42). In her article "Weaving Fabrications," Coral Ann Howells writes:

> In this "indefensible moment" Rachel's language does not issue from a unified centre of consciousness; rather, it issues from a rift in consciousness as words deformed and fragmented rise unbidden to her lips. (97)

In this moment, the repression of desire caused by Rachel's sense of phallic lack is shattered.

Laurence, however, makes us aware that Rachel's sense of phallic lack is not the manifestation of a universal structure of desire, but is a product of Rachel's extreme internalization of institutionally mediated structures of desire. The society in which Rachel lives and has grown up generally represses the expression of desire. The church that she and her mother attend has "a stained glass window [which] shows a pretty and clean-cut Jesus expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain" (47), and Reverend MacElfrish "is careful not to say anything which might be upsetting" (47). Rachel is aware that not only women suffer under this

oppression, and she speculates that Tom Gillanders' singing is the equivalent of her speaking in tongues: an embarrassment to which one is helplessly driven by an otherwise unspeakable desire. Nonetheless, the institutional framework in which Rachel's life is embedded is patriarchal and privileges the desire of the phallus. The heads of both the church Rachel attends and the school at which she teaches are male, and Rachel has internalized the inferior position interpellated for her by these institutions. When Willard walks into Rachel's classroom, she immediately acknowledges his culturally privileged position: "I know I must not stand up now, not until he's gone. I'm exceptionally tall for a woman, and Willard is shorter than I" (13). Called into Willard's office, she expresses only the desire to please him: "I can hear my own voice, eagerly abject. Probably I would get down on my knees if this weren't frowned upon" (51). Laurence makes us aware of the possibility of alternative structures of desire through Calla. Calla refuses to adhere unquestioningly to patriarchal power structures and encourages Rachel to refuse Willard's interpellation of her into an inferior subject-position: "He likes playing games with people, that's all. If you once said to him, 'Now listen here, Willard, quit making a mountain out of a molehill—'" (52). Furthermore, as a lesbian Calla refuses to recognize the phallus as the only destination of desire.

Through her sexual encounter with Nick, Rachel herself begins to restructure her desire away from the phallus. Nick provides Rachel with a "neutral place" (92) in both the material world and her super-ego in which her desires can be validated for what they are. Previously, Rachel's super-ego has had two voices: her mother's, to which Rachel turns when in need of a defence against the world, and the voices of society, which continually torment Rachel with grotesque pictures of her appearance to others. Nick is a third term in this "us" and "them" equation. Nick's voice expresses neither the tyranny of repression nor the hegemony of approval, but both urges Rachel to act on her own desires and engages her in a dialogue in which her voice carries equal weight. In Rachel's relationship with Nick, the phallus facilitates rather than subjects Rachel's desire. With Nick, Rachel can use imperatives to consciously express her desire: "'Nick—take your clothes off'" (153). This neutral place and the voice Rachel develops in this context become independent of Nick's physical presence. After imagining how ridiculous she must have looked making love on a Hudson Bay blanket,

she says "All right, God—go ahead and laugh, and I'll laugh with you, but not quite yet for a while" (121). She then counters her attempt to repress her thoughts: "Rachel, stop it. You're only getting yourself worked up for nothing. It's bad for you. Why bad? I've felt a damn sight better since I stopped considering my health" (121). Rachel here occupies a mental space from which she resists interpellation from the voices of both God and her mother. From this mental space Rachel also sees that "those eyes all around [which] have swollen to giants' eyes" (54) belong to people who, like Nick, have their "own demons and webs" (197). Rachel realizes that her super-ego is an internal construct, not an external reality: her perceptions of others' perceptions of her were distorted from reality by her own demons, her own repressed fears and desires.

