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**MORAG'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S
THE DIVINERS: A STUDY**

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Abstract:

Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974) is fourth Manawaka novel which has been highly praised by many critics as the most excellent achievement in her writing career. Like Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey, Morag also fits a feminist idea of a hero. She is a role model that teaches her readers to fight for their right to a career, as well as be wives and mothers. Morag raises the baby on her own in Vancouver, London, and McConnell's Landing. As a female protagonist Morag, struggles to retain her identity through her writing as a successful writer in male dominated society. Morag's fight is to be a career woman in a society that pushes women, especially mothers, into the role of exclusive domesticity. Laurence points out this theme on the first page of the novel when Morag's daughter Pique leaves a note on the typewriter. Performing both the roles as a writer and mother simultaneously without disturbing each requires great struggle on her part. Her effort to have her work taken seriously is a frequent occurrence, but family and neighbours interrupt her writing. Morag has strength in her writing, and wants to continue her profession, but faces many problems while working. Despite all of these issues faced by Morag, her efforts make her to complete her journey as a writer. Morag achieves success in writing defeating all the adversities and performing the role of mother.

Keywords: Identity, Struggle, Writer, Career, Male Dominance and Strength, etc.

Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974) is fourth Manawaka novel which has been highly praised by many critics as the most excellent achievement in her writing career. It again deals with the themes present in her earlier three Manawaka novels, the search for identity, problem of individuality, isolation, the impossibility of total communication, and the importance of the past in determining the course of one's life. These themes are handled skillfully with more detail in this novel. As Clara Thomas observes, "The Diviners is a complex and a profound novel, an exploration of the meaning of a life, a quest, and finally, the affirmation of a life's meaning" (Thomas, 168). In Laurence's novels these are all aspects of the journey to self-knowledge undertaken by heroines who are isolated and have the problem of identity.

Like Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey, Morag also fits a feminist idea of a hero. She is a role model that teaches her readers to fight for their right to a career, as well as be wives and mothers. Morag raises the baby on her own in Vancouver, London, and McConnell's Landing. As a female protagonist Morag, struggles to retain her identity through her writing as a successful writer in male dominated society. Morag struggles with language and communication, this difficulty is shared with protagonists of earlier novels. As a talented writer, Morag's this problem is on a different level than that of the other women, but she battles it all the same.



Morag's fight is to be a career woman in a society that pushes women, especially mothers, into the role of exclusive domesticity. Laurence points out this theme on the first page of the novel when Morag's daughter Pique leaves a note on the typewriter, the tool of her mother's trade, "where Morag would be certain to find" (Laurence, *TD*, 3). Performing both the roles as a writer and mother simultaneously without disturbing each requires great struggle on her part. Her effort to have her work taken seriously is a frequent occurrence, but family and neighbours interrupt her writing. Morag has strength in her writing, and wants to continue her profession, but faces many problems while working. Sometimes she seeks help from a professor called Brooke Skeleton with whom she marries but realizes instead of helping her he tries to confine her in traditional role. Ward explains that fictional career women typically have a variety of difficulties, "motivation, the feeling that their career is a part of their identity, the role of mentors and teachers in their lives, the tension between their careers and expectations placed on them to fulfill traditional roles, and their desires for romantic heroes" (Laurence, *TD*, 180). Despite all of these issues faced by Morag, her efforts make her to complete her journey as a writer. Morag achieves success in writing defeating all the adversities and performing the role of mother.

The search for self knowledge and identity is especially difficult for Morag, since the age of four she has been without parents or family. Readers may praise Morag, as they do Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey, for her strength and ability to survive. From her childhood she leads a difficult life, but continues to survive as she determined to do as a child, "Eva seems like she is beaten by life already. Morag is not -- repeat not -- going to be beaten by life" (Laurence, *TD*, 113).

Christie has accepted his status as an outsider, but Morag is not ready to do so, and so she denies his attempts at comfort. This reaffirms for the reader the necessary loneliness of the quest for self knowledge: Morag must find her own path. She does not continue with the path which Christie has accepted she must find her own way for herself. Though Morag is different from other children from her childhood, she is open to learn throughout her life. As well as taking note of women in familial roles, Morag also learns in her earlier life that strength is not accepted as part of a woman's character. This is where her notion of herself as a strong individual comes into conflict with societal roles.

Guide and mentor Miss Melrose, Morag's teacher at Manawaka College, as a female guide, demonstrates that a single woman can have a successful career. As a mentor she talks to her Pupil, "about what is good and bad in writing" (Laurence, *TD* 98-9) and encourages her to submit her work to the school paper. Acceptance of her talent gives Morag strength because, "she has known for some time what she has to do, but never the knowledge to any other person or thought that any person might suspect" (Laurence, *TD* 99). This contact with someone who admires her writing causes Morag to dream about publishing her work and provides her with motives for writing that is a way to earn money and a way to escape Manawaka.

