QUEST FOR FEMININE IDENTITY: A GENDER PERFORMATIVITY STUDY OF MARGARET LAURENCE'S MANAWAKA NOVELS

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Abstract

Between 1965 and 1980, Margaret Laurence is without a doubt Canada's most admired author. Her five works of fiction—*The Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God*, *The Diviners*, *The Fire Dwellers*, and *A Bird in the House—known* together as the Manawaka cycle, are praised by both readers and critics. As early as 1966, she is already well-known in many parts of the English-speaking world as a serious writer who had accomplished much and showed promise of even greater success. In 1969, she is considered the best fiction writer in Canada and one of the best in the world, and in 1974, she is described as a fine writer, certainly the best Canadian novelist yet to appear. Her art is frequently referred to as being among the most distinguished now created in Canada. Laurence's Manawaka books seem especially pertinent to those working on a national cultural project to establish Canadian literature as a genuine and recognized national category, as well as to those working on a parallel attempt to establish the importance of women's fiction. I have applied the concepts and ideas of Judith Butler and her theory of "Gender Performativity" as the methodology for searching for feminine identity and gender discrimination in the Manawaka novels of Margaret Laurence.

Keywords: feminine identity, gender discrimination, gender performativity, Manawaka novels.

Introduction

In Canada and elsewhere, literary critics and theorists have questioned the nature, if not the reality, of unified identities since the 1980s. When there are so many opposing factors at work in any human being's social upbringing, how can an individual be depicted as having stable psychological unity? Furthermore, how can any identity-based social movement hope to portray socially complicated individuals as having a single identity, given that it is built on the collective social and historical figuration of bourgeois individuality? As common as such issues are in academic circles now, they were preceded by years of intense critical focus on how such complicated social conditioning shaped a sense of vital individual identity. Judith Butler, a philosopher and literary theorist from the United States, is one of the most significant scholars in the subject of gender studies, and her theories of gender and sex identity have had a long-term impact on the field and beyond. Butler was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, to Hungarian and Russian Jewish parents—the majority of her maternal grandmother's family was slaughtered by the Nazis—and attended Hebrew school, where she acquired Jewish ethics and philosophy.

Butler's intellectual ancestors include Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, who add the discursive and socially constructed component of the gendered and sexualized subject to Butler's intellectual ancestors. Judith Butler, a well-known gender theorist, makes an attempt to debunk out-dated gender stereotypes. Judith Butler, a well-known gender theorist, makes an attempt to debunk out-dated gender stereotypes. Gender is a constructed identity that changes with time and the body. Performance, which is a process in which language and action patterns repeat themselves, defines gender. The concept of gender performativity may be seen in great detail in the way children are raised. Boys are taught from a young age that crying is something only girls do and that they must man up. Men are still considered as strong, intelligent persons in the twenty-first century, whilst women are still viewed as weak, emotional, and dependent beings. Later in life, these stereotypes would become routines that they would have to keep and be evaluated on, as well as stereotypes that they would have to maintain and be graded on, a concept known as "gender performativity."

The "theory of performativity" is employed in this chapter to examine how gender is a component of social action and, as such, has the capacity to change human perspectives on the world. Judith Butler's "theory of Gender Performativity," which she explores in her essay

"Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," asserts that gender is a fluid identity, not a permanent or stable one. The study examines the subject-object duality in social, political, and cultural settings using Butler's feminist perspective on gender. The goal is to reclaim a sense of complete identity and independence.

Feminist theory, particularly the concept of woman as a term-in-process, has impacted Butler's work. Heteronormativity can, of course, be destroyed, and Butler emphasizes that gender and sex do not have to be synonymous. Butler singled out the drag queen, underscoring the disruptive potential of his gender parody as a vehicle for challenging established power structures and cultural norms. Women are viewed by the bulk of society as weak and reliant on others. This remark is irrelevant and cannot be agreed upon completely. There are women who go through life alone, facing the challenges that life throws at them without someone to support them and raising their heads in the face of a society that refuses to lean back to them.

Analysis

Margaret Laurence, a Canadian novelist, has made it clear that she is committed to reducing gender discrimination and the unfair treatment of women in the home and in society. Her whole literary output focuses on exposing Canada's double standards when it comes to women's rights. In a society that is completely centred on male dominance, the opposite sex has unwritten rules: obey the norms, be obedient, and commit yourself to the family, especially for the husband; if you step out of line, expect to be abandoned or dumped. Laurence's novels are known as the Manawaka novels, and they consist of five books. In *The Stone Angel*, Laurence tells the painful story of a self-respecting, self-reliant, and tough girl whose stubborn nature keeps her isolated and outcast her entire life.