From this newly acquired space Rachel inverts the Oedipal binary opposition that privileges the phallus over the womb. Rachel's supposed pregnancy is the material signifier of this change. At first Rachel considers it "a gift" for Nick, and dreams of being married to him and bearing more of his children. Freud writes that, in the development of the Oedipus complex in women, "the wish for a penis is replaced by one for a baby" (162). Rachel's desire initially is to find completion in Nick. This changes, however, when Rachel realizes that Nick has left, that "there isn't anyone. I'm on my own" (171). Her desire for the child is divorced from a sense of phallic lack: "Look—it's my child, mine. And so I will have it. I will have it because I want it and because I cannot do anything else" (177). The child is now not a gift to gain approval, nor a foreign addition that completes her. It is part of her, produced by her and belonging to her, and desired by her for these reasons. The womb, then, expresses a presence of which the phallus is only a shadow. The phallus is inferior, a product of the womb and a momentary intrusion on the fringes of a matrix of desires that cycle forth and return to it, self-referential in its validity. Consequently, Rachel can enact her desire to move from Manawaka without feeling the need to justify her decision either to her mother or to Willard. She also changes her relationship to her mother without reference to the paternal. "I am the mother now," Rachel says, ignoring the static and hostile relationship the Oedipus complex delineates for mother and daughter. In her article, Howells suggests that Rachel's story "is a story of rehabilitation within limits" (99). However, the contrary seems to be the case: Rachel's story is a story of rehabilitation

through breaking down prescribed limits and building upon the possibilities thus created.

In *The Fire-Dwellers*, Laurence considers the connection between the structures of desire and civilization. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud writes that

> we cannot fail to be struck by the similarity between the process of civilization and the libidinal development of the individual. . . . Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development. (742)

According to Freud, the development of desire through the Oedipus complex determines the larger structure of civilization; in the Oedipus complex a series of related binary oppositions are begun that find their larger logical expression in a particular type of civilization. Because Freud spins his Oedipal yarn around the plenipotent phallus and the fear of its absence, he develops an opposition in the Oedipal mind between the mother as inferior, lacking power and authority, and freely loving, and the father as superior, the giver of power and authority, whose respect must be won through conflict. This leads to a hierarchical split between the private sphere of the mother and the public sphere of the father in which power is wielded in battles to win respect and the ability to be a lawgiver. In short, the larger realization of the Oedipus complex is the epic, heroic civilization ruled by the stern phallic Father.

In *The Fire-Dwellers*, Laurence shows the Oedipal nature of the civilization in which Stacey lives. It manifests itself in Stacey's and Mac's relationships with their two sons. Mac shows the boys little affection, thinking that it will ruin them as men if he does. When Duncan has nightmares and Stacey gets out of bed to comfort him, Mac reacts negatively: "Leave him. You're going to ruin that kid, Stacey. Boy of that age shouldn't have his mother tearing in to see what's the matter every time he wakes up" (27). Mac does not comfort Duncan when he cries, but tells him "you're going to get hurt; you're going to get bashed around; that's life. But for heaven's sake try to show a little guts" (111). Mac's love is not unconditional: Duncan must learn the right responses in order to gain Mac's approval, and he laments to Stacey that "I never do anything right" (111). Stacey's relationship with the boys is the opposite: she loves them unconditionally, and consequently the boys take it

for granted. She comments that "Ian doesn't give a damn for my approval. He knows he's got it anyway. It's Mac's he needs" (56).

The vision of society disseminated by the media is also Oedipal. The Westerns which Mac and Buckle watch on television assert the primacy of a male, conflict-oriented, civilizing process:

> The Ever-Open Eye. Western serial. Sing yippee for the days of the mad frontier. Boys were sure men in those days all right and men were sure giants. How could they miss? Not with them dandy six shooters. Tak! Tak! Splat. Instant power. Who needs women? (57)

The news headlines confirm that this vision still controls the values and the use of power in Western society. Under the headline "BOMBERS LAST NIGHT CLAIMED A DECISIVE VICTORY FOUR VILLAGES TOTALLY DESTROYED AND A NUMBER OF OTHERS SET ABLAZE," appears a photograph which reveals the values that triumphed in this victory:

> Some new kind of napalm just invented, a substance which, when it alights burning onto the skin, cannot be removed. The woman was holding a child about eighteen months old and she was trying to pluck something away from the scorch-spreading area on the child's face. (90)

Stacey is aware of the horrible possibilities inherent in Oedipal civilization, and her visions of the future of this civilization are apocalyptic: Stacey looks at the buildings downtown, "brash, flashing with colours, solid and self-confident" (14) and "sees them charred, open to the impersonal winds, glass and steel broken like vulnerable live bones, shadows of people frog-splayed on the stone like in that other city" (14).