These strong women characters are obviously very influencing, which definitely help her to find her existence. Mrs. Gerson is an example of a strong working woman bringing up children without anybody's help. Even though, "her daughters are her life, she has a job and numerous interests" (Laurence, *TD*, 148). She encourages Morag to keep her mind on "higher things" (Laurence, *TD*, 149), than attracting men and introduces her to literature of a broader scope. She also shows Morag that a woman can nurture and be strong at the same time, "It is not only Mrs. Gerson's ability to reach out her arms and hold people, both literally and figuratively. It is also her strength" (Laurence, *TD*, 150). Though she has the guides since her childhood, Morag falls prey to a seducer. As seen in all the novels discussed in earlier chapters, a seducer is someone who appears in the beginning to help the hero in her quest but then does not help her personally to overcome the problems, that is, to make her own decisions or achieve her own goals. As her teacher, lover, and husband, Brooke Skelton has the



understanding to support Morag's writing but, instead of becoming her guide, he becomes her seducer because he demands that she should be his wife before anything else..

Morag gets attracted towards the Brooke's amazing qualities, "the prestige, the security, the intellectual fulfillment and the glamour" (Thomas, 151), so she marries to him. As an English professor, Brooke's ability with words is superior to any man that Morag has ever known and in the beginning he encourages her writing, saying that her work is "extremely promising" (Laurence, *TD*, 153). Morag sees in him everything she wants: language skills, intellectual fulfillment, and sexual satisfaction, not to mention prestige. At this position in her life, she is thrilled to give up her past as the scavenger's daughter. His words permit her to believe she will have the "everything" (Laurence, *TD*, 147) that she wants in life, "I only want to know you as you are now, my tall and lovely dark haired Morag, my love, with your very touching seriousness and your light heart. Never be any different, will you?" (Laurence, *TD*, 161). Morag's vision is to become successful writer which is difficult but not unattainable. For Morag, this everything includes writing at a professional level and communicating openly and equally with her husband and those around her. For Brooke, the same words indicate that he does not want her to grow. Though Brooke seems her guide and he would help her to achieve success in all the way but reality is different.

In the description of Brooke's setting, Laurence alerts us that he is not a positive figure that will encourage the hero on her quest. What Morag fails to see is that, even early on in their relationship, Brooke silences her and, even worse, she censors her own conversation fearing that he may know about her past and her dreams will drive him away. Rather than being the guide to communication that she had expected, Brooke quickly becomes a captor. While she is with him, it seems that possibly she might lose her battle to be a writer.

Brooke quickly takes ownership as Morag becomes "his woman" (Laurence, *TD*, 162). She is absolutely cut off from intellectual pursuits and her writing must fit into a schedule that does not interfere with her husband's routine. As Morag becomes more and more self-aware, she moves further from Brooke, and spends her day mostly writing. But by evening she gets ready for Brooke's arrival, preparing his dinner and dressing up herself alluringly with her hair done the way he likes it.

He believes his demands should be given the priority over her writing and sees her as his wife, not a writer. She feels she must lie to him regarding the importance of her first novel to her. Instead of helping her to create her identity as a writer, he becomes threat to it. Earlier she had experienced the individuality, marrying him she has lost it. She married expecting it would be helpful to her profession, but contrary she is burdened with more difficulties. In order to achieve success she must struggle more. She is confined in to familial role which can be harmful and inescapable. During her married life, Morag encounters this first major, "tension between career and female expectations" (Ward, 182).

Though late but she realizes his ownership over her which is harmful to her career as well as existence. Morag is now habituated to his strategies, she says, "it has become his game" (Laurence, *TD*, 200). Due to his selfish nature when he tries to persuade her she feels, "to shove him away, wants no part of him" (Laurence, *TD*, 200) but, fails to do so. Morag becomes gradually aware that performing role of wife and remaining Brooke's wife for whole life can hold her back. The hero now hears a call to leave her married life, because, in it, she remains static and unenlightened. The call begins gently and then builds. On her return from Manawaka, Morag stops cutting her hair in the "more feminine" (Laurence, *TD*, 180) fashions that Brooke prefers. Like Sampson, this act reinforces her strength and is the initiation of her escape.

Morag activates her voice which was lost and tells Brooke that she is now a mature woman and she, "can't bear not to be taken seriously" (Laurence, *TD*, 211), as well as warns him, "can't bear to be treated as a child" (Laurence, *TD*, 211). She insists on speaking the truth about her past and herself.



She is a woman with a strong voice that needs to be heard; she is a woman who is a serious writer, not a wife and a housekeeper. Her suggesting Brooke that she is proud of her height and her strength and she will no longer be his “Little one” (Laurence, *TD*, 210) is symbolical in the sense that she is strong enough to go against him, if he continues dominating her. She regains her lost self and, in the process, puts her needs above his because she fears that, “remaining there meant to be chained forever to that image of yourself which he must have and which must forever be distorted” (Laurence, *TD*, 211). She realizes that her need to pursue a writing career is more important to her than her wish to please his needs as a wife. She now sees him for the captor who has held her back until now.