Laurence's masterpiece is, in reality, *The Stone Angel*. She addresses a wide range of issues and problems that senior citizens experience in today's advanced Canadian society. The elderly experience mental and physical collapse "as memory fails and social power is stripped away" (Rooke 36), and they suffer from existential dread as a result of their meaninglessness. Laurence, a humanitarian, speaks out against modern life's alienation and self-exile. *The Stone Angel*, the first novel in her Manawaka cycle, is a masterpiece about Hagar Shipley, a 90-year-old woman. Laurence is depicted in this vivid artwork as a skilled translator of the human psyche. She portrays Hagar as a rebel who defies phallocentric standards, but she suffers as a result of swimming against the river.

In addition, Hagar represents an estranged character who believes in living a life of dignity and respect. Laurence intends to use the stream of consciousness technique to delve into Hagar Shipley's past in order to uncover the foundations of Canadian history. She accepts the following, "My writing, then, has been my own attempt to come to terms with the past. I see this process as the gradual one of freeing oneself form the stultifying aspect of the past, while at the same time beginning to see its true value" (Laurence, *Heart of* 39–40).

Laurence elucidates a full-fledged self-analysis of Hagar's isolation and alienation from herself and society in the novel as a feminist. It's the story of a strong-willed elderly woman who resolves to forge her own path rather than rely on the tyrannical regime's mercy. All of her decisions and judgments are based on her strong prejudices and determination. "I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead" (Laurence, *The Stone* 87), she admits, but her determination to forge her own path keeps her from interacting with others. Totting the load of superfluous mental baggage that everyone carries, until the time of death, Hagar, a cantankerous old woman, tries to "survive with some dignity" (44). But, in the midst of this tough job of surviving with dignity, she encounters exile and isolation, turning her into a "Stone Angel." Her egoism and out-of-control fury detach her from the present, and her deep quiet decreases communication opportunities, making it impossible for her to connect with her husband and children.

The "reliable alliances" and "new relationship" rip away all the blinders of relationship issues, and Hagar and Marvin enjoy revealing their emotional feelings with one another. Finally, Hagar concedes that her treatment of Marvin was unduly harsh, saying, "you've not been cranky, Marvin. You've been good to me, always, a better son than John" (331). This is a big epiphany for Hagar in her final moments, and it reveals layer upon layer of her bias against Marvin. She counts

her own mistakes as she lies in the hospital bed, without thinking about her dead past. As Hagar declares, "Pride was my wilderness, old and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched" (318).

Despite spending her entire existence as an exile and an ostracized person, Margaret Laurence reveals that Hagar is entirely transformed by the end. The realization that she has flaws in her basic character establishes closeness between her and her family. The realization that she has neglected Marvin throughout her life is a form of reconciliation as well as repentance. Her seclusion comes to an end the minute she opens herself up in front of Marvin and Doris. Her stay in the hospital, as well as her efforts to alleviate others' pain, and eventually the small acts of kindness she performs while there, help her to break free from her estrangement and form a relationship with the world outside. As a result, she dies as a kind, caring old woman at the end of the narrative, rather than as an exiled and isolated character.

Margaret Laurence's character Hagar in *The Stone Angel* is an example of someone who does not want to bend down to a male-dominated society. Hagar believes that by withdrawing from her surroundings and entering her own world, she is preserving her individuality, yet this actually aids her in defeating herself. The conflict between her inner and outer personalities will last until her death. Hagar realizes near the end of her life that she has lived a restricted, contained lifestyle devoid of all human feelings. She comes to the realization that her life has been a complete waste. Hagar may have had a healthy, natural life for several years instead of just a few if she had been awakened to her actual self. Hagar always thinks about her life and her pride and sums it up by saying, "Pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear... I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains with me and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched. Oh my two, my dead. Dead by your hands or by mine? Nothing can take away those years" (292). This is a crucial phrase in comprehending Hagar's character at the conclusion because it fully reveals Hagar's perspective on her life.

