

# Margaret laurence the diviners essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Margaret Laurence was born Jean Margaret Wemyss on July 18, 1926 in the prairie town of Neepawa, Manitoba, Canada. Both of her parents passed away in her childhood, and Laurence was raised by her aunt and maternal grandfather. Laurence decided in childhood that she wanted to be a writer, and began writing stories in elementary school. Her professional writing career began in 1943 with a job at the town newspaper, and continued in 1944 when she entered the Honours English program at Winnipeg's United College.

Laurence's fiction was thereafter concerned with Canadian subjects, but she maintained her interest in African literature and in 1968 published a critical analysis of Nigerian literature, (*Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists 1952-1966*). Her first work with Canadian subject matter *The Stone Angel* was published in 1964, and was the first of Laurence's group of "Manawaka novels", so called because they each take place in the fictional prairie town of Manawaka, a community modelled after Laurence's hometown of Neepawa, Manitoba.

Laurence received a great deal of critical and commercial acclaim in Canada, and in 1971 was honoured by being named a Companion to the Order of Canada. In the early 1970s, Laurence returned to Canada and settled in Lakefield, Ontario. During this time she continued to write and held positions as writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto, the University of Western Ontario, and Trent University. In 1974, Laurence completed her final novel, *The Diviners*, for which she received the Governor General's Award and the Molson Prize.

She was also a founder of the Writers' Trust of Canada (is a charitable organization providing financial support to Canadian writers. Founded by Margaret Atwood, Pierre Berton, Graeme Gibson, Margaret Laurence and David Young, and registered as a charitable organization on March 3, 1976, the Writers' Trust celebrates and rewards the talents and achievements of Canada's novels), a non-profit literary organization that seeks to encourage Canada's writing community. The Diviners

The Diviners is the fifth and last work in Margaret Laurence's cycle of fiction concerning Manawaka, a mythical prairie town based in part on her own home, Neepawa, Manitoba. I have listened an interview with Margaret Laurence about this book. There she said that this is not the end of her career, but the end of this period of Manawaka, like, how she said ' the blue period, the pink period of Picasao'. Concerned most conspicuously with one woman's search for her roots, The Diviners is also an epic tale about the origins of Canada as a whole and the Indian, French, English, and Scottish peoples who formed the nation.

Talking about the title, in that interview, which I mentioned, Margaret Laurence was asked, why did she chose the Diviners as the title of the book. She answered that ' Writing is kind a form of divining. Any writer tries to catch the vibrations of the characters, tries to feel their way into characters heads. ' She also compared this novel to a statue, when a sculpture inside it, is waiting to be discovered. This is how she feels about the novel.

The major character Morag Gunn is a successful forty-seven-year-old novelist who has bought a farm in rural Ontario, where she is trying to write a new

novel. Many novelists, from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to James Joyce to James Michener, have written novels describing the lives of young artists and the paths by which they came to be novelists. It was not until later, however, that women novelists began to undertake the same task. Laurence is among the most distinguished of these, and *The Diviners* is among the most impressive examples of the genre.

*The Diviners* is also an autobiographical novel because the protagonist Morag Gunn is obviously based on Margaret Laurence herself, being raised in a small Manitoba town, working on a local newspaper, marrying a professional man, separating, becoming a novelist, living for stretches in Vancouver and Britain. Margaret Laurence's technique in *The Diviners* is as ambitious as her plot. The novel is divided into five sections, the first of which, "River of Now and Then," introduces her grand theme: "The river flowed both ways.

The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction." Susan J. Warwick, who wrote the book 'River of Now and Then: Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*' says that symbolically, the water for which the diviners search is the river of history, always dangerously in movement, yet once entered always there as an expression of identity through past and present, a river that flows both ways. The loose, wide quality of the novel has brought it some denigration but this is an effect of a method, which exploits memory.

The end of the narrative elaborates the metaphor to emphasize the truth that Morag finally divines—that life, like literature, is a continuum formulated

by the interplay of past and present, fact and imagination. In a sense Laurence's epic, like James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), begins where it ends, as Morag returns to the novel she was writing when the narrative opened: " Morag returned to the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words, and to set down her title. The title of Morag's book, plainly, will be *The Diviners*. " *River of Now and Then*" also introduces Laurence's innovative techniques for relating Morag's story. The first of these, called " Snapshots," are pseudodocumentary renderings of Morag's past whose obvious artificiality draws attention to her powers of fiction making. The Snapshots—stills, as it were, of Morag's earliest memories—are embellished both with childish interpolations and with Morag's mature commentary on them: " 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. " In the Snapshots and in Morag's other mechanism for relating her history, her " Memorybank Movies," the narrator always speaks of herself in the third person, reinforcing the reader's sense that this orphaned artist is creating her own past. Laurence employs the film metaphor again in sections labeled " Innerfilms," which occur more frequently toward the end of the book and the present time of Morag's narrative.

Unlike the Snapshots and Memorybank Movies, which fictionalize reality to reveal inner truths, the Innerfilms are made up out of whole cloth, representing more recent psychic realities that Morag has yet to rework, as she has the more concrete Snapshots, into a meaningful pattern. As Laurence's novel repeatedly demonstrates, art, or fictional re-creation, is a <https://assignbuster.com/margaret-laurence-the-diviners-essay/>

means of formulating the past. Just as Morag discovers that Christie's myths are truer for her than the reality of Scotland, so Morag creates her own history through the technical inventions she employs in *The Diviners* to relate her autobiography.

She is, as she discovers, Christie's true inheritor, graced with the ability to recast the past in order to divine its hidden meaning. Controversy of the book *The Diviners* became a source of public controversy in 1976 and 1978. The controversy centered on attempts to remove the novel from the grade thirteen curriculum in Ontario public schools on grounds that it was pornographic. The novel was attacked by conservative groups for featuring blasphemy, immorality, adultery, and fornication, but as more than one observer has noted, what these readers seem to have found most offensive was Morag's independence.

The backlash against *The Diviners* was part of the conservatism that followed in the wake of the hedonism of the 1960's. *The Diviners* is not a revolutionary book, but it certainly played a part in the profound changes brought about by feminism in the 1970's in its presentation of a heroine who achieves true independence on her own terms and not through the agency of a man. In an interview granted in the midst of the public debate about her book, Margaret Laurence stressed Morag's achievement not only of financial independence but also of internal freedom..

All in all, today I talked about Margaret Laurence, the plot of the book, the structure of it and some main themes and ideas and controversy of the text. I can say that it was a little bit hard to read this book, because of this strange

structure and because of that it was difficult to understand The Diviners. In the internet reviews I saw some women, which said that she read this book about her 19 age and then about 40 and it was a big difference of understanding and also she liked it more at the second time of reading. So, I decided that I will read that book later in my life to compare.