In order to assist Morag to complete this call to adventure, Jules Tonnerre comes back in her life as guide, a green-world lover, and a “shaman” (Laurence, *TD*, 223). Jules is a part of Morag’s sexual awakening and she relates his “brown hawkish face” (Laurence, *TD*, 103) and his crow like voice with nature.

Morag in her life associates only with Jules whom she considers sensible to understand her problems, her relationship proved wrong from which she had expected a lot. So having that understanding Jules connects with Morag in a largely non-verbal way. One would expect that any guide for a writer would be articulate but, for him, “apparently nothing needs to be spoken” (Laurence, *TD*, 348). Like a proper guide, Jules neither offers Morag solutions nor takes over the job to get rid of her problems. The proper guide instead of helping directly to overcome her problems enables to do so. Here also he let her to make her own decisions and mistakes. Jules does not ask her to marry him, even though they do not have a child together, nor does he guard her from Brooke. He does not show his concern with her problems he says Brooke is, “your problem” (Laurence, *TD*, 220). He, however, offers her support when she needs it, “Jules puts one arm around her, as though assisting along the Street someone who is maimed or crippled” (Laurence, *TD*, 220). This is a relationship of equality and Morag has the opportunity to do the same for Jules when he is on the verge of death.

Until protagonists are not aware of their problems, they cannot find the solution. Here Morag has understood her problems, being caught in Brooke’s trap she is not able to become a good writer as well as have her individuality. In Jules’ room, she reaches the inner self that has been lost to her. Journey towards change is necessary and inevitable to overcome the problem, though it is not easy. There are captors and events that threaten a successful quest, not becoming the victim or giving up efforts leads towards successful journey. Morag trades married confinement with being hemmed in by Vancouver and motherhood. This confinement and treatment is indicative of Morag’s future for many years to come.

In England, Morag faces more difficulties to achieve a vocation. It is not that she rejects to have loved ones or the responsibilities that come with them; it is the unfair pull between career and, “trying to fulfill the traditional feminine roles” (Ward, 182) that makes the dual roles such a conflict. Naturally, as a mother Morag has attachment to Pique so she takes care of each type of her daughter but the necessity of financial remuneration from her writing becomes paramount now because she has a child to support. Her dealing with time and emotional restrictions on a scale that she has never faced before needs additional efforts to be a good mother and writer.

Career woman faces this problem, sometimes she is compelled to give up her career being found difficult devoting her time whether to child or career. Morag is not a kind of woman who gives up career. Ward rightly says it is common for a, “career woman heroine try to separate her life as careerist from her life as woman” (Ward, 182) and Morag does just this. When she was married to Brooke Skelton, she attempted to “get outside the novel” (Laurence, *TD*, 187) before he came home and, now she gives her time first to Pique and second to her writing. Though she wants to be successful writer she prefers to give time to her child. From the time Pique is born, Morag adjusts her writing time to accommodate her: she writes longhand so not to wake the baby; she writes at night so



she can do things with the child during the day; she writes during the day when Pique is at school but walks her to and from class; when Pique is ill she does not write at all.

Morag has experienced seducers as well as guides in her life; she is now with more knowledge and good understanding of her own situations. The significance of another positive influence in Morag's life comes to the fore when Christie Logan dies. He plays multiple roles in *The Diviners*: he is a mentor and teacher for Morag's writing, as was discussed earlier; he is a Wise Old Man figure; and he is the person who enables the Morag to come to terms with her parents. As a scavenger he is ridiculed and rejected by society but he continued his work without getting offended. Her leaving him will destroy the fragile veil which guards him from recognizing that he too is alone. Morag will move on to face and conquer her isolation, but Brooke continues to retreat from isolation as Morag initially did.

In a way Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey are seen feminist defined protagonists it is not denied that Morag aptly deserves this distinction. Morag is stronger enough to accept the challenges of her life and has the ability to overcome successfully. Morag Gunn's example gives the lesson that pride in any job or vocation is a valuable part of a woman's self-worth and that every woman who wants a career deserves the respect. Society or individual has no right to place women in roles that confine growth and fulfillment.

Morag, like Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey, can be praised for her strength and resilience. She has made a journey to self-awareness and survived it, "I am okay. And in a profound sense, this was true" (Laurence, *TD*, 368). Manawaka novels are completely devoted to the theme of women's predicament in male dominating society and their struggle to establish equal status and retain dignity as individuality. Morag's struggle is not exception to it.

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To Cite the Article: Shrishialya, Todkar, "Morag's Search for Identity in the Diviners" Literary Cognizance, II-4 (March, 2022): 57-62. Web.