The Diviners is the final installment in Margaret Laurence's acclaimed Manawaka cycle. Morag Gunn, the main character, appears to be Margaret Laurence's megaphone as well as a depiction of Laurence's personal struggle as a writer to a considerable extent. In her autobiography, she admits: "*The Diviners* came closest to being not precisely an autobiography but certainly a spiritual autobiography" (Laurence, *Dance* 6). Hence, Morag "may be a spiritual sister or shadow self, a mirror image reflecting her creator" (Stovel 101).

The Diviners is a biographical sketch about a 47-year-old writer who is trying to figure out who she is in a world ruled by a male-dominated power system. She goes through a lot of ups and downs just to give her life the right structure and significance. Laurence metaphorically presents her picture of identity crisis and survival through the psychology of her protagonist, Morag Gunn, from the very beginning of the story. Her protagonist, a middle-aged woman, lives alone in a house with a terrace, from which she observes the river's "seemingly contradictory" flow. It represents the potential and contrasts of a woman who wants to live her own life but must overcome obstacles. The opening of the novel starts with these words:

> The river ran in both directions. The wind blew from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction as the current travelled north to south. Even after all these years of river watching, Morag was still fascinated by this seemingly inconceivable contradiction that was made evident and possible. (Laurence, *Diviners* 11)

Such a natural conflict reflects the tensions in Morag Gunn's life as she seeks to build her distinct identity against the patriarchal power structure's customary stream. However, the process of such "apparently impossible contradiction" has imprisoned her with a deep sense of alienation, and she considers river slaughter as "something worse than killing a person" (11). "River of Now and Then," the novel's first portion, is a visual gallery of Morag's spiritual voyage, which takes her from the present to the past. She delves into her previous life through her image of "Then" and attempts to escape the harsh realities of her "Now," when she is utterly alone on the riverbank. She is at ease in the world of her memory's made-up stories. She fascinates herself, "much as the child did, to deny

the absence, to overcome the loss, to people the silence; and these stories structure her life, as they did that of her younger self, and determine who she is" (Hjartson 50).

Every human being needs conversation to survive, but Morag is utterly alone, and in the absence of human company, she establishes a relationship with her history. The fundamental goal of the "Now" story is to depict Morag's sense of loss, and we learn about her desire to discover her own identity, yet her traumatic experiences cut her off from the world outside. At the same time, she is dealing with the devastating effects of three losses, the first of which is the death of her 18-year-old daughter Pique, leaving her destitute and alone. Pique's abrupt departure is such a shock to her that it lingers in her mind at all times. Morag, now in her forties, is weary and fatigued. Her never-ending quest for existence has thrown her into a realm of isolation. She appears defenseless and helpless, unable to break free from her isolation. However, as a writer, she transforms all of her anguish and suffering into her writing, which aids her in overcoming her isolation. "I've got too much work on my hands to worry about Pique," she says. "I'm in luck. I've got my work to distract me from my problems. That's not such a bad situation when you're forty-seven. I might have been a first-rate disaster at this stage if I hadn't been a writer. Don't dismiss the profession" (Laurence, *Diviners* 12).

Morag expresses all of her rage and frustration that have been building up in her heart for a long time, but no one understands. Her isolation from society and the outside world heightens her sense of isolation, and in order to protect herself from the negative effects of alienation, she establishes "a room of her own" and devotes herself to her literary profession. "If a woman is to write fiction, she must have money and a room of her own," Virginia Woolf observes, "and that, as you will see, leaves the big problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unanswered" (*A Room* 13–14). Laurence employs a variety of structural methods drawn from the mass media to investigate her protagonist's mental state and the suffocating environment of loneliness, including interior monologues, soliloquies, snapshots, memory bank videos, mythological stories of legends, and songs. She arranges all of the photos in chronological order and "keep[s] the snapshots not for what they show but for what is hidden in them" (Laurence, *Diviners* 14). This type of study into hidden reality is a search for her identity in order to connect her to reality.

Morag has a stereotypically Canadian demeanor. She embodies the sensibility of the Canadians. Her struggle for survival, identity, and existence reveals the plight of Canadian society. The battle for survival and the search for one's identity are two significant themes in Canadian fiction. It has a mosaic culture because it is a land with different cultures and identities. It was formerly a French colony before being colonized by the British Empire until 1867, when it gained independence.