Throughout most of the novel, Stacey is trapped in the ambivalent, intermediate nature of of the subject-position into which she is interpellated by Oedipal society. Her relationship with Mac and her status within the household are determined by the Oedipal division between public and private spheres. Mac's life takes place within the public sphere, Stacey's within the private sphere, and communication between the two is difficult and for the most part superficial. Stacey notes that Mac "doesn't want to know anything difficult about me or the kids. Nothing. Okay, and now I don't want to tell him, either" (193). As the head of the private sphere, Stacey has a tenuous position in the hierarchy of family

power. During family arguments Stacey finds herself "running interference again, never knowing if rightly or wrongly, or whose side I'm on or why I should be on anybody's side" (55). It is Stacey's task to "keep these kids quiet for one minute" (55), but it is Mac who possesses the authority that from Stacey's lips "sounds corny" (55). Stacey notes that "I stand in relation to my life both as a child and as a parent" (46). Stacey's position is ambivalent not just in terms of family power, but also in terms of power in society in general. In one of her dreams, Stacey sees the world on fire, and "all the men around have to go and fight it. That is the law of the land. . . . But only the men are forced to go. The children have no business there" (30). Stacey, neither a man nor a child, is suspended on a bridge, forbidden to join in the fight to extinguish the fire and unable to lead her children to a greener world. She is powerless either to effect a change in civilization or to escape it.

Throughout the novel, however, Stacey is aware of the culturally mediated and historically contingent nature of the Freudian family romance. The split in the narrative between Stacey's inner thoughts and outer speech often illustrate that, while she may be outwardly conforming to her Oedipal role, she is skeptical about its status as the universal structure of desire. When displaying affection for her boys, Stacey consciously "restricts herself to putting a hand on their hair" (17), having read a magazine article entitled "Are You Castrating Your Son?" (17). While troubled by these types of articles, Stacey is skeptical of them, and comments that the article "Nine Ways the Modern Mum May Be Ruining Her Daughter" (17) was probably written by someone in a "jazzy office stuffed with plastic plants and never a daughter in sight" (17). Furthermore, Stacey articulates alternative evaluations and structures of desire for herself, her son, and society, based on desires marginalized by the Oedipus complex. Stacey re-evaluates the conflict between Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, asserting the moral primacy of the domestic over the heroic by supporting Clytemnestra's killing of Agamemnon. She enacts this re-evaluation later on when Mac sacrifices Duncan's emotions to the masculine ideal. When Duncan cries because he has cut himself on a rusty nail, Mac actively expresses his disapproval, and Stacey thinks "I could kill you, Mac. I could stab you to the very heart right this minute" (110). She questions the masculine ideal to which Mac is forcing Duncan to conform. She knows that "the one thought Mac can't bear"

(28) is "the insufficient masculinity of one of his sons" (28), but still thinks that "lots worse things could happen to them than to be queer, and that when they're away and on their own, in some ways it wouldn't matter to me at all who they held as long as there was someone and they could bring themselves to cry out" (28). Stacey's visions of alternative societies take the form of pioneer, post-apocalyptic, or science-fiction narratives. All of these narratives express Stacey's perception of the present civilization as one in which "the Roman legions are marching" (85) and "strange things are happening, and the skeletal horsemen ride" (85). The narratives illustrate Stacey's desire to "pierce through" (85) to the "unknown houses" (85) in which live "people who live without lies" (85). Throughout most of the novel, however, the alternative structures of desire that Stacey envisions must remain within her own private sphere: she is silenced by the professor from whom she is taking the Greek Classics course, by Mac, and by her own historical circumstance. The silencing is often effected covertly by the ever present threat of institutional oppression. Stacey's urge to explain to the young girl on the bus that "under this chapeau lurks a mermaid, a whore, a tigress" (15) is contained by the fear that "she'd call a cop and I'd be put in a mental ward" (15).

Laurence furthers her historicization of Oedipal society by exposing to the reader those aspects of its material foundations that it attempts to hide. In its exaltation of the public at the expense of the private, the Oedipal society glosses over the fact that the public and the private are intertwined, the public built on and dependent on the private. Freud's delineation of the Oedipus complex seems predicated upon an aristocratic or upper-middle-class society, in that there are servants to perform domestic duties. In this situation, once a child has passed out of the nursery she or he can depend on the servants to meet her or his needs, and so any remaining authority the mother possesses is merely a token given her by the father. This is not the case in the suburban Vancover household that Stacey runs with the skills of a "sergeant-major" (89). Stacey coordinates the movement into the public sphere every morning, preparing her children and her husband for school and work. She recognizes what is left unsaid by Freud: although scorned by those who go out into the public sphere, the mother preserves their egos from collapse. The fragile phallic ego needs constantly "to be told everything is all right" (66). Stacey's singular impor-

tance in holding the family together so that there can even be such a thing as a family romance is evidenced by the different familial reactions to occasions when Mac or Stacey is late. When Mac is late, only Stacey notices, but without worry; when Stacey is late Mac contemplates calling the police—but at least she's "back in time to make breakfast" (168). Under Laurence's scrutiny, the division between public and private that Oedipal society seeks to maintain begins to break down.