As a result of the complexity of its cultural milieu, its people are befuddled by an identity crisis. They are not seen as Canadians, nor do they forget their French heritage, and they are unable to break free from the colonial inferiority complex. The same society is represented by Morag Gunn. She considers herself Scottish, a member of the honourable Gunn family, based on Christie's fictional stories, and she separates herself from Christie's real world. On the other hand, her interaction with Brooke Skelton, an English academic (and colonizer), illustrates Canada's colonial heritage. Morag willingly accepts that: "Brook, I am happy, with you. And anything else—Manawaka and that—it's over. It doesn't exist. It's unimportant" (215). As a result, Laurence has successfully projected Morag to capture all of Canada's identical visitors.

Morag, the Diviners' mother, has to go through a lot to keep her relationship with her daughter Pique in check. It's difficult for her to reveal the concealed truth about Pique's birth. She is hesitant to admit that she is her former lover's daughter, not her husband's. She is afraid of being humiliated if the truth comes out. In the process of persuading others, the female protagonists in Laurence's novels make minor concessions. They demonstrate that while they can be destroyed, they can never be defeated. Margaret Laurence delves into her feelings about human tribalism. She not only expresses a uniquely Canadian sensibility, but she also portrays women's attitudes in general. Every individual, man or woman, in the modern world has a basic survival concern. Laurence's main focus in the Manawaka series of novels is this. The feminine perspective on life in the mid-twentieth

century is something she is very interested in presenting. She illustrates the breadth of the Canadian experience at the time in the process.

Masculinity in a female body is enacted through a correlation of "performativity," "representation," and "transition," not merely through surgery and hormones. It's a process of "becoming a man" and determining a male identity and masculine self-presentation. Each of the Manawaka novels can be defined as a "fictional autobiography" in some way and has created indelible portrayals of women grappling with internal demons and attempting to find purpose in their lives through self-examination. Her heroes may be victims at the start of the stories, but at the end, they have refused to be victimized. Their trek, which is typically considered a means of escaping claustrophobia, transforms their condition of wilderness into a state of wholeness. The trek itself becomes a metaphor for their quest for self-awareness and acceptance of their background. Laurence's characters serve as a mirror to the lives of multiple generations who have lived in and around Manitoba. Rachel's self-flagellation is the result of her actions. She indulges in the practice of self-deception. She can't help but be drawn to imagination. She creates a self, clearly intent on misinterpreting facts or reality. She becomes the true subject of a false reality, which complicates things. This makes her less able to control herself because she thinks the chaos outside and inside are the same.

Again, natural imagery is employed once more in *A Bird in the House*, ostensibly to improve understanding across a racial divide. Piquette is a thirteen-year-old classmate of Vanessa, an eleven-year-old Tonnerre girl who wants to make friends when her father invites the Tonnerre child to their summer home to allow her tubercular leg to heal. Despite the fact that Piquette offers Vanessa little more than silence and vague insolence that summer, when the two reconnect four years later, Piquette offers personal information. She says, "Listen, you wanna know something, Vanessa? ...Your dad was the only person in Manawaka that ever done anything good to me" (Laurence, *A Bird* 116). Vanessa's approach to comprehending Piquette is to situate her outside of history and politics, in an "unconscious" and unrecognisable environment. Piquette's position as the only one who hears the loons supposedly gives her a unique connection to nature that other humans lack. What gives her the right to be the only one who can hear the loons? Is it a biological tendency, or is one doomed species more able to hear the pleas of another doomed species?

In either event, a mystical explanation for Piquette's demise places the redress of cultural wrongs in another world, a move that is more likely to undermine rather than strengthen Canadian identity. Piquette has been viewed by some commentators as a solution to Canada's internal identity crises, as "a symbolic answer to reconciliation for Canada ... with Pique accepting her twin ancestry, having found her place in Canada" (Lever 96). However, in the decades after the optimistic 1960s and 1970s, ideas regarding identity as a solid concept have been increasingly challenged. Readers who lack faith in the unifying force of identity are more likely to perceive Pique as not having "found her place" in Canada.

In *The Fire Dwellers*, Margaret Laurence depicts a patriarchal power structure where women have always been on the perimeter and their social involvement has been horrible, ignored, and estranged at times. Laurence highlights women's contributions to the growth of civilization and their sacrifices for the wellbeing of their families through the character of Stacey MacAindra. Unfortunately, their inarticulate spouses and self-centered children, who consider them as agents or instruments, largely ignore all of their contributions and sacrifices. They have a feeling against society's merciless structure, and I feel isolated and lonely.

Laurence tells the story of a middle-aged housewife and mother of four children using dramatic techniques such as first- and third-person narratives and interior monologues in *The Fire Dwellers*. Essentially, she depicts the violent, aimless lives of "fire dwellers"—individuals who live in perpetual terror for themselves and their children, alienated not just from their families but also from themselves—throughout the novel. Laurence, as a social thinker, depicts a realistic image of the never-ending battle of human existence, along with thirst, malnutrition, and disease, and she occasionally harshly criticizes the tyrannical regime's cruel code and behaviour, which alienates a woman from her family and herself.

The key themes of *A Jest of God* are survival and freedom. Laurence illustrates the horrible conditions under which women in Canada battled to survive in the mid-twentieth century. Laurence's other Manawaka works, such as *A Jest of God*, have a lot to say about survival, and it strives to highlight how everyone wishes to live with dignity until the end of their lives. Primarily, *A Jest of God* is about what happens to an eastern European family after they relocate to a Canadian prairie town one generation later. Despite the fact that the father arrived in the early twentieth century as a young lad, his homeland remains his greatest passion until maturity. He's grown up and married, and every time he and his brother-in-law get together, he insists on Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union. The mother, who is of the same ethnicity but was born in Canada, is pious and traditional. Their ethnically distinct second-generation Canadian children suffer the embarrassment of growing up. These family members must not only deal with the generational difference that affects every other family in Manawaka but also with their differing perceptions of and commitments to the surrounding culture.

Known in the town as Nestor the Jester, Nick's father is recalled by his adult son as having "always thought people were laughing with him, never at him. At least that's how he seemed to me then. Now I don't know" (Laurence, *A Jest* 117). This fine calibration of humour-assessing whether one is the generator or target of a joke—is one that can be made only by someone sufficiently assimilated into the dominant culture to be able to tell the difference. Mr. Kazlick begrudges the loss of Ukrainian being spoken in his home, and when he gives way to speaking English there, his son, Nick, notes that the change "put him at a great disadvantage with us, presumably because he was the least proficient English speaker of his family" (95). In this sense, he may well have been laughed at by townspeople without knowing it.

While Mr. Kazlick's ethnicity defines him throughout his life, Nick develops the hegemonic dominance that comes with being a Canadian male. He is a university-educated Winnipeg teacher who returns to Manawaka one summer in the 1960s to patch a rift in his relationship with his father. Once there, he rekindles his friendship with Rachel Cameron, a former classmate, and during the course of their summer romance, he tells her about his experiences as a Ukrainian-Canadian. Rachel's mother remarks, "Really? How did he manage that?" to which Rachel evinces the view of a more self-conscious member of the dominant culture by answering sarcastically, "I couldn't say. Some miracle, I suppose. Divine intervention, may be" (71). On the other hand, Rachel reinvents her notion of national identity as a representative of dominant culture. She expresses her dissatisfaction with her Scottish ancestors' exaggerated sense of self-importance and the effect it had on Ukrainian immigrants, downgrading their descendants to second-class status, in Nick's company:

> Half the town is Scots descent and the other half is Ukrainian. Oil, all they say, and water. Both came for the same reasons, because they had nothing where they were before. That was a long way away and a long time ago ... [My mother] was brought up that way, and my father too, and I, but by the time it reached me, the backbone had been splintered considerably. (Laurence, *A Jest* 71)

Rachel occasionally assumes the role of a remorseful Canadian who has become aware of the challenges faced by immigrants, as she does when she tells him she feels "apologetic towards people like your family, that they went through all that" (112). She also realizes that her drift away from her forebears is not the same as Nick's ongoing struggle with his ethnic background, which is still a powerful though unwanted influence in his life. This disparity in ethnic heritage provides a barrier to understanding. Nick, as Rachel points out, "has this streak of flippant bitterness that I can't reply to. I don't know how to interpret it" (95).

Rachel is once again alone at the conclusion of the novel. She has put everything on the line for a man who is more concerned with his family's problems than with her. Nick has returned to Manawaka to confront his father's ambition to pass down a culture in which he has little interest. Rachel's battle is still gendered, in that she despises the cliché of the spinster who has given up the chance to live a full life in order to care for a sick mother. Both Nick and Rachel are depicted as making progress in their respective battles with their respective demons, but their parallel personal problems are always kept separate and without mutual understanding.