Laurence presses her attack on Oedipal society beyond questioning its universal validity and revealing what it attempts to hide. Through Stacey's experience, Laurence demonstrates the inadequacy of the Oedipus complex to account for the totality of the dynamics of desire and to argue the possibility of effecting changes to the structure of desire in the material world. Elements in Stacey's experience contradict Oedipal logic. Her father, far from being present and the giver of authority, was a figure of absence in Stacey's childhood, more concerned with the dead than the living. Stacey's relationship with her daughter, Katie, bears little resemblance to the primarily hostile Oedipal mother-daughter relationship. Musing on her children's confidence in her, Stacey comments that "Katie lost it long ago. And yet in some ways not. Look at how she was that day with Tess. She thought I would have known what to say" (223). Her relationship with Katie is mediated by desires other than competition for the phallus, desires such as their mutual love of dancing that have no reference to the phallus. Through her recognition of their mutual love of dancing Stacey acknowledges a complex relationship with Katie that encompasses love and sorrow, continuity and discontinuity, identity and difference, without using the idiom of conflict: "You won't be dancing alone for long, Katie. It's all going for you. I'm glad. Don't you think I'm glad? Don't you know how beautiful you are? Oh Katie love. I'm glad. I swear it" (127).

Furthermore, Stacey's psyche is structured by desires that flow in channels other than those of the family romance. Stacey decides to continue her relationship with Luke because it provides her with a sense of self that is not dependent on her family: "I would know once again the feeling of another man, and I would have done something that belonged only to me, was mine only, related only to me, nothing to do with any of them" (193). Through her affair with Luke, Stacey sees the possibility of changing the

Oedipal structure of her desire and her family relationships. In her article "Identity in *The Fire-Dwellers*," Nancy Bailey argues that Luke can be seen "in terms of the internal self of the protagonist, as an animus" (116). To translate from Jungian to Freudian terms, Luke can be seen as the catalyst and facilitator of desires that have been marginalized by the feminine Oedipal subject-position into which society has interpellated Stacey. Luke spurs Stacey to break down the opposition between public and private that has silenced the expression of her desires. He asks her "What scares you, merwoman?" (178), acknowledging the validity of Stacey's concerns about civilization and her children, and recognizing an aspect of Stacey beyond her role as housewife. The question Luke asks Stacey is not the Freudian "What does woman want?" (Jones 421) but "what do you want?" (209). Here she has the opportunity to structure her desire according to her own vision. Her choice is strategic and made out of a sense of responsibility to her own children and to all children: she chooses to go against what she wants, not in order to conform to her Oedipal role, but to work against it. She does this by attempting to bridge the gap in communication between herself and Mac, to eliminate the opposition between public and private spheres that structures their relationship. At the novel's end, Stacey and Mac are able to talk about personal concerns and then "make love after all, but gently, as though consoling one another for everything that neither of them can help or alter" (279). No longer a battlefield in which the Oedipal hero conquers and the woman submits, their lovemaking has become an embrace in which strength and weakness, love and sorrow, are shared.

In *The Diviners*, Laurence leaves the Oedipus complex behind. Morag's family romance takes place within larger historical and ideological contexts in which there are multiple, often contradictory, privileged sites of presence around which desire is structured. Morag's behavior in school is determined by her relation to two such sites of presence: intelligence and class. Morag is intelligent and loves words, and yet her clothing, idiom and friends indicate her lack of membership in the privileged social class to which Stacey Cameron grudgingly belongs. The tension thus generated has complex results. Morag feels acutely her lack of social status and compensates for it by valorizing her lack: she sits at the back of the class and is the toughest girl in the school. Nonetheless, she