As a result, it's significant that Rachel is the one who is most susceptible as a result of their social and sexual interactions. Before returning to his life as a teacher in Winnipeg, Nick does not call to say goodbye. Rachel can only communicate herself to him in fictitious scenarios: "I talk to him when he is not here and tell him everything I can think of, everything that has ever happened, and how I feel and for a while it seems to me that I am completely known to him, and then I remember I've only talked to him like that when I'm alone. He hasn't heard and doesn't know" (144). Rachel is presented as wanting the same kind of attention and respect as a woman that Nick craves as a Ukrainian-Canadian, despite her concerns that Nick not interfere with the goal of diverse Canadians getting to know one another better. Laurence, at the very least, separates the concept of woman from the concept of national unity because people share more common ground based on race than they do on gender.

Conclusion

During the period 1965–1980, Canadians reinvented themselves as Canadians, while women in Canada reinvented their understandings of themselves as women. New legislation on divorce, family law, equality, sexual assault, abortion, and domestic abuse was prompted by widespread popular questioning of what a woman's role should be (Adamson, et al. 38). Women challenged stereotypes about who they were and what they could do by venturing into non-traditional settings. Many feminist historians perceive parallels between the nationalist and feminist movements and even link the two. Margaret Laurence deserves credit for portraying this social milieu in her novels. Women of this age have Hagar-like features. Laurence's persona has evolved as a result of her ability to anticipate what is to come in the near future. This indicates her wish for women to be like Hagar, courageous enough to stand on their own two feet and demand what they deserve. Hagar's involvement could also be interpreted as a challenge to patriarchal ideology, proving that women are capable of contributing to society and are not always expected to obey males.

The stone Angel, which is a prominent element in the narrative and depicts Hagar's pride and blindness, is a metaphor for her. Her father, Jason Currie, encourages her to acquire macho attributes while ignoring certain female virtues he expects her to develop later. What Hagar forgets is that a lady is a lady first and foremost. This piece exemplifies an educational system that aims to make women decorative and dependent on men. Her sense of pride is a major theme throughout the story. Gender is defined by a number of factors that lead to binary oppositions such as male and female, man and woman, nature and culture, subject and object, and so on. When a person does not conform to the established norms, she or he is subjected to threats such as othering and isolation.

Gender as a given and dependent category, on the other hand, is not a set of rules to be followed. All gender roles are culturally and historically contextualized, which means they can't be studied outside of their contexts. We can, however, unlearn and reconstruct these roles because they are merely taught. Gender performativity is a word coined by Judith Butler, a well-known gender theorist, to critique out-dated gender concepts. Gender is a constructed identity that changes with time and the body. Performance, which is a process in which language and action patterns repeat themselves, defines gender.

Laurence's perspective on women Laurence studies women, investigates the limiting definition of women, and dramatizes how a woman's voice becomes a method of self-realization: to uncover their voice and learn to let it speak rather than suffocate themselves in the Manawaka rules. As a result, a key theme in Margaret Laurence's Manawaka novels is each protagonist's endeavour to shape themselves according to their own ideals, independent of the societal stereotypes that are thrust upon them, mixed with the desire for an authentic voice.

Realist expectations, which emphasize the accompanying historical forces that develop a specific kind of individual consciousness, undercut romantic interpretations of female and national identity creation, particularly the belief that these identities are the result of parallel processes. In terms of national identity and femininity, the fictitious picture of Canada as a nation of people seeking to create a cohesive society may be more meaningful if considered in terms of the issues it faces rather than the utopian answers it offers. The inherent tensions and inconsistencies that arise

from evaluating characters that begin their quest for independence and community as female Canadians provide the most support for realism as a viable interpretation of the Manawaka literature. Critics who saw Laurence's characters as resolving conflicts inside the Canadian consciousness thought that her vision would include a mechanism for uniting discrepancies and lowering social turmoil in ways that were not yet obvious in the social realm. Laurence's fiction's responsiveness to such a central yearning for effective identity resolutions may account for some of her celebrity. Laurence's novels, on the other hand, may be more significant in terms of identity issues, particularly female identity, as illustrated in her Manawaka novels.

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