sees the opportunities an education can provide, and she loves learning. Her policy for school is, then, to "work like hell, that is like the dickens. Although not letting on to the other kids" (133). Her experiences of school as an institution that privileges certain sites of presence determine her ambivalent relationship with Christie. She loves Christie for the stories he tells and for his own love of words but hates him for his lack of social manners and standing. Christie and Morag "together . . . look at the strange words" (74) of *Ossian* in Gaelic, and Morag urges Christie to "read some more in our words" (75). When, however, Prin serves dinner and Christie displays his lack of socially acceptable table manners, "Morag wants to hit him so hard his mouth will pour with blood" (75). Rather than fixed, immutable channels of desire that work around only the presence or absence of the phallus, the channels of desire that structure Morag's relationship with Christie are fragile, worked around a number of socially constructed sites of presence and fraught with contradiction and irony.

Morag's psychological development occurs as a series of formations and resolutions of structures of desire around different sites of presence. In her article "Consolation and Articulation in Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*," Lynette Hunter observes that "the world of Morag Gunn is a set of structured consolations in which the complicity in relationships of social order and power is shown to be comforting. Within this world there is a necessity for an articulation of the consolation, a speaking out that reveals the hidden or evaded or oppressed/repressed" (133). Each consolation is a social construct, a site of presence implicated in an ideology which works toward reproducing itself by structuring desire in a particular way. Morag develops by facing the ideological implications of her structures of desire. As a child, Morag finds consolation in Jesus because "he is friendly and not stuck-up" (87). Only after Morag is not chosen to sing a solo in the Christmas Eve service does she realize that Jesus is mediated through an institution that discriminates along class, gender, and race lines. She then turns for sites of presence to other narratives such as the tales of Piper Gunn. The same process is at work in Morag's marriage to and divorce from Brooke. In him she looks for the ultimate meaning of her life and "will do whatever he wants her to do" (213). To gain Brooke, Morag conforms to the subject-position of "genuine innocence" (213) that he interpellates her into, and in so doing loses temporarily

her own history and identity. Jules's visit restores to Morag a sense of a self beyond Brooke's construction of her, and she realizes that this construction is a function of Brooke's own problematic mental life and ultimately of the British imperial ideology that scarred Brooke's childhood. When she leaves him, "she is shocked and awed by his pain. At the same time, she sees for the first time that he has believed he owns her" (299).

Laurence's rejection of the Oedipal society moves to a higher level with Morag's rejection of the Oedipal configuration of the symbolic order. Morag's first encounters with larger symbolic structures such as narrative and history are problematic. Christie's tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels in Skinner's tale of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet present Morag with two differing accounts of the same event, both of which oppose a third narrative, the history Morag learns in school. The tellers of both narratives, Christie and Jules, claim their narratives possess truth. Morag is faced with the possibility of multiple truths, a possibility that runs counter to the Oedipal assumption of one Truth. Skinner tells her that what is called History is only the winner's story: "the books, they lie about him. 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" (161). Morag comes to realize that these stories are "both more and less true" than the historical event itself, and she rejects the notion of a single truth. In the same fashion, Morag rejects the Oedipal notion of a single set of standards for good writing. Once married to Brooke, Morag's writing comes under his supervision. Hunter comments that "Brooke uses the position of literary critic/professor to control her expression of herself. He sees her both as child and as incompetent writer" (142). As long as Morag accepts Brooke's opinion of her work, she cannot write. To write, she must reject Brooke's control, and consequently her first book is published without Brooke's advice and in Morag's maiden name. She tells Brooke: "I know you know a lot about novels. But I know something, as well. Different from reading or teaching" (281). Brooke's response predictably asserts the primacy of the judgement of the institution he represents. Morag frees herself completely from the notion of a hierarchy of literary values only when she leaves Brooke. She then incorporates a multiplicity of discourses into her work and

her beliefs without organizing them around a unitary Truth. *The Diviners* is the result.

Margaret Laurence's fiction has often been dismissed as limited by the conventions of realistic fiction. This, however, is a misleading criticism. While it is true that Laurence does work with these conventions, she does not do so without a profound awareness of the very fictional nature of reality itself. Laurence, then, works within the conventions of realism in order to examine the material causes and effects of those conventions that structure what we call "reality." Laurence shows the reader the unfolding of the oppressive Oedipal drama in society in order to historicize and deconstruct it and then to suggest alternative roles that might lead to a better society grounded in the acceptance of a multiplicity of non-hierarchical narratives and truths.